



the alliance

4 July, 2024

Dear Bishop Steven,

Thank you for your response to our letter to the Archbishops which we were grateful to receive. However, we have to say that we were saddened and not a little surprised by some of the tone and content of your letter. Your letter amplifies rather than assuages the concerns we have.

Below is a short response to each of the headings to your letter which we hope you will find helpful. However, we would also be glad to continue this dialogue further in person so that we can engage with each other in a more eirenic tone as we look to work out a better way forward.

1. The extent of the Alliance

The evidence of support for our network is that individual clergy members of the Church of England have each formally and personally expressed support for the Alliance online at alliancecofe.org and we have their names (*including 138 clergy in the Oxford diocese so far*). The Catholic signatories remain an essential part of the Alliance and their views are clear from their signatures on past letters, their [recent public statement](#), and their support below. The clergy currently supporting the Alliance come from churches which represent 36 per cent of the Church of England's average Sunday attendance and 55 per cent of the Church of England's under 18 average Sunday attendance.

2. A departure from doctrine therefore B2

You assert as fact your opinion that nothing proposed to General Synod is indicative of a change in doctrine. We would suggest that the facts do not support your assertion. Articles 7 and 20, Canon B30, the Book of Common Prayer, the introduction to the Common Worship marriage service, the 2005 and 2020 House of Bishops Pastoral Statements on civil partnerships and the 2014 Pastoral Guidance on same sex marriage all seem to differ from what you assert. The only way for the Church of England to introduce services of blessing for same-sex couples or same-sex marriage for clergy would be to overturn all the aforementioned statements.

You are right that we have "consistently proposed" the B2 process, but are wrong to claim that we do so only as a delaying or blocking tactic. We do so because any other route is unlawful and unconstitutional, as the Canons confirm that due process for introducing any substantial change in a form of service is to go through Canon B2. On

this matter, we would also encourage you and your colleagues to look again at the House of Bishops' own legal advice summarised in GS 2328: *"We have also been advised that it would be difficult to say that making the PLF available for same-sex couples without there being an assumption as to their sexual relationships was not indicative of any departure from the Church's doctrine"*. This would mean a return to implementing the voted for February 2023 General Synod motion in full (which included the Cornes amendment) and the decisions of the College and House of Bishops, supported in the November 2023 General Synod motion, to only proceed with standalone services by going straight to a B2 process.

We also wish to note our surprise in reading your comment that "all of you as signatories have been part of a church in which clergy in same sex marriages continue to minister". If what you state is true, we do not understand why the bishops and clergy involved have not been disciplined, particularly in light of the Pemberton case where an employment tribunal recognised that our doctrine of marriage is clear and does not allow for clergy to enter same-sex marriages.

3. Western elitism?

No single letter can say everything, and of course we are deeply concerned about the persecution of the LGBTQIA+ community in many parts of the world. We oppose the criminalisation of consensual homosexual behaviour. Please note that in a number of our [previous letters](#) we have stated that we believe there is no place for homophobia in the church and this is also made clear on [our website](#).

It is undeniable that there is a very clear consensus across the vast majority of the Anglican Communion that the proposed changes are doctrinally and procedurally problematic. Statements from both the GSFA and GAFCON demonstrate this loss of confidence in the Church of England's leadership of the global Anglican Communion. The most recent statement from the Primates of the Global South states: *"With the Church of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury forfeiting their leadership role of the global Communion, GSFA Primates will expeditiously meet, consult and work with other orthodox Primates in the Anglican Church across the nations to reset the Communion on its biblical foundation. We look forward to collaborating with Primates and bishops in the GAFCON movement and other orthodox Anglican groupings to work out the shape and nature of our common life together and how we are to keep the priority of proclaiming and witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ ... foremost in our life as God's people."*

It does seem to many that these voices, which represent 75% of our brothers and sisters in the Anglican Communion, are still not being heard.

4. Catastrophising language

Church attendance is down 29% since 2015 and most dioceses are now facing a financial structural deficit. Though there are other reasons including the impact of the pandemic, the levels of disunity and distrust that have grown through the LLF process are certainly a significant factor in the present situation. In saying this, we are not trying to catastrophise, but rather have a sense of realism about what is taking place.

Our entire understanding of mission and ministry comes from our deep Scriptural perspective of the mercy and love of God which lies at the heart of the gospel message.

Like you, our desire is to focus on this gospel proclamation, which is why we would be keen for a more consensual approach in determining the way forward so we do not face years more diversion of energy that we cannot afford.

5. Fracturing the body of Christ

You state that our letter is a “threat of schism”. We struggle to see how the word ‘schism’ can be levelled at those maintaining the current teaching and practice rather than those who are forcing through changes in an unlawful way. The House of Bishops is planning to change the received teaching of the Church of England and not following a transparent and appropriate due process of Canon B2 to implement the changes they seek.

What we are suggesting is an attempt to avoid schism and is consistent with the very essence of Anglican ecclesiology. Indeed, because of the changes that you and others wish to make, you have already acknowledged in your recent paper, 'Together in Love and Faith', that *“some alternative system of episcopal oversight may well be required to enable a differentiation of ministries, such as an alternative province and structure within the Church of England or a system of oversight from a neighbouring diocese”*.

6. A new stream of ordination candidates

Ordinand numbers are down 40% since 2019. The evidence in all our networks is that for orthodox ordinands this is overwhelmingly due to the uncertainties around the LLF process. Because of our shared desire with you for a growing Church of England which is younger and more diverse, we want to be a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem. This is why we would open up a new pre-ordination stream for potential ordinands, in partnership with orthodox bishops, to reverse the decline in ordinands that we are currently witnessing.

And finally...

We are thankful to you for writing to us to lay out your concerns. We have set out our concerns in greater detail in our [previous seven letters](#) if this is helpful for reference.

We are also sincerely thankful that you state that you “do respect our views on marriage and sexuality”. We hope that this could include a respect for our conviction that this is not something on which we can just 'agree to disagree'.

You close by referring to our letter as one we “have been persuaded to sign”, with the implication that some of us may have been reluctant to do so. We are indeed deeply sad about the circumstances that led us to write as we did, but we want to make it clear that all of us stand wholeheartedly behind what our letters argue for and propose. Given your reference to the 'hurt' we have caused to LGBTQIA+ Christians, we should add that they are not a homogeneous group. Indeed, many of them form part of the Alliance, including some who are signing this letter, and they have themselves been deeply hurt by the process which the House of Bishops has been pursuing.

We long that there might be a better way forward, and we continue to pray that you and your fellow Bishops would follow the lawful constitutional path to preserve the unity of the Church throughout the Anglican Communion.

With love in Christ

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 Canon Paul Langham, National Leadership Team, **New Wine** on General Synod

Revd Archie Coates, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton and Head of **HTB Network**
Revd Nicky Gumbel CBE, President of Church Revitalisation Trust, **HTB Network**
Revd Sarah Jackson, CEO of Revitalise 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 Canon John McGinley, **Church Planting Network Leader**

Revd Lydia Corbett, **Orthodox Female Clergy Group**
Revd Elaine Sutherland, **Orthodox Female Clergy Group**

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**

Revd Dr. Lee Gatiss, Director of **Church Society**

Fr Adam Gaunt, Chair of **Catholic Group in General Synod**

Tom Middleton, Director of **Forward in Faith**

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.

Cc:

The Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop of York

Members of the College of Bishops

First, Second, Third Estates Commissioners

Secretary General, Archbishops' Council

Chair, Church Commissioners Audit and Risk Committee

Secretary to the Church Commissioners' Board of Governors