

Letter from Concerned Anglicans in the Oxford Diocese in Response to Ad Clerum of 31st October 2018

We wish to record our grave concern over the letter issued by the four Oxford bishops on 31st October 2018.

There is, of course, much in the letter that we joyfully affirm:

- We wholeheartedly agree with the call to love one another as we seek to build a common life.
- We wish to strive to play our part in opposing bullying and harassment.
- We wish to respect all people and we endorse the view of the Archbishops that in discussions, no person is a problem or an issue.
- Those who are teachers amongst us aspire to preach and exercise pastoral care with sensitivity.
- We entirely endorse the view that nobody should be told that their sexual orientation makes them an unsuitable candidate for leadership in the Church.

However, we are dismayed that nowhere in the letter is there any articulation of the current teaching of the Church of England on marriage and sexual relationships, based as it is on the words of Scripture, nor is there any expressed support for it. Instead we read references to 'attitudes changing', respect for 'different views', and willingness to 'listen to different streams in the debate'.

We are disturbed by the apparent ambiguity of the language. Much of what is said about sexual orientation is uncontroversial. We know of no church among our number which sees this as an obstacle to faithful discipleship. However, in discussing leadership in the local church, the letter seeks to suggest that this should mean acceptance into leadership of those who identify themselves as LGBTI+. This carries with it a range of understandings about what is appropriate by way of lifestyle. We cannot see how it is right to accept as Christian leaders those who advocate lifestyles that are not consistent with New Testament teaching. The Ordinal asks a new deacon or priest 'will you endeavour to fashion your own life and that of your household according to the way of Christ, that you may be a pattern and example to Christ's people?' The mind of Christ, and therefore the way of Christ, is expressed in the whole witness of Scripture.

A further example of ambiguous language arises out of the references to everyone having 'a place at the table' in God's Church. If what is meant by that is a warm welcome, we are entirely agreed. However, in supporting the formulation first produced by the Bishops of Lichfield, the Letter makes specific reference to nobody being excluded or discouraged from receiving the sacraments of baptism or the Lord's Supper. Such indiscriminate participation seems to be inconsistent with the witness of Scripture: for the early Christians, these sacraments were only for those of the household of faith (eg, Acts 2: 41-42); and the Apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11: 27-29 clearly discourages participation in the Lord's Supper for those who have not examined themselves.

We are concerned too by the references to LGBTI+ 'identity', when as Christians we want to urge that our identity is to be found 'in Christ;' by the generalisation of 'gender identity',

when there are so many aspects to this question; by the apparent desire to see the Church innovating liturgically in order to meet an expressed desire of some same-sex couples; and by the organisation of a group of LGBTI+ advisers which does not include same-sex attracted people who advocate celibacy in faithfulness to Scripture.

Overall, however, our overriding concern is with the direction of travel which the Diocese is taking as revealed by this letter. In its desire for new expressions of 'inclusion', it could end up excluding those who hold to the traditional teaching of Scripture and doing a great disservice to those of us who experience same-sex attraction. We are not here simply stating an aversion to change; we are, however, convinced that failing to hold the Bible's teaching out to everyone, including those who identify as LGBTI+, is to show a lack of that very love the letter urges us to exhibit. As Bishop William Love of the Diocese of Albany in the Episcopal Church of the USA said last month in relation to the introduction of 'blessings' for same-sex couples, it 'does a great disservice and injustice to our gay and lesbian Brothers and Sisters in Christ, by leading them to believe that God gives his blessing to the sharing of sexual intimacy within a same-sex relationship, when in fact He has reserved the gift of sexual intimacy for men and women within the confines of marriage between a man and woman.'

We recognise that as fallen creatures, sexual desire and expression is disordered in all our lives and we do not wish to represent ourselves as in any way morally superior. We recognise that we have much to learn from others, including those with whom we disagree, but the issue concerns the teaching of Christ's Church, however lacking we may be as disciples of Christ. If we cannot clearly advocate God's revealed will and encourage each other to repent, then we are ill-served by the Diocese. We would love our bishops to articulate clearly God's love for us in helping us see both the attractiveness of deep friendships, but also the appropriate setting for sexual intimacy – namely in marriage between a man and a woman. However, if they are unwilling to do this, we would ask them to recognise the seriousness of the difference between us: advocacy of same-sex sexual intimacy is either an expression of the love of God or it creates an obstacle to people entering the kingdom of God. It cannot be both. The situation is serious. If not addressed, we would all struggle to support the leadership of our bishops in this matter and a number of our churches may want to seek alternative means of receiving episcopal ministry, in recognition that your position is seriously differentiated from theirs. This would be a tragedy.

