



OneBodyOneFaith

Affirming sexuality and gender in Christ

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury
Lambeth Palace,
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The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Dr. John Sentamu, Archbishop of York
The Office of the Archbishop of York
Bishopthorpe Palace
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Friday 2nd February 2018

Dear Archbishop,

The recent decision by the House of Bishops to assert that there is no need for an authorised liturgy to mark a person's gender transition has caused a range of reactions from upset and anger to great relief. We understand that creation of a trans liturgy was always going to be a divisive issue and that the House of Bishops is caught in the middle, however that is the nature of leadership and not a new predicament for bishops.

Whilst we are obviously very disappointed by the decision, our greatest concern lies with the process that this decision seems to have been arrived at. Our concerns are:

1. GS Misc. 1178 states that the decision was made after both time and space had been provided for bishops 'to consider the issue prayerfully.' The official press release regarding the issue also states that 'the House of Bishops has prayerfully considered whether a new national commended service might be prepared to mark a gender transition.' However, the Summary of Decisions made by the House of Bishops in GS Misc. 1179 contains no evidence of any decision having been 'prayerfully considered' in relation to this issue. There is a conflict here which could be perceived as spin, an attempt to circumvent synodical process, or as incompetence. As this was consideration of a motion from General Synod which was overwhelmingly passed, there is the clear implication that Synod's will was disregarded by the House of Bishops.
2. An article in the Church Times on 26th January this year states that the recommendation of the sub-committee to offer the existing rite of Affirmation of Baptismal Faith was placed on the House of Bishops' agenda as part of a list on paper under 'business for deemed approval' and was accepted without debate. We find it astonishing that a motion clearly approved at synod, which explicitly calls

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on the House of Bishops to collectively consider an issue of such sensitivity, has been treated in such a dismissive way. Surely an issue such as this and one which received huge support in synod was worthy of the whole House of Bishop's discussion and 'prayerful consideration'?

3. At a time when the welcome offered by the Church is under close scrutiny, particularly to LGBTI+ people, this is once again a case of actions contradicting words; a contradiction that is further emphasised by the apparent lack of regard for synodical process. The suggestion of using the Affirmation of Baptismal Faith is one which was raised during the debate in General Synod and was clearly not the direction in which Synod wished to go. In making that the House of Bishop's decision further underlines the lack of listening which has characterised the bishops' response to this issue and that of sexuality generally.

The words of apology or welcome to LGBTI+ people are a good first step but mean absolutely nothing if not accompanied by corresponding action. The issues outlined above have yet again undermined our faith that the bishops of the Church of England mean what they say on this issue: this continues to cause hurt and distress to far too many people. Worst of all, the contradiction of words of welcome spoken not being matched by receptivity to those to whom those words are directed continue to be an obstacle to the mission of the Church. They are also a barrier to many who do not see the love of Christ reflected in either this decision or the process taken to arrive at it.

As well as the question of public confidence in the Church of England's governance, many of us on General Synod now need to have our trust re-established, following a decision which synod made being so easily dismissed by the House of Bishops, in a process that is not only not transparent but seems to undermine Synod's status and function.

We call upon you to set up an independent and open enquiry to investigate both the process by which this decision was reached and the way it was represented by Church House officials. We believe this action is urgently needed to begin to rebuild trust and to restore good governance within the Church of England when with good reason it has been brought into question.

Yours sincerely,



The Reverend Canon Peter Leonard
Chair



Tracey Byrne
Chief Executive

cc Rt Rev Tim Thornton, Bishop at Lambeth
Mr William Nye, Secretary General of the Archbishop's Council