

# DIOCESE IN EUROPE

THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

The Suffragan Bishop  
The Right Reverend David Hamid



20<sup>th</sup> January 2023

A letter to the Diocese from Bishop David on the publication of proposals to General Synod following LLF

Dear Brothers and Sisters

As you may know, today the bishops of the Church of England have published our proposals resulting from months of consultation in the College of Bishops, where we considered what we learned and discerned through the six-years of *Living in Love and Faith*. Our proposals will be presented to the upcoming meeting of the General Synod.

This is an historic development in the life of the Church of England. For years, LGBTQI+ members, their families and friends, have been waiting for a new climate of respect, recognition and welcome in the Church. While these proposals may not be as far reaching a step as many in the LGBTQI+ community were hoping for, my prayer is that the consensus achieved by the bishops will be accepted across the Church as a significant change towards full inclusion of all God's children. Others, in good conscience, will feel that these proposals move the Church away from traditional teaching and practice, and will be unable to accept them. I want to assure the people of the diocese that whatever your views on these proposals, you have an honoured and respected place in the Church.

I do want to share a couple of *personal* thoughts about these proposals, now that they are in the public domain. To begin with, I believe that they contain three important developments.

Firstly, the bishops are offering an apology to LGBTQI+ people for the rejection, exclusion and hostility that they have experienced from the Church. This is as far as I can remember the first time that the bishops *together and on behalf of the Church* have expressed such an apology, which is long overdue. The apology will not heal all wounds and there are many whose lives have been permanently damaged by our complicity, silence and institutional homophobia in the past. But it is a deep expression of sorrow and shame, with which I wish to associate myself fully.

Second, the bishops have prepared draft prayers which we hope to commend for voluntary use in Church to celebrate and bless couples who are in same-sex marriages or civil partnerships. These resources can be used by the clergy to put together joyful services to offer God's blessing on such faithful, monogamous couples. So for the first time the blessing of same-sex civil marriages and partnerships will be possible in the Church of England. This is a huge development in the direction of responding pastorally to and affirming same-sex couples in the life of the Church.

Thirdly, the bishops intend to withdraw our former document *Issues in Human Sexuality*, and replace it with new pastoral guidance which will, I hope, permit clergy and those who wish to be ordained to enter same-sex civil marriages without the disciplinary effects and other restrictions imposed upon them as before.

It is important to note that our proposals do not alter the Church's doctrine of Holy Matrimony. The bishops have chosen not to take that path. A move towards equal marriage in Church, for heterosexual and same-sex couples, while looked-for by many of us in the college of bishops, would have required a two-thirds majority in each house of the General Synod, which was highly unlikely to be achieved, and a rejection by the synod would have had a disastrous effect on the Church's ministry, unity and credibility.

Our proposals, thus, are a compromise. They will be received with gladness by many. They will be a disappointment to some who would have wanted more from us after waiting so long. Others may feel that what we propose goes too far and disturbs deeply held traditional convictions. Together with our colleagues in the College of Bishops, your own bishops are committed to respect all, and minister among all, regardless of their position on these matters.

I want to thank those across the diocese who have engaged with the LLF materials and who have shared their views with your bishops. Let us continue to pray for each other, that we may be a community where, even when there are divergent views on matters of human sexuality, we can be united in a commitment to welcome all among us, into a family of reconciliation, healing, peace and love. Despite our imperfection as a Church, may we walk together with all God's children.

Your brother in Christ

+ David