



The College of Bishops held its second three-day meeting (12-14 December) to continue discerning a way forward for the Church of England on questions of identity, sexuality and marriage.

Under the banner, 'Living in Love and Faith' (LLF), the Church produced a suite of resources in November 2020 examining human identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. These include a book, a video course, podcasts and videos of the lived experiences of a wide range of individuals. These have been available through a variety of channels across the Church including websites and local parishes.

Congregations across the country then took part in a process of learning using the resources, listening to one another and to God. A report of the gathered responses from this churchwide engagement was published in September 2022.

Since then the College of Bishops – which includes all the serving bishops of the Church of England – has held two three-day meetings, to draw on this wealth of resources and the many conversations that have been held to inform their discernment. A third meeting will take place next month in mid-January 2023.

The format of this week's meeting mirrored that of the earlier November meeting: Working in group and plenary sessions, bishops shared their different views and discussed how the Church should approach questions relating to same-sex relationships and marriage. Other pastoral and theological concerns were also discussed relating to human identity and sexuality honouring the different deeply held convictions that exist among bishops and the wider Church.

Bishops spent time praying, reflecting and discussing a spectrum of possible ways forward for the Church regarding same-sex relationship and marriage, and the theological basis for each. They will continue those discussions at a third meeting in mid-January at which it is anticipated that they will agree an 'offering' to the Church, giving a clear sense of direction. The Church of England's General Synod would then be invited to indicate its views at its meeting in February 2023.

Meanwhile the bishops identified a number of related areas to which they believe the Church needs to attend and discussed how best to offer guidance and support to the wider Church.

The College also discussed commitments that bishops will take and develop further in line with the direction of travel to be agreed by Synod in February 2023. It is anticipated that these commitments would be included in the bishops' offering to Synod and the wider Church.

Commenting at the end of the meeting, the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullaly, who chairs the bishops' Next Steps Group, said: "It was deeply heartening that Bishops continued to walk together united under Christ and celebrated our differences over the course of the last three days.

"They manifested a desire to find a way forward that will be good news to the Church and to wider society."

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, said: "The College continued to be engaged positively, robustly and frankly with three days of conversations held in a heartfelt commitment of mutual respect and understanding."

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said: "As our second meeting closes and as we continue our journey on to the next stage in the LLF process, we continue to pray for continued guidance by the Holy Spirit through the scriptures about God's intention for human life in all its glory and joy."

Details of the three-day programme and a short video on the reflections of some bishops and members of the Reference Group are posted below.

The next College of Bishops will be in mid-January where further discernment and decision-making will take place.

## **Programme of the College of Bishops, 12 December - 14 December 2022**

### **Monday 12 December**

*Welcome and opening worship*

Session One: Introduction

Session Two: Collective Leadership (1): What does it mean to lead the Church together as bishops?

Session Three: Agreements

*Eucharist*

Session Four: Theology Open Forum: Exploring our theological understanding of the doctrine of marriage in the context of same-sex relationships.

*Compline*

### **Tuesday 13 December**

*Morning Prayer and Eucharist*

Session Five: Agreements

Session Six: Sexuality and Marriage: Where are we now?

*Midday worship*

Session Seven: Sexuality and Marriage: Ways forward

Session Eight: Sexuality and Marriage: Ways forward

*Evening Prayer*

Session Nine: Sexuality and Marriage: Unity and disagreement

*Compline*

### **Wednesday 14 December**

*Morning Prayer*

Session Ten: Thinking about the Anglican Communion

Session Eleven: Where are we now?

Session Twelve: Commitments

Session Thirteen: Next steps

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