

Monday 14th August 2023

Dear Archbishops, College of Bishops and key officers in the Church of England

Six weeks has passed since our last letter to you on 3rd July, writing as a broad alliance of leaders across different traditions within the Church of England. Since then, we were grateful to receive a number of responses, including from our two Archbishops on 12th July (see appendix).

We affirm the Archbishops' recognition of the importance of prayer in the task of discerning the route ahead in the LLF process, and we are committed to praying for you all as the College of Bishops in your vital task. These are matters of profound and lasting importance to the Church and it is right that the Church is seen to engage with them in a full, considered and constitutionally appropriate manner.

We are saddened by the use of the word "legalistic" in the response of the Archbishops. All the signatories of our letter are passionate about the honour of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who prayed for the unity of the church in order that the world might believe in Him. The Canon Law of the Church of England is formulated to avoid unnecessary division and any situation in which "the unity of which our Lord prayed is impaired and the witness of his gospel is grievously hindered" (Canon A08). The Church's own constitutional framework is intended to serve these purposes. It expresses the Church's ecclesiology. Fidelity to those same constitutional principles cannot be considered legalistic.

On the issues currently being raised in Synod there are many different views and theological perspectives. However, whatever those differences may be, there should be no doubt that in order to preserve the unity of the church due process must be followed and visibly so.

Our desire is that in a matter of this significance for the Church that we love and are part of, we need to act in a manner that is lawful, open, transparent, accountable, and consonant with being part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The concerns raised in our letter were ecclesiological, not legalistic. The Canon Laws of the Church of England were drawn up in order to preserve the unity of the church (by requiring a two-thirds Synodical majority in the case of controversial issues). Any process which suggests an unwillingness to give appropriate recognition to the Church's constitution exposes the Church to risk of legal challenge and has the potential to cause irreparable harm to the unity we have enjoyed up until now.

Ecclesiology is an irreplaceable part of both theology and pastoral care. It informs our self-understanding of the Church and its mission. Whilst we deeply sympathise with the attempt to achieve a degree of unity amongst you as the bishops of the Church of England, there is a danger of this being a very local form of unity. As we highlighted in our first letter to you on 10th May, there have been, and are continuing to be, many unintended consequences as a result of what is taking place.

1. Locally, churches that have walked happily together with different views, disagreeing well and walking together in unity, are being forced into positions that are potentially divisive and could lead to many people leaving churches. Indeed, there is a risk that many from a global majority heritage will no longer feel at home in the Church of England.
2. Nationally, up until now we have walked together with our disagreements in the Church of England. Now there is a risk of schism.

3. Globally, many primates in the Anglican communion are mystified by the direction that we are taking. They regard it as chronological prejudice in that we are going against the tradition of almost 20 centuries, Western prejudice in that we seem to view our cultural context as superior to theirs, and Anglican prejudice in that brothers and sisters in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal churches have not changed their position on these issues.

The Church of England has always been part of the “one holy, catholic and apostolic Church”. Any departure from this long adopted and protected position, requires not only extended examination and deliberation, but ultimately fidelity to our constitutional obligations. As such, such a move would require at least a two-thirds majority in all Houses. This constitutional principle has been adhered to in the past (e.g. the ordination of women, women bishops and divorce and remarriage) each of which were recognized as having liturgical and pastoral significance.

These constitutional realities have consistently informed the legal advice shared with Synod. Further, within the information shared in March 2023, it was made clear that there was a need for the House of Bishops to engage with a number of matters of the Church’s teaching (including the status of same sex marriages) before looking to introduce these Prayers. To date, the House of Bishops has not done so. Engagement with, and resolution of, these matters is a natural precursor to any constitutional consideration on the part of Synod. It is also consistent with the amended resolution at the February 2023 Synod which stated that “the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England”.

It follows, that any attempt to put these Prayers for example under Canon B4, Canon B5 or Canon B5A (which are all designed for entirely different situations), would be unprecedented, unlawful and divisive and fundamentally inconsistent with the constitutional framework which gives effect to our ecclesiology.

