

## A WORD FROM THE TEAM RECTOR



Unless you spent last week asleep you will have picked up in the media the news that the General Synod, the Church of England's parliament, made a momentous decision on Thursday at its sessions in London. For the last six years formal conversation and debate has been taking place across the length and breadth of the Church of England about the church's teaching and practice with regard to matters concerning identity, sex, relationships and marriage, and in particular same sex relationships. This process has been called 'Living in Love & Faith' and it reached a very significant point last week as the bishops presented proposals to the General Synod on their preferred way forward.

After much impassioned debate, Synod approved the bishops' proposals to leave the current doctrine of Holy Matrimony unchanged – the lifelong one-flesh union of one man and one woman – while, at the same time, introducing commended prayers to be used publicly in church to affirm, celebrate and bless same sex couples who have reached a significant stage in their relationship, such as a contracting a Civil Partnership or Same Sex Marriage. Bishops will now work on producing final drafts of these prayers along with pastoral guidance as to how and for whom they can appropriately be used as well as directions on how clergy and licensed ministers are expected to order their own lives and relationships. These will then be brought to the next sessions of General Synod in July for debate and approval.

This is clearly a compromise position from the bishops who are intent on holding the Church of England and the worldwide Anglican Communion together. The votes in General Synod were marginal and it is clear that there is a deep fracture in the Church of England on this issue. Some believe strongly that this compromise doesn't go far enough and that the Church of England should, as a matter of equality and justice, change its doctrine of Holy Matrimony to include same sex couples. Others, including me, believe strongly that this compromise goes too far and is a significant departure from the clear teaching of Scripture and the historic doctrine and practice of the universal church. These sincere differences of opinion will no doubt be reflected in our own congregations here in the Furzedown Team Ministry.

There is little doubt that this decision by General Synod, far from ensuring unity in the Church of England, will sadly deepen the existing, long-standing divisions. Several significant contributors to the debate last week urged the bishops to acknowledge the fact that mutually exclusive views on a fundamental theological issue clearly exist within the church and this is untenable in the long term. Once these proposals become reality after July, those who, like me, are unable to accept them will in all likelihood feel they have little choice but to leave the Church of England, unless serious structural changes are made to enable them to remain. The Archbishop of York, in his closing remarks, did recognise this fact and gave his assurance that the bishops will give it serious attention as they work towards July's sessions of General Synod.

As Team Rector, I encourage us all to be prayerful as the bishops continue their work in preparation for July's General Synod. Whatever our personal views may be, whatever the final outcome is, whatever impact that may have on our life together as churches and as a Team Ministry or on each of personally, let us continue to love one another, to speak well of one another, and to live for the glory of God.

I will write again when there is greater clarity on what the future holds.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robson'.