

**All Saints' Church  
Cottenham with Rampton**



**Pastoral Letter #65  
15<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Dear Church Family,

This letter is to give you some detailed information about Living in Love and Faith, the topic of our 3-week sermon series beginning this Sunday.

In 2020, the House of Bishops of the Church of England published a book called '*Living in Love and Faith: Christian Teaching and Learning about Identity, Sexuality, Relationships and Marriage*' (hereafter referred to as LLF). Both the book and its accompanying resources are an invitation from the Bishops of the Church of England for us to learn together about how the Christian understanding of God relates to questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

These are questions that touch all of us deeply. They are about our lives and the loves that sustain them. They are about experiences and convictions that bring both joy and pain. And so this invitation is about learning together as human beings, each one of us created in the image of God and equally precious in God's sight.

The book has come about because there is disagreement within the people of God, including amongst the Bishops of the Church of England. There are disagreements about same-sex relationships and the Christian understanding of marriage as the Church of England has received it. There are also disagreements about pastoral practice in relation to gender identity, sexuality and relationships more generally. The roots of these disagreements relate to Scripture, doctrine, ethics and the nature of the Church.

Accepting the invitation to join the Bishops – with all our difference – is about embarking on a venture of learning and discovery. The Bishops' prayer is that as all of us, the people of God, take time to listen and learn together, our love for one another will be deepened and our faith in Jesus Christ strengthened so that his joy will be made complete in us.

At the end of the book, there is an appeal. As the Bishops lead the Church of England into making whatever decisions are needful for the future, they appeal to us to join them in a period of discernment that follows publication of LLF. Their strong hope is that people and communities all around the country - everyone who looks to the Church of England as their spiritual home – will engage with the book and its accompanying resources and, as far as possible, do this with those who have different perspectives and lived experiences. This work demands from us that together we face our differences, divisions, and disagreements honestly, humbly and compassionately, and that together we stand against homophobia, transphobia and all other unacceptable forms of behaviour, including demeaning those whose views are different from our own. It requires us all to serve, honour and love one another as we seek the face of Christ in each other. It calls us all to enter into the suffering of Christ's body as we embrace the pain of differences and see the harm that some of our disagreements cause. It implores us to seek the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we may be led more deeply together into the mind of Christ.

At All Saints, Cottenham with Rampton, we intend to engage in LLF through a 3-week sermon series and through the opportunity to be part of a 5-session course for groups starting in January 2022.

The sermons will cover the main topics of identity, relationships and sexuality and will include short films where we can listen to people's individual life stories. As we will only be able to scratch the surface of these topics in a 10-15 minute sermon, we will prepare some questions for you to go away and think about, as well as encouraging you to engage further by accessing resources online. You can access the book and other LLF resources by following [www.churchofengland.org/LLF](http://www.churchofengland.org/LLF)

There is no doubt that this is difficult material. We will not be discussing abstract concepts but matters that are of immense sensitivity and often pain to every human being. The supreme and unique beauty of the person of Jesus is found not only in that he is the Truth, but also that this truth abounds in grace and love (John 1:14). Inevitably, many people will approach LLF with some trepidation. They will be anxious in case it causes pain or betrays, or seems to them to betray, principles they hold as essential. Others will be anxious for the Church to move forward quickly in decision making and will be frustrated by the need for more talking about an issue which isn't regarded as problematic by wider society. The book therefore may be deeply uncomfortable in different places for everyone who reads it sincerely and honestly. It will bring us face to face with Christian people who have been hurt or harmed by the words and actions of the church. It will confront each of us with the realities of the depth and breadth of disagreement that is the experience of all churches today.

But, our vision must be that which Jesus prays for in John 17:21, *'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'* Being one is not in the sense of being the same, and we will disagree with one another. But our prayer must surely be that, in engaging with this subject, we demonstrate the same love to one another that we have experienced from God; the grace that includes everyone whom Jesus Christ is calling to follow him; the holiness that changes the world; and the unity that calls others to faith in Christ.

Please do try and listen to all three sermons. Do remember that, if you are away one week, you can still watch the sermon online through the church website [www.allsaintscottenham.org.uk](http://www.allsaintscottenham.org.uk)

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ring, email or chat to me.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Best wishes,

Revd Lynda Davies

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