



THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK

Bishopthorpe Palace
Bishopthorpe
York
YO23 2GE

Tel: (01904) 707021
archbishopofyork.org

9 February 2023

To the clergy and people of the Diocese of York,

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Galatians 3:26-27 (NIV)

I have been present over the last few days as the *Living in Love and Faith* debate has been taking place at General Synod at Church House in London. The debate concluded earlier today with Synod voting to welcome proposals which would enable same-sex couples to come to church after a civil marriage or civil partnership to give thanks, dedicate their relationship to God and receive God's blessing. In addition, Synod members also voted to lament and repent of the failure of the Church to welcome LGBTQI+ people and for the harm that LGBTQI+ people have experienced – and continue to experience - in churches.

I realise that some in the diocese will welcome this decision by Synod, while others will feel that it does not go far enough. Others will feel that it goes too far. I write to you briefly now, to offer clarity on what has taken place and reassurance where there may be anxiety.

There are three things that I would like to clarify:

First, there is no change to the doctrine of holy matrimony. The draft *Prayers of Love and Faith* which were circulated to Synod members have not changed what the Church believes about holy matrimony as set out in Canon Law. This was emphasised by the acceptance of an amendment from a member of the General Synod.

Second, the Church will be able to offer the opportunity for couples who have entered into same-sex civil partnerships and civil marriages to have that relationship acknowledged and celebrated, and to receive a blessing within a Service of the Word or Holy Communion.

Third, clergy will be free to choose whether or not they opt to use the forthcoming *Prayers of Love and Faith*. Furthermore, I am determined that in the Diocese of York no one will ever be disadvantaged by the decisions they make whether to use or not use these prayers. On this you have my assurance, though I realise there is work to be done to provide a framework within which we can minister together with our conscientiously held disagreements. We need to work closely with the whole Church of England on this.

By Synod voting in favour of this motion, work will now continue on refining the draft *Prayers of Love and Faith*, and pastoral guidance will be produced which will replace *Issues in Human Sexuality*. There is a strong commitment to working collaboratively on this, ensuring that all voices are represented and heard in both the *Prayers* and the pastoral guidance. Until the *Prayers* have been reviewed, commended and issued by the House of Bishops, which won't be until the pastoral guidance has been issued, they are not yet available for use.

To those who welcome this development, can I remind you that you are not yet at liberty to use these prayers.

To those who are troubled by this development, can I ask for your patience and forbearance as the work is done to ensure that freedom of conscience is properly respected.

Some people have said that the Church of England may split because of this. I pray and give myself to something much harder and much more beautiful: we learn to live with profound difference, respecting the conscientiously held but incompatible views we hold, ensuring that everyone has a place, and showing the world the more excellent way of love.

Please pray for me and be assured of my prayers for you.

+ Stephen Eber:

The full motion, as amended, put to Synod was:

That this Synod, recognising the commitment to learning and deep listening to God and to each other of the Living in Love and Faith process, and desiring with God's help to journey together while acknowledging the different deeply held convictions within the Church:

- (a) lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people and the harm that LGBTQI+ people have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church;
- (b) recommit to our shared witness to God's love for and acceptance of every person by continuing to embed the Pastoral Principles in our life together locally and nationally;
- (c) commend the continued learning together enabled by the Living in Love and Faith process and resources in relation to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage;
- (d) welcome the decision of the House of Bishops to replace Issues in Human Sexuality with new pastoral guidance;
- (e) welcome the response from the College of Bishops and look forward to the House of Bishops further refining, commending and issuing the Prayers of Love and Faith described in GS 2289 and its Annexes;
- (f) invite the House of Bishops to monitor the Church's use of and response to the Prayers of Love and Faith, once they have been commended and published, and to report back to Synod in five years' time;
- (g) endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage, and their intention 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.'

Votes were recorded as follows:

Bishops 36 for, 4 against, 2 abstained
Clergy 111 for, 85 against, 3 abstained
Laity 103 for, 92 against, 5 abstained