



Much attention has been given in recent days to the Church of England's evolving stance on same-sex relationships. I have remained committed to the College of Bishop's agreement to refrain from commenting on draft documentation before its formal release for debate at the General Synod in February. Now that this happened, I would like to declare my own views on this issue to the Diocese.

The proposal under consideration offers a significant change in policy towards LGBTQI+ people and, for the first time, permits clergy to offer services of prayer and blessing for same-sex couples. I hope that the General Synod will endorse these prayers.

I further support a change to the law that would allow for the marriage of same-sex couples in church, and regret that this proposal does not extend that legal change.

Over many years I have tried to travel alongside LGBTQI+ Christians as they have responded to the call of God and struggled against discrimination. As a deaconess and university chaplain in the 1980s, I became aware of the risk of prosecution that many faced, and the secrecy they consequently kept. I was relieved when both law and culture changed to allow for civil partnerships (though deeply disappointed that bishops argued against this change). I continued in conversation about marriage over the years, knowing that there were a variety of views within the Christian LGBTQI+ community about this possibility.

When I was appointed to the Diocese nearly five years ago, there had been (unlike other dioceses) very little formal opportunity for discussion of sexuality and identity, and nervousness about engaging in debate when many were aware of profound disagreement. I was glad, therefore, that discussions around human sexuality endorsed by the national church ('Living in Love and Faith') provided an opportunity to listen and learn together. I am grateful to those who participated, particularly those for whom personal disclosure left them vulnerable to hurt.

It has been the testimony of gay Christians who have married, and who have longed for the support of the church and for Christ's blessing, which ultimately convinced me. I honour those who, despite prejudice against them, have established faithful, loving and stable relationships which have been a gift to the church and to their communities.

As Bishop of Bristol, I share with bishops in England responsibility for the mission and ministry of the church and its unity; and so I am aware that advocating marriage for same-sex couples goes against scripture and tradition in the view of many. As a woman in Church of England ministry, I have my own experience of the cost of disagreement about doctrine and practice.

In our Diocese, there will continue to be a variety of views about sexuality and identity. I remain steadfastly committed to a spirit of generosity: that we can continue to listen and learn together, respect each other and disagree well. In the meantime, I pray that General Synod will be supportive of the changes proposed today.