

An Open Letter to the House of Bishops from the Trustees of Together for the Church of England

We are disappointed, but not surprised, to find that the guiding spirit of leadership in the Church of England today is the spirit not of Prophecy but of Procrastination. After many years of work on LLF, and especially since the clear resolution of Synod nearly three years ago, we have waited to see the tangible fruit of change. The entire House of Bishops, as they acknowledge, bear responsibility for the grief and pain they have inflicted, not least by ignoring the volatile public reaction to their provisional decisions in October.

In the short time since the announcement, we have heard innumerable responses of hurt and anger from across the Church. The proposal of a Working Party, no doubt including some of the weary and wounded veterans of the many Groups and Conversations of recent years, battling to find a set of Recommendations to present for debate in the new Synod, sounds like a holding measure. In the meantime, same-sex couples hoping to celebrate their love in the services shaped by that love in the sight of God and those in same-sex marriage called to ordination must wait, enduring profound feelings of rejection by the Church.

As well as the tone of contrition from the House of Bishops, we are ready to acknowledge a few positive elements. It is good that the House was able to resist the pressure to revisit their commendation of the Prayers of Love & Faith in existing services, which makes it clear that the committed love of same-sex couples may be celebrated joyfully in the life of the Church. We are grateful for the rejection of new structures which would undermine the episcopal order of the Church of England in favour of bespoke episcopacy to suit personal convictions, which would defy the call of the Church of England to rejoice in diversity. It is also good to read discouragement of local gestures of separation in finance or otherwise.

We note the efficient implementation of the overwhelming decision of Synod last July that *Issues in Human Sexuality* should be replaced with the *Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy*, which offer no specific directions on same-sex relationships. We look forward to this neutrality, agreed when the *Guidelines* were adopted by the Convocations in 2015, being maintained in the current revision to be presented in February. We also note with thanks that many bishops are now able to openly voice their support for change. We thank them for doing so.

The fact that debate on the further authorisation of services for same-sex couples and of the ordination or ministry of those in same-sex marriages will be deferred to the new General Synod places a firm focus on the forthcoming elections for Synod in autumn this year. We urge all Anglicans who believe in a broad and

inclusive Church of England to join in our joint campaign with *Inclusive Church* to achieve a representation in the elected Houses of Clergy and Laity which better reflects the whole Church.

This is not a time to despair of the Church; this is the time to recommit anew to a stronger and wiser Church that does not hide behind legal formularies or fear of honest disagreement. We believe a more representative Synod will be a place in which the question of same-sex marriage as a whole, regrettably foreclosed early in the LLF process, will become once again a live debate as we strive to follow the God whose love is without limit.

Yours faithfully,

Revd. Canon Neil Patterson (Chair)
Professor Helen King (Vice-Chair)