Dear name

Thank you for your email expressing your concern over the recent General Synod debate and decisions made in regard to Living in Love and Faith (LLF). We know this has resulted in much soul-searching and has been a source of pain for faithful Christians on all sides of the discussion that has happened. We hope you will appreciate that it is difficult to attend to all correspondence in personal detail but would like to offer the following in response to you.

As you are aware the Church’s engagement with matters of human identity, friendship, sexuality, and marriage has been going on for some years. In February, General Synod agreed that no change should be made to the doctrine of marriage, which therefore remains as being that between one man and one woman.

However, it also recognised that there has been a failure by the Church to value those who are LGBTQI+ within our life together. Indeed there has often been deep and painful rejection. Together these call for a deep apology. Whilst same sex marriage continues not to be permitted in Church, the College and House of Bishops did propose that resources for prayers for those in same sex, faithful and life-long relationships should be provided. This was agreed by a majority vote at Synod and hence the work continues on the texts for such prayers and for guidance as to how these should be used. This material is expected to be presented at July’s General Synod when further debate will be had and members asked to declare their view by vote.

As bishops of the Diocese of Bath and Wells it is only too apparent to us that this matter is an issue of profound difference amongst Christians. As disciples of Christ, we all seek to live by his principles of grace and truth, and we do so through searching the Scriptures, listening to the Holy Spirit, and discerning together. As can be seen from the vast wealth of material offered through the LLF resources, the Church is trying to discern God’s way for us through the means of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, as it has always done.

We hope very much that you will have been able to engage with the [LLF material](https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith/living-in-love-faith/), (its Biblical studies, anthropological and scientific research and historical detailing of Church tradition). As you will have seen from this work, it is clear that there is no one view on the interpretation of Scripture in relation to these issues. Neither is there agreement within any one sector of the Church on these matters, even though that may be asserted by some.

One of the great strengths of the Anglican church has been its ability to live with difference and yet it is also its greatest challenge. The Biblical imagery of the body of Christ invites us to see each element of the body as contributing its own particular gift of difference. While such difference is necessary, it can also be uncomfortable. The challenge for us at this moment is in distinguishing between what is different and what is sin. That judgement sits rightly with God and our task is to seek to be holy as He is. We are therefore convinced that no part of the body can say of another ‘we have no need of you’.

It is our view as Bishops that there should be opportunity for the Church to recognise the place of **all** faithful relationships within its life and thus we are supportive of the way in which the Church is seeking to walk together amidst its difference. We know that there has been particular concern raised in regard to personal conscience from all sides and we want therefore to assure everyone that **all** clergy and laity will be supported in holding their own personal view, according to conscience, whether to use or not use any prayers which may be commended.

We also want to assure you of our ongoing commitment to the equality of both lay and ordained in the way in which our discipleship is lived out. One of the reasons for the need of new pastoral guidance is that there has been an inequity between the standards required of laity and clergy. Although there may be difference in roles, we believe that all are called to live holy lives, faithfully following Christ.

We know that this may not be enough to allay all fears but we hope that as we continue to engage in listening to one another and to God, we will find our way through this together. As we have already stated in our [earlier letter](https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/60638a2c87045/content/pages/documents/living-in-love-and-faith---24022023.pdf) to the diocese we are willing to listen, walk and talk with any across the diocese.

With our love and prayers

+Michael +Ruth

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