

# together

## For the Church of England

Chair: The Revd Canon Neil Patterson

National Co-ordinator: Nic Tall

Dear Archbishops and Bishops,

We write as you prepare to discuss, among other things, the progress of *Living in Love & Faith* since July Synod and especially to consider the approach to same-sex marriage for ordinands and clergy. In doing so, please be assured of our prayers for your deliberations and decisions, and our gratitude for the definite, if slow, progress that has taken place since the first LLF Synod debate of February 2023. We are delighted to know of many churches, including a number of cathedrals, where same-sex couples have been able to celebrate their relationships in the sight of God with the use of the *Prayers of Love & Faith*. It is good that this small step towards redeeming the decades of exclusion and hurt felt by LGBTQ+ people from the Church of England will be developed in the coming months by the provision for standalone services for couples wishing to celebrate their love, and we know of those looking to do so next summer.

As you will be fully aware, the key unresolved question remains what provision replaces the firmly rejected, but still enforced, text *Issues in Human Sexuality* in setting out the expectations of clergy, those in discernment and training (and in some dioceses, lay ministers) if they are in same-sex relationships and intending to marry. Although it was never explicitly stated, we trust it is clear to all of you that the majority in all three Houses of Synod who have repeatedly endorsed the replacement of *Issues* have done so because we believe it imposes unjust and unreasonable demands upon ordinands and clergy. This is all the more so because the commendation by you of the *PLF* indicates that, contrary to the position set out in *Issues*, same-sex relationships are good and may be prayed for in public – how then can they be impermissible for the clergy?

We recognise that there are different ways, only some involving amendment of canons or similar processes, by which this situation could be resolved, and likely to be presented to you. Until you reach a decision as to what sort of development in the teaching of the Church this would represent, and how you intend to resolve it to allow clergy the freedom to marry, the levels of discontent and disappointment amongst our supporters, especially the hundreds of candidates, ordinands and clergy in same-sex relationships, will grow. This will make it difficult for us to maintain the level of support in Synod which has so far enabled the LLF journey to continue. You will recall how in February this year we were willing to contrive a move to Next Business in order to prevent a train crash; a manoeuvre difficult to repeat.

Recent developments, including the delegation of ordinations in Oxford Diocese, have sharpened discussion about what will be included in the “specific and limited episcopal ministry” to be delegated under any emerging plans. This is, of course, against the backdrop of a well-publicised and funded campaign for the widest possible separation within the Church for the benefit of those unable to accept the use of entirely optional prayers. We are grateful that in the past the House of Bishops has upheld its commitment to the unity of the Church in response to such campaigning, and trust and pray that you will continue to do so. We are willing to work with carefully defined conscience provision which is clearly designed to further the unity, rather than deepen the divisions, in the Church of England.

In all this we remain keen to work with you, nationally and locally, to maintain the breadth and diversity of the Church that we all treasure. You will know that we have active or emerging Together groups in all dioceses who very much value the opportunity to meet with you locally. And we all put our trust in the God who in Christ has set us free from every bond to serve him without fear.

Yours sincerely

The Revd Canon Neil Patterson  
Chair – Together for the Church of England

Professor Helen King  
Chair – Together on General Synod

On behalf of the Trustees of Together for the Church of England