

Friday 20 January 2023

Next Steps for Living in Love and Faith – A message from Bishop Jonathan to the Diocese

Dear Friends,

The House of Bishops will publish on Friday morning the material it will be offering to the General Synod in February regarding next steps for the Living in Love and Faith process which has been underway for the last six years. The Diocese will publish a link to the relevant section of the Church of England website as soon as it becomes available.

As you will be aware, there has been a good deal of controversy about this whole process, particularly following the leaking of details about the material earlier this week.

I profoundly regret that these details should have been leaked in this way, as I believe this showed a lack of respect for all those involved in the process and especially for those directly affected by these complex and hugely sensitive issues. We need to remember that this is about people's lives and about their deepest convictions, and we need to honour and respect that in the way we relate to one another.

Inevitably the material that the bishops are bringing forward is the result of a certain amount of compromise between people who have all been seeking to discern the will of God but who have very strong and diverse convictions, and as such it cannot and will not please everyone. I am aware that some people will be deeply disappointed or even angered by what is proposed, for all sorts of different reasons.

I would like to urge everyone in the Diocese to read and reflect carefully on all the material that will be published on Friday, doing so with open minds and generous hearts, seeking to receive the material in the spirit in which it has been prepared. Namely, as a set of resources which can enable Christians of all traditions in the Church of England to celebrate the gift of faithful, committed, loving relationships and to seek God's blessing on those who enter into them.

I also want to express my view that the material is the fruit of long, honest, and heartfelt discussion and that the prayers and other resources offered can be used with integrity in different contexts by people of every tradition in the Church of England, while respecting also that some will not feel able or willing to do so.

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In the coming days, I will be meeting with a number of groups of people within the Diocese who hold very different convictions about these issues, partly in preparation for the discussions that will take place at General Synod next month. These discussions in turn will help shape the eventual form of the material to be issued in due course by the House of Bishops.

Bishop Simon and I are committed to honouring everyone whatever their views on these issues and to enabling them to feel welcomed, included and affirmed within the life of the Church in this Diocese.

We will have to work through some difficult questions in the days ahead about what all this means, including for our relationships within the Diocese and the wider Church, and we all need to pray for the grace and wisdom of the Holy Spirit as we do so.

Please pray for us and for one another, as we will be praying for you in the days ahead.

+Jonathan

The Rt Revd Dr J R Gibbs
Bishop of Rochester