

6th October 2023

Dear members of the House of Bishops,

We are writing to assure you of our prayers as you meet next Monday, following the Living with Difference groups, the stakeholder meetings and the recent discussions in the College of Bishops. We write again, following our letters of 11<sup>th</sup> May, 3<sup>rd</sup> July and 14<sup>th</sup> August which we hope you will review before you meet, because we understand that the Archbishops may at this meeting consult with you as required by Canon B5A.1 about the possibility they might use that canon to authorise, in whole or in part, the draft Prayers of Love and Faith for experimental use within the Church of England.

As we set out more fully in our last letter of 14<sup>th</sup> August, we believe that this way forward, like all routes other than immediate consideration by General Synod in accordance with Canon B2, is not a safe, effective or legitimate means by which the Prayers can be finalised and adopted for use in the Church of England.

We are concerned that to introduce new and unprecedented controversial forms of prayer by Canon B5A does not grant Synod its proper function and role as a representative deliberative body intended to ensure authentic witness to the Church's mission and to determine that our liturgy is in conformity with our doctrine. We also believe it is pastorally unwise, unstable and insensitive to proceed in this way - a time-limited experiment, only in such places or parishes as the Archbishops may designate - during this current time of uncertainty. This is especially so as we are all aware of the distress many will feel should the prayers, after being used experimentally, then not gain (as ultimately required by using Canon B5A) the necessary Canon B2 majorities in General Synod for their full authorisation in the whole church.

We fully understand that many of you and the wider College wish the prayers to be authorised or commended. The difficulties you have found in finding a legal route to bring the prayers forward have clearly been frustrating. However, as all of us in Christian leadership know, general confidence in *how* our goals are achieved is of vital importance in any community we serve, whether a network, a parish, or the national church, particularly when that community is seriously divided about the wisdom of those goals.

To be clear, we wish to state that the solution to the issues we are raising is not to try and tone down the Prayers and Guidance in the first instance so that more people might somehow deem it acceptable to use Canon B5A. After all, the indicative evidence is that the introduction of prayers will only be seen as a stepping stone to further changes. Rather, the solution is to use the legitimate process of Canon B2. We were encouraged that express assurances were provided in the February Synod, and Synod itself adopted the amendment that said no changes would be introduced which might be "contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England".

Furthermore, it is essential that what is brought forward to Synod is brought as an integrated scheme. The three elements of the Prayers, Pastoral Guidance and Pastoral Reassurance are integrated realities and they are mutually dependent. It would be contrary to all the commitments given thus far at Synod to then attempt to deal with them in a piecemeal and separate manner. We have been assured throughout that they would be addressed together, concurrently and in their entirety.

We trust that these assurances and the Cornes amendment will be fully honoured in whatever you bring to the November Synod. This will require the provision of sufficient theological evaluation and assessment to enable Synod's doctrinal evaluation of any further developments in relation to liturgy along with clear and convincing final legal advice as past legal advice was based on an unconvincing distinction between civil marriage and holy matrimony and provisional until agreement on the final form of the Prayers and the Pastoral Guidance. To seek to proceed without these and without clarity as to the complete Pastoral Guidance to replace Issues and an agreed settlement involving sufficient Reassurance would not honour the assurances given or the Cornes amendment and would further erode trust. Any attempt to innovate now and deliberate later is fraught with legal and pastoral difficulty, including the absence of necessary protection for both clergy and laity across the breadth of the church who may be vulnerable to legal challenge.

Given these realities, we would urge you to pause the current process until FAOC has presented coherent theological options and offered an evaluative judgement on the competing and contradictory theologies that exist in the current debate. The following issues require resolution in advance of any liturgical innovation, namely:

- The Church's teaching on Same Sex Marriage;
- The Church's view on the canonical standing (if any) of Same Sex Marriage; and
- Whether it is necessary for the Church to re-engage with and re-assess its doctrine and teaching on Holy Matrimony and sexual intimacy.

We would add that the need for resolution of these issues has been identified by your own legal advisors; and detailed in the course of Advice previously shared with Synod. We emphasise that this route would instil confidence in both process and outcome and ensure the pastoral consistency and stability which is central to the Church's mission.

If you and your colleagues are of the view that the Prayers should be adopted now (with or without the components previously identified) we urge you to present these innovations to Synod under Canon B2. This should be done at the earliest opportunity by bringing the Prayers forward as they stand for First Consideration. This would represent a clear move forward implementing February's decision and is much to be preferred to separating the proposed prayers into different unprecedented and illegitimate routes of B5 and B5A and deferring use of B2 to a later date.

If, however, you still wish to use some other avenue than Canon B2, the attached letter to the Archbishops sets out the case for our proposed alternative way forward.

We and the networks we lead will be praying for you all as you consider how best to approach the November General Synod at your meeting next Monday.

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