

St Andrew's Church, Kirk Ella
Packman Lane
Kirk Ella
East Riding of Yorkshire

3rd February 2023

Dear Archbishop Stephen,

Prayers of Love and Faith

We are conscious that there has been little time for Churches to process the statements from the House of Bishops and yet, with General Synod meeting next week, we feel it is important for us to make an initial response. We intend to write more fully after the proposals have been considered by Synod.

Two points need to be raised and their consequences spelled out.

First, the prayers proposed skate as close as possible to a marriage service for same-sex couples, with the blessing of rings and so forth. On the one hand, we are told that this is not a change of doctrine and therefore Synodical oversight is unwarranted. On the other, you have taught on national radio that, 'what we are saying is that physical and sexual intimacy belongs in committed, stable, faithful relationships and therefore where we see a committed, stable, faithful relationship between two people of the same sex' then they should be welcomed 'on their terms.' This is a serious departure from both Scriptural norms and historic Anglicanism. We feel that it is thoroughly disingenuous to suggest that this isn't a change of doctrine.

Secondly, and more seriously, this is an attack on the very gospel itself. Jesus was clear that all must 'repent and believe the gospel' (Mark 1:15). In particular, the Scriptures are clear that all sexual sin which goes unrepented of will keep one out of the Kingdom (1 Cor 6:9-11). It is therefore *essential* to salvation that everyone repents of sexual sins which condemn them. Far from being a generous pastoral provision for same-sex attracted people, it plays fast and loose with their eternal salvation.

It seems to us, then, that we have two related but somewhat separate issues to address.

First, there is what we might call False Anglicanism. In the ordinal, all clergy promise to order their lives and doctrine by the Scriptures and to drive away error. You appear to us to be breaking your promise. In Article XX, an article ordained members of the Church of England have promised to uphold, it is clear both that Scripture (interpreted by Scripture) is the supreme authority of the Church and that it is therefore contrary to the Articles for the Church to ordain any rites or ceremonies which are contrary to Scripture. These prayers, then, appear to us to be utterly unAnglican. We invite you to make the Scripturally founded, historically Anglican, and doctrinally coherent case for this change. At present, however, the move appears to be both unbiblical and unAnglican.

This unAnglican practice, disingenuously avoiding the due process of Synod, in violation of your promises upon which you were ordained, is a severe rupturing of the Anglican Church in this country and across the communion. We call on you and all the bishops to repent of this schismatic proposal. It is hard to see how you can maintain your integrity otherwise.

Secondly, there is a far more serious issue even than dividing the Church of England or even the Communion. It is the propagation of False Teaching. To bless what God calls us to repent of is to do violence to *everyone* in our diocese. To depart from Scripture and to teach others to live contrary to Scripture is to invite God's judgment on yourself. Please, do not take lightly the warnings that Jesus gives us about leading others astray (e.g. Matt 18:6-9). There are many in our Churches who desire to be faithful to Jesus but who will be led to stumble in the area of sexuality

because of your words and actions. Some of those may be kept out of the Kingdom of God altogether. There are still others in our churches who will be thrown into confusion by such a radical departure from historic Christianity. Most sadly of all, there are those *outside* our churches who, in the pain and misery of our present day, are looking for truths, even hard truths, upon which to build their lives. They look to the Church to be the radical counter-culture that Christ intends. But these prayers, and the change of doctrine they herald, make the Church like the world, with nothing useful to say. Christ will not honour a church which does not honour him and we can only expect terminal decline.

Archbishop, it is not easy to write these things and we do so out of love for you, the other Bishops and the people in our congregation and parish. We have taken courage from the way Jesus confronted those in religious authority who departed from the truth in his day. Whilst we do not claim his omniscience, we do seek to stand on his word. And we do so for your sake. Our prayer is that you will listen to the Scriptures and to the two thousand year long witness of the Church, hard as it may be, and turn back from your false teaching.

Whilst we pray for Synod, we also recognise the division these proposals have wrought in the Church. The Church is no longer united. You want to be the focus of unity within the Diocese of York, and yet the prayers you are introducing and the change in teaching you wish to introduce are schismatic. Please don't be the Archbishop who breaks the Church.

We must recognise the sharp division you have caused between, on one hand, yourself and any other Bishops and clergy who promote, practise or allow this false teaching and, on the other hand us, the worldwide Anglican Communion and the catholic Church with whom we stand.

We propose to take the following steps with immediate effect:

- We shall not recognise the spiritual authority over our church of Bishops who promote, practice, or allow this false teaching.
 - This means that until the Prayers of Love and Faith and its supporting document are withdrawn, and the historic doctrine of the church is publicly upheld in word, deed and appearance we will not take part in communion services, or times of prayer with any who approve, use or allow the Prayers to be used, nor welcome them to our church or homes.
- We will pause all finance paid in Free Will Offer to the diocese with immediate effect whilst we prayerfully consider our long term response.

Please be assured, we will be praying for you and the other Bishops in the days and weeks ahead. As faithful Anglicans and members of the Church of England, we look forward to the day when you publicly uphold the historic teaching of the Church and the schism you have wrought is healed.

With love and prayers,

The PCC of St Andrew's Kirk Ella