Serving clergy

The Revd Sam Allberry (Global speaker for Ravi Zacharias Ministries, Editor for The Gospel Coalition and Member of General Synod)

The Revd Dr David Andrew (Associate Clergy, St Mary's Maidenhead)

The Revd Dr David Archer (Rector, St Mary's Purley)

The Revd Christopher Ashton (Part-time Curate, St. John the Baptist, Burford; Assistant Chaplain Kingham Hill School)

The Revd Roger Aston (Associate Curate, Cassington & Eynsham)

The Revd Dr Dave Atallah (Priest in Charge, St Mary's White Waltham)

The Revd Dr Andrew Atherstone (Tutor at Wycliffe Hall and Member of General Synod)

The Revd Joshua Bailey (Associate Vicar, St Mary's Chesham)

The Revd Ben Baker (Curate, St Mary's Headington)

The Revd Hugh Barne (Associate Curate, Wargrave with Knowl Hill & Diocesan Synod)

The Revd Timothy Bateman (Curate, St Aldates Oxford)

The Revd Matthew Beer (Assistant Curate, St Mary's Bletchley)

The Revd Piers Bickersteth (Rector, Arborfield and Barkham, Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) elected member, ODEF coordinator Berkshire)

The Revd Julian Bidgood (Minister, St James' Church Barkham)

The Revd Paul Bolton

The Revd Sam Brewster (Associate Minister, Holy Trinity Henley-on-Thames)

The Revd John Bramhall (Associate Minister, St Mary's Greenham)

The Revd Mark Brickman (Associate Minister, St Aldates Oxford)

The Revd Canon Victor Bullock (Vicar, Fenny Stratford, St Martin)

The Revd Ken Campbell (Rector, Appleton-with-Besselsleigh)

The Revd Simon Cansdale (Team Rector, Great Chesham)

The Revd Duncan Carter (Vicar, Holy Trinity Henley-on-Thames)

The Revd Leon Catallo (Associate Minister, St Ebbe's Headington)

The Revd Canon Charlie Cleverly (Rector, St Aldates Oxford)

The Revd John Cook (Vicar, Wargrave with Knowl Hill)

The Revd Mike Cotterell (Vicar, St Paul's Church Slough)

The Revd Jonny Dade (Pioneer Minister St Andrews High Wycombe)

The Revd Kirstie Dolphin (Curate, St Matthew's Reading)

The Revd Pads Dolphin (Vicar, St Matthew's Reading)

The Revd Will Donaldson (Area Dean, Oxford and Staff Member at St Aldates)

The Revd Greg Downes (Director of Ministerial Training, Wycliffe Hall)

The Revd Jon Drake (Associate Vicar, St Mary's Maidenhead)

The Revd Keith Dunnett (Vicar, Christ Church Abingdon)

The Revd Simon Dust (Vicar, St Andrew's High Wycombe)

The Revd Canon Gary Ecclestone (Vicar, Hanslope & Castlethorpe)

The Revd Paul Eddy (Vicar, Stanford in the Vale with Goosey & Hatford)

The Revd Antonia Elliott (Associate Minister, St Eligius, Parish of Finchampstead & California)

The Revd Steve Flashman (Vicar, Holy Cross & St Mary and All Saints, Oving with Pitchcott)

The Revd Julian Gadsby (Priest in Charge Bucklebury, Bradfield and Stanford Dingley)

The Revd Bruce Gillingham (Chaplain, Wycliffe Hall Oxford)

The Revd John Goodman (Vicar, Chalfont St Peter)

The Revd Wendy Graham (Associate Priest, The Parish of Chalfont St Peter, Chair of Hillingdon Branch of Council of Christians and Jews)

The Rev Jason 'Griff' Griffiths (Curate, St George's Britwell)

The Revd Daniel Hames (Curate, St Aldates Oxford)

The Revd Dan Heyward (Vicar, St Andrew's Oxford)

The Revd Mark Huddleston (Minister, Christ Church Wokingham)

The Revd Will Hunter Smart (Rector, St Nicolas Newbury and St Mary Speen)

The Revd Neil Jeffers

The Revd Les Jesudason (Team Vicar, Bracknell Team Ministry)

The Revd Andy Kearns (Associate Minister, St. Bartholomew's Arborfield)

The Revd James Kennedy (Team Rector of Chipping Norton Benefice)

The Revd Simon Kirby (Vicar, St Mary's Cogges & St James South Leigh)

The Revd Joel Knight (Curate, St Ebbe's Oxford)

The Revd Martin Kuhrt (Church of the Holy Spirit, Bedgrove, Aylesbury)

The Revd Gareