

STATEMENT

in response to the bishops' announcement on blessings for same-sex couples

Not radical Christian inclusion

On 17 January, the Church of England bishops met to decide what proposals to offer to General Synod in February to bring to an end the five-year process of Living in Love and Faith. Some of the decisions have already been leaked to the media (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64313367>) and the C of E has issued a press release (<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/bishops-propose-prayers-thanksgiving-dedication-and-gods-blessing>). The full details will be published on Friday 20 January, and we will be commenting on those detailed proposals next week.

What follows is our initial response to what has been leaked.

It seems that instead of the new inclusion we had been promised we are to be cautiously offered no more than **a few stale crumbs**.

- ❖ The bishops are going to issue yet another **apology** for the 'rejection, exclusion and hostility' that LGBTQIA+ people have so often experienced at the hands of the C of E. Apologies are easy to offer, but what God calls for is **repentance** – and repentance requires real change to patterns of behaviour. It appears from the rest of the proposals that there is little intention to do so, and that the bishops are proposing a way forward that continues much of the damaging and hurtful behaviour for which they are apologizing. We want to see evidence of repentance – change of mind, heart and action – not an apology.
- ❖ Commended **prayers/blessings** for same-sex civil marriages and civil partnerships. This may seem a positive development, but the bishops have also stated that the doctrine of the Church is not changing. According to that unchanged doctrine which the bishops have reaffirmed, sex outside marriage is sinful and the only acceptable form of marriage is between a man and a woman. The bishops seem to be saying both that same-sex relationships are wrong and that they can be blessed. This is inconsistent and incoherent, and it certainly isn't radical inclusion.
- ❖ *Issues in Human Sexuality* (a discussion document that morphed into a hard-line rulebook) will **no longer be a requirement** for ordinands and clergy to assent to. We welcome that change, which is long overdue. However there is no clarity about what will replace it, and instead another group (of bishops presumably) is going to meet and make proposals 'shortly'. There is no certainty that clergy who have married same-sex partners will be allowed to serve in ministry, and this is key to the freedom of conscience that the Campaign has been urging for years.
- ❖ There is no **roadmap for change**, as in the Church in Wales. This is not seen as a step on the journey towards equal marriage; it could be all we get.

These proposals lack vision, courage and clarity, and we call on the House of Bishops to look again at what they are suggesting. The aims of the Campaign for Equal Marriage in the Church of England are clear: same-sex couples should be able to marry in their parish church, clergy should be free to marry and to continue to serve, and no one should be forced to act against their conscience. We will continue to argue for these until the Church of England has accepted them.

19 January 2023