

A statement from eleven bishops in the House of Bishops

On Monday the House of Bishops reached a decisive point in the journey discerning how to proceed in relation to *Living in Love and Faith*. We have participated in good faith in attempts to find consensus but were unable to support the decisions taken on Monday. There was deep disagreement within the House. Sharing the profound concerns of many in the Church of England and in the wider Communion, with heavy hearts we find it necessary to dissent publicly from the decisions of the House.

We welcome the fact that the House recognised the need for General Synod to exercise its legitimate responsibilities in relation to liturgy and doctrine under Canon B2. However, the decision to commend the suite of prayers for use in public services bypasses those procedures and does not permit the General Synod to consider the full significance of the prayers. Nor can Synod determine whether the bishops have fulfilled their intention (supported in February) that the final form of the prayers should not be “indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England”. Indeed, legal and theological advice the House has received suggest clearly to us that the decisions of the House may fall short of this commitment.

We are also firmly of the view that we need to adhere to the commitment made to bring the Prayers of Love and Faith, the pastoral guidance and pastoral reassurance (including whatever formal structural provision is necessary) to Synod as a single package, rather than doing so in a piecemeal fashion. We are therefore unable to support the collective decisions made by the House which we believe fail to safeguard the pastoral stability, mission and unity of the church.

Faced with these sensitive matters over which there remains deep disagreement, we are committed as bishops to continue seeking to discern a way forward in the interests of the whole Church and to providing pastoral care for all. At the same time, we believe that bishops must have due regard to the obligations of good and proper governance. Even at this late stage, we urge our episcopal colleagues and the Archbishops, as joint Presidents of General Synod, to reconsider the course we saw mapped out in our meeting.

We join the prayers of the whole Church as we seek to bear united and faithful witness to the good news of Jesus Christ entrusted to us, in the midst of the challenges we face as the Church and especially for our wider world at this time.

The Bishop of Blackburn, Philip North
The Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner
The Bishop of Ebbsfleet, Rob Munro
The Bishop of Guildford, Andrew Watson
The Bishop of Hereford, Richard Jackson
The Bishop of Islington, Ric Thorpe
The Bishop of Lancaster, Jill Duff
The Bishop of Oswestry, Paul Thomas
The Bishop of Rochester, Jonathan Gibbs
The Bishop of Sheffield, Pete Wilcox
The Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham, Paul Williams

12 October 2023