



The Bishops' Office

20 January 2023

Dear Friends,

Earlier today the Bishops of the Church of England published a series of documents that is our response to the Living in Love and Faith process that began in 2017, and that considers major issues to do with Christian teaching and learning about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. You can read all of the documents by following this link: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/draft-prayers-thanksgiving-dedication-and-gods-blessing-same-sex>.

We suggest that you might like to begin with the Pastoral Letter (which we have attached) that introduces them. General Synod will now have opportunity to consider the bishops' response when it meets next month. In writing to you today we want to commend the documents to you and to request that you pray for our General Synod representatives.

Some of our own thoughts are set out below:

Bishop Stephen says: 'I am glad to be a signatory of the letter from the bishops of the Church of England. It communicates our desire to reach out to and better serve LGBTQI+ people, and represents the reality of the measure of common ground which we as bishops could reach. The suite of documents taken together demonstrate that we want faithful same-sex couples to have their union affirmed in church and for them to receive God's blessing. I appreciate that some people are disappointed that we have proposed these positive steps at all and others will deeply regret that we could not go further. Our apology emphasises that we are all fully valued by God. Wherever you stand today, I care for you and long for our continued unity in Christ. We all need to keep praying, not only for the forthcoming meeting of General Synod, but for the work to be done in devising the new Pastoral Guidelines to replace Issues in Human Sexuality.'

Bishop David adds: 'For me personally engaging with the LLF process over these last six years, and the shared conversations which preceded it, has been a hugely enriching, if at times challenging, experience. I am hugely grateful to all those whose honesty and vulnerability have helped shape my own thinking on these issues of human identity and sexuality. I have had much to learn and have been changed.'

The approach now offered by the Bishops of the Church of England I believe offers the Church the opportunity to demonstrate how to live well with each other as one Church, while acknowledging we are not all of one mind on aspects of this issue. My prayer is that this is an approach that we will see lived out amongst us here in Greater Lincolnshire as we seek to enable all people to realise how deeply loved by God they are, and to experience that fullness of life that Jesus came to bring'.

Bishop Nicholas comments: 'The publication of these documents is a big moment: same sex couples can now request prayers to celebrate, dedicate and seek God's blessing on our relationships in Church of England churches. There is much work still to do, especially as the pastoral guidance is drawn up, and I very much hope to contribute to that work. Living in Love and Faith has been an extremely demanding process. I have grown and changed as I have participated in it. I pray that as we digest and consider these documents we are mindful of the precious gift that God gives us in our neighbours, as in our own lives. To God be the glory.'

This letter comes with our prayers and with every blessing to you during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,

Thank you for the privilege of serving you as your bishops,

Almighty God,
in Christ you make all things new:
transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace,
and in the renewal of our lives
make known your heavenly glory:
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

The image shows three handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged horizontally and separated by plus signs. The first signature is 'Stephen Conway', the second is 'David Court', and the third is 'Nicholas Chamberlain'. The handwriting is cursive and fluid.

The Rt Revd Stephen Conway
Bishop of Ely
Acting Bishop of Lincoln

The Rt Revd Dr David Court
Bishop of Grimsby

The Rt Revd Dr Nicholas Chamberlain
Bishop of Grantham