

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Dear College of Bishops

We write as a broad coalition of leaders of networks across different traditions within the Church of England who place loyalty to you, our bishops, extremely highly. We are all agreed there is no place for homophobia in the church, and we all remain committed to seeking a way forward together. However, we are struggling with the real burdens you are placing upon us, theologically and structurally, by your promotion of – and clear public support for in many interviews – the proposal to conduct same-sex blessings.

This letter begins by setting out the broad areas of concern which we and many others in our networks have, but goes on to offer what we hope is a positive suggestion for a way forward. The situation is so grave that our loyalty – and that of thousands of other faithful clergy and lay leaders throughout England – is now painfully stretched. Indeed many of us find far greater accord with the bishops of other provinces of the Anglican Communion, some of whom have announced impaired communion with the Church of England, than we do our own.

We hope our proposals can help heal this tragic situation which we all feel deeply. The sense of alienation is all the more devastating because there is a strong perception among our number that you, our bishops, although sympathetic to our plight, are prepared to press on with the current proposals regardless even if the consequences result in the entire Church of which you are present custodians being catastrophically split down the middle. We feel that your desire for the College of Bishops to be a focus of unity has been severely undermined.

The Disunity

We believe that what has been proposed as a way forwards at February's General Synod is theologically compromised and pastorally confusing. This has caused disunity at every level which has been very damaging, and we fear that there will be far greater consequences if this direction of travel continues unchecked.

a) Disunity in the Anglican Communion

The Synod resolution has resulted in some provinces in the Anglican Communion declaring impaired communion with the Church of England, a reality reinforced by the recent statements from both the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches and the GAFCON Kigali conference. These are our brothers and sisters who warned time and again that this would be the consequences of the Synod's decision – but who were to all intents and purposes ignored in the debate. As you know, many in our networks feel that the decision to press ahead without giving proper weight to their opinion has an element of intellectual elitism and even racism given that 75 per cent of all Anglicans are from the Global South. For those of us who have ministries with an international dimension, we find our friends in these countries perplexed that their mother church has taken a step which in their view is wholly contrary to Scripture and the gospel, and which has threatened international church unity.

b) Disunity in the Church of England

The direction of travel (as suggested in interviews given by Church of England bishops) suggests there will be further introduction of doctrinal revision and greater confusion about ethical teaching. The consequence of this approach is likely to be that the future Church of England will be whiter, older, increasingly theologically liberal, and rapidly reducing in size. Applications for theological colleges may be significantly impacted by this decision,

and with it the potential to train future clergy to serve the Church of England. Many ordinands and clergy have a nagging ‘check’ as they look back in church history. Liberalising denominations do not grow, and tend to shrink. If the Church continues down this path, more gifted and diverse Christian leaders of more orthodox positions will opt to serve in Christian networks outside the Church of England.

c) Disunity in local parishes

The vast majority of the churches in our networks are led by clergy who would not choose to use the ‘Prayers of Love and Faith’ – however they may be worded. Most of the communities attending these churches will be made up of individuals and families where not everyone holds the same opinion on same sex relationships. Guarding the unity of each congregation is causing a huge amount of stress in many parishes. Some have expressed an unease about giving financially to their church when they do not agree with the current direction of travel in the wider Church of England. Some, particularly from racially diverse communities, have expressed the desire to leave the church because of this decision by the Church of England. We are also very concerned for the wellbeing of those who are same-sex attracted in our congregations and are trying to be faithful to what they believe to be the biblical stance on this issue.

The Direction

With the Church of England and wider Communion in danger of rupture, it is important to send out a message to all parties that the unity of the Church is of profound importance to the bishops of the Church of England.

The proposals put forward at General Synod are in danger of lacking integrity without considerable further thought and careful deliberation. The idea that the doctrine of marriage is not being changed has only been argued by separating the doctrine of marriage from the biblical view that the only place for sexual intimacy is within the context of a marriage between a man and a woman. If the church’s doctrine of marriage is truly not to be changed (as agreed by General Synod through Andrew Cornes’ amendment), it is essential that any proposed wording or rubric is “neither contrary to nor indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England”. This means there must be no changes under the guise of extending or developing the existing doctrine of marriage. This will require general agreement across the traditions and, most importantly, time.

We therefore suggest that the following direction forwards would help repair division and enable the College of Bishops to be a focus of unity:

- (i) Having taken five years of LLF deliberation to bring the Church to its current place, we now need to allow enough time for due consideration on wording in the proposed draft Prayers of Love and Faith and the as yet unwritten Pastoral Guidance and Pastoral Reassurance. This will ensure that, taking the three together, they unambiguously reflect the church’s unchanging doctrine with relation to marriage. This needs to take place with a realistic timetable which will, whilst giving that time, prevent drift.
- (ii) If agreement on this wording is not possible, it will then be necessary to find another way to make provision for those who wish to offer prayers of blessing – without compromising the received doctrine relating to marriage. In order to restore unity within the Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion, it needs to be clear that the central core of the Church of England is holding onto the current doctrines and practices, with the exception being made for those wanting to discern possible changes in areas of doctrine and practice. We and many in our networks would very much wish to work with you and others to see how a solution in this form can be found.

We do believe that this is a way which would enable us to walk together in a manner that would be far more unifying and sustainable than the current way – and in our belief, that is worth aiming for.

With love in Christ

Fr Adam Gaunt, Chair of **Catholic Group** in General Synod
Emma Joy Gregory (née Forward), Vice-Chair of **Catholic Group** in General Synod

Tom Middleton, Director of **Forward in Faith** and Secretary of the Council of Bishops of **The Society**

Bradley Smith, Chairman of the **Prayer Book Society**
Prudence Daley MBE, former Chairman of the **Prayer Book Society**

Busola Sodeinde, Church Commissioner and **UK Global Majority rep**
Ade Adebajo, Lay Chair of London Diocesan Synod, Chair of Lambeth Partners and **UK Global Majority rep**
Canon Dr. Addy Lazz-Onyenobi, Member of General Synod and **UK Global Majority rep**

Revd Wole Agbaje, Head of Young Adults, **New Wine**
Revd John Coles, Chair of **New Wine** trustees
Revd Ben Doolan, **New Wine** National Leadership team
Revd Paul Harcourt, former National Leader, **New Wine**

Revd Archie Coates, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton and Head of **HTB Network**
Revd Nicky Gumbel, President of Church Revitalisation Trust, **HTB Network**
Revd Sarah Jackson, CEO of Church Revitalisation Trust, and Chair of **HTB Network** on General Synod
Revd Jago Wynne, Vice-Chair of **HTB Network** on General Synod

Revd Canon John Dunnett, Chair of **Evangelical Group on General Synod (EGGS)**
Jane Patterson, Secretary of **Evangelical Group on General Synod (EGGS)**

Rt. Revd Julian Henderson, President of **Church of England Evangelical Council**
Revd Lis Goddard, Co-Chair of **Church of England Evangelical Council**

Revd Kieran Bush, Chair of the **ReNew** Planning Team
Debbie Buggs, Member of **ReNew** and Member of General Synod and of the Crown Nominations Commission

Revd John McGinley, Executive Director of **MYRIAD**

Ed Shaw, Ministry Director of **Living Out**
Revd Canon Vaughan Roberts, Co-Founder of **Living Out**
Revd Dr. Sean Doherty, Christian Ethicist and Co-Founder of **Living Out**
Rt. Revd Keith Sinclair, Trustee of **Living Out**
Helen Lamb, Trustee of **Living Out**

All signatories are leaders of networks/organisations but are signing in their personal capacities, recognising they cannot claim to speak for everyone that they lead.