

Dear Dr John

Follow up on meeting with LGBTI Organisations

Thank you for meeting with us last weekend. It was very good to meet you and your willingness to listen and to seek to understand our concerns was appreciated. It was also good to see the presentation and to begin to understand the thinking behind the Living in Love and Faith process.

As promised we are offering some feedback based on the long experience of what it is to be LGBTI Christians in the Church of England. Many of us, allies and LGBTI people, have been active in campaigning within the Churches for years, some of us for decades and you will understand why we feel both a little weary, and cynical of the whole process. We presented you with a paper that detailed the long history of Reports and recommendations that have been produced by the Church of England and the equally long history of failure in implementing those recommendations. We want to believe that Living in Love and Faith will be different, but it is hard to do so given past experience.

In this response we address some of the issues raised by your presentation using questions that are being asked of some individuals and churches. We do not claim to speak for all LGBTI Christians or allies, and we are aware that there are differences in the way our communities have been historically treated and in our specific concerns at this present time.

Those of us who are Intersex or Transgender are experiencing the Church very differently to cis-gender gay men, and the voices of lesbians and bisexuals are often ignored by the focus on male homosexuality.

We all acknowledge the diversity of opinion within the Church of England on matters of sexuality and recognize that it is not yet going to be possible to reach a single mind on matters such as marriage and ministry. We do however want to work to a situation in which the honest, prayerful and deep theological convictions of those who are supportive of LGBTI people in our relationships and in relation to lay and ordained ministry are properly acknowledged and honoured. It cannot be sustainable to continue to act as if the Church is 'of one mind' when it clearly is not.

It is also important to highlight that unless this process has due regard to safeguarding and the prevention of harm then it is worthless. The evidence is clear about the damage being done to people and we all have a duty to work to stop this now and to prevent it in the future.

In relation to the questions (shortened for ease of response)-

1) What resources would we find appealing, help us to think more deeply...

As we said in our meeting the premise of this question is one that we question. It seems to assume that we haven't already given considerable thought to who we are, and how that experience relates to our faith. Believe us when we say that as LGBTI people we have spent more time thinking about, worrying about and resolving our sense of identity than a straight, cis-gendered person can possibly imagine. The question also assumes that the straight laity of the Church hasn't already given considerable thought to their own identity as Christians, sexual and relationship orientated beings and as people in relationship with others. We do want to be helpful in this process but some honesty about the reality of the actual situation and lives lived would be a relief to see. It would be powerful to see the Bishops themselves being honest about their own lives, about their thoughts struggles and the questions they have, rather than expecting others to do the work for them. Leadership is from the front and not a spectator sport.

We also question how parishes across the range of approaches to the subjects under consideration are going to engage with the proposed resources. To be honest simply getting people to come to a Lent Course is enough of a struggle in many places, getting people to turn out to explore what may be uncomfortable and divisive issues is going to be very challenging indeed.

2) What are the questions...?

The main question for many of us is simply 'why does the Church of England continue to treat us so badly?' If the apologies of the past are genuine and repentance real, why aren't our lives, faith and hope acknowledged? In wider society our experience is increasingly one of acceptance, normality and even celebration. How is it that the place we believe to be about justice and love is the place we are least likely to experience these virtues? In relation to the resources encouraging

those engaged in them to consider what it is to do what God requires of us towards each other as expressed in Micah 6:8: 'He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' Too often we do not experience that of the Church of England.

3) Would you be willing to share your experience...

We have been offering this for years. The question is 'can you listen and hear?' And if you do, 'will you bother to respond?' We have frequently looked to the Bishops for comfort and on many occasions have received only stones for bread. We expect to be acknowledged as full members of the Church of England, for our consciences to be respected and our faith and lives honoured. It is a constant pain to us that this so often seems impossible to see in reality.

4) What issues remain unresolved?

The answer to this will very much depend on the outcome of this LLF process. It was good to learn that the Bishops intend to set out a way forward that will lead the CofE on from this process but we will, and do, expect that promise to be honoured and there to be real and genuine change. There is real urgency in this, and if the LLF process becomes another exercise in the cultivation of long grass then there is going to be anger and disillusionment.

None of us expect the CofE to quickly and entirely resolve its contradictions over human sexuality and gender. We do expect and, even dare to demand, that the theological diversity of our Church be officially recognised and that this be expressed in clear practical and workable steps within the life of the coming General Synod.

The failure of the Church to honour its LGBTI members must be properly acknowledged and some honesty shown about the hypocrisy of the current settlement. It cannot be right that the integrity of the Church is so compromised that people are being asked to agree to something that we all know that they do not support.

We want the postcode lottery for married lay ministers to end and there must be freedom to celebrate our marriages and Civil Partnerships in Church in public and without threat. In time it must be a matter of individual conscience whether or not to offer marriages in Church to gay and lesbian couples and for gay and lesbian clergy to choose whether to marry or enter into a Civil Partnership and continue in ministry. We know that these are long term ambitions, but nothing less is going to be acceptable.

We are faithful Anglicans. We will continue to be faithful Anglicans and we are increasingly in the majority. The dilemma for those leading this process is how to recognize that reality, preserve unity as much as it can and to guide the Church forward. We are daily in prayer for this but without a vision for the future that has integrity at its heart the message of the Gospel is not going to compel and our Church faces a bleak future indeed. It is in the interests of us all to work well together. As a group we will continue to meet and independently monitor the progress of our Church in these matters.

Yours in Christ

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