

THE BISHOP OF ROCHESTER



To: Beneficed and Licensed Clergy
Licensed and Authorised Lay Ministers and Lay Workers
Youth & Children workers
CWs & PCC secretaries
Diocesan and Deanery Synod members

9 November 2020

Dear sisters and brothers

Living in Love and Faith

Today sees the launch of a suite of resources entitled [Living in Love and Faith](#) for consideration in parishes, deaneries and dioceses.

These materials have been produced to help us reflect on our shared humanity and sexual identity, on covenant and relationship, taking into account the spiritual, personal, social, economic and political dimensions of life; of what it means to be in relationship with one another and with God in Christ.

In early 2017, a joint letter was written by the Archbishops after General Synod declined to take note of a House of Bishops' report called 'Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the Shared Conversations' (GS 2055). In it, they said:

'we need a radical new Christian inclusion in the Church. This must be founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it; it must be based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual'.

The Living in Love and Faith materials are a response to this plea, arising from the work of more than forty people, from all sides of the debate and with very different life stories and theological beliefs. The resources include a book, a series of story films, podcasts and an online course – these are all available through the [Living in Love and Faith Learning Hub \(llf.churchofengland.org/\)](http://llf.churchofengland.org/).

When work first began on Living in Love and Faith, no one could have imagined the changed and challenging context within which their endeavours would be received. Yet as we wrestle with many questions at this time, reflection on identity and relationship will always be present and important.

Our recommendation is, therefore, that we take time to read and reflect on the materials, individually and together, seeking to listen to all sides of the debate, as we engage with one another, scripture and society with open-heartedness and integrity.

These issues go to the heart of what it means to be human, and especially touches upon the lives of people who feel marginalised by the Church, so we should debate with compassion and sensitivity, seeking prayerful wisdom from God and aiming at all times to show the fruit of the Spirit as St Paul describes it in Galatians 6; that is, with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

We are very conscious that some may feel anxious and vulnerable around these conversations because they touch so closely on their own personal and/or theological identity. Your well-being is of great importance to us. Do please, therefore, seek out those who can offer pastoral and spiritual support, whether that be through friends, a spiritual director, a counsellor or in other ways. Please also be in touch with either of us if you would appreciate our pastoral support.

As part of our commitment to supporting the whole diocesan family with this process, we plan to offer some opportunities next year for conversation and listening with the help of the materials – the shape of these will inevitably be determined by Covid-19 restrictions at the time.

Indeed, Living in Love and Faith is expected to be a year-long journey of listening and learning, with a 'Next Steps Group' led by Bishop Sarah Mullally, bringing the discernment and decision making to a conclusion at General Synod in 2022.

Some may wish to engage with the material promptly, that is fine too. Whichever way is best in your context, we hope you will be involved with the discussion.

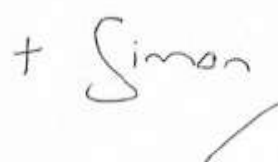
There is, then, space ahead to talk, but more so, to listen to voices we may disagree with. There is something sacrificial about hearing others out and doing so in a way that does not make them fear for the response we then make. How we conduct this debate will be noticed and it would be wonderful to wrong-foot society's expectations of that.

We, therefore, commend these materials to you and pray that in this Kingdom season, the eternal hope set before us will comfort and inspire us, knowing *'that the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ'* (Phil. 1:6).

With our prayers and good wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James." with a small cross symbol to the left of the name. The signature is written in a cursive style.

James, Bishop of Rochester

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Simon" with a small cross symbol to the left of the name. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Simon, Bishop of Tonbridge