We have previously written about the illegitimacy of Canon B4:2 and Canon B5 for enabling these Prayers to be used. We remain of that view. However, in recent weeks Canon B5A has also been mooted. We are bound to observe that resort to this Canon is likely to be widely perceived as a further attempt to “get the prayers over the line” and into practical usage, albeit experimentally, without affording Synod its proper function and role as a deliberative body intended to ensure authentic witness to the Church’s mission. Nobody disputes that the Church should be authorising and over time revising services of non-contentious form such as marriages, funerals and the Eucharist. Canon B5A is suitable in such circumstances to explore the viability and suitability of modifications to existing liturgical practice. However, the Prayers of Love and Faith cannot be so classified. Rather, they represent the proposed introduction of a novel form of liturgy.

It is neither appropriate nor consistent with the conventions of Synod that novelties and innovations should be introduced in this manner. In this respect, we note that the term ‘form of service’ (which is defined in section 5 (2) of the Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure 1974) self-evidently does not extend to encompass doctrinal innovations. Furthermore, we note that Canon B5A is itself subject to a precondition, namely: that forms of worship have been formulated ‘with a view’ to submission to Synod under Canon B2. There has been no indication thus far of a primary intention to propose the Prayers of Love and Faith under Canon B2 – rather Canon B5, and then Canon B4:2 have been suggested as the way to introduce the Prayers. For these reasons, Canon B5A is not appropriate for authorising the Prayers of Love and Faith.

For the good of the Church, it is vital to guard against any impression or suggestion that attempts are being made to by-pass the Constitutional role of Synod. We are mindful of the legal advice which has been previously shared. The General Synod is the steward or the gatekeeper of the church’s doctrinal integrity. We are in full agreement with what the 22 bishops wrote in their letter to you and us on 5th July that other routes besides Canon B2 “risk not only damaging the unity of the Church of England but, in so doing, also damaging the integrity of the Church’s episcopate”.

We repeat our concern that the present proposals bring with them significant risk of legal challenge and long-term exposure. These risks could be simply avoided by your undertaking that you will in due course follow the only viable constitutional route in accordance with Canon B2. We very much hope that you will be able to reply to us and give such an undertaking.

As explained in our 3rd July letter, our Legal Counsel Edward Morgan KC advises, the only safe, effective and legitimate means by which the Prayers could be formulated and adopted is by means of a resolution of the General Synod in accordance with Canon B2. He further advises that any alternative route is likely to expose the Church and/or the Presidents of the General Synod and/or individual bishops to significant legal challenge. He further states that for the prospect of legal challenge and ecclesial disharmony to be averted, it is vital that the doctrinal position and matters of process are clearly set out and followed.

We continue to pray for you all in your key leadership roles in this challenging time, and long that we might discern a better way forward together.

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**

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 Dr. Rich Johnson, National Leader, **New Wine**
Revd Wole Agbaje, Head of Young Adults, **New Wine**
Revd John Coles, **New Wine** Ambassador
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**
Sarah Tett, Trustee 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**
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.

Recipients of the letter:

- The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York
- The College of Bishops
- Members of the Archbishops' Council
- First, Second, Third Church Estates Commissioners
- Secretary to the Church Commissioners' Board of Governors
- Chair, Audit and Risk Committee, Church Commissioners
- Secretary-General of the General Synod of the Church of England

Appendix:

The response from the two Archbishops on 12th July is on the next page



 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

Sent via email: email@networksletter.org

Ref: 91562

12th July 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Thank you for your letter of 3rd July. We are glad that you share the commitment to provide pastoral responses to address concerns around homophobia and discrimination in the Church. Also, that you would like to be part of the solution rather than the problem.

However, we were a little surprised by the legalistic tone in some of your letter. The second paragraph notes that we are exploring different options, which is being done to try to protect others from the threat of legal or other challenge. However, the next paragraphs use negative and legalistic language about a decision which you acknowledge has yet to be made. We invite you to see the matters at issue as primarily theological and pastoral rather than legal. Let us continue to wrestle with these issues together, and so very many more too. That is part of the ministry that is entrusted to us as Bishops and we continue to seek your prayers for us in this task. In our turn we seek to guard the church and remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Together, let us not fear for God's Church but trust God who has kept the Church through many upheavals, revolutions and changes, and is continually calling us into his more perfect way.

We remain grateful for your faithfulness, your ministry and all you do in the service of our Lord, we pray for you as we know you pray for us.

With every blessing,

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Justin Welby
Archbishop of Canterbury

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Stephen Cottrell
Archbishop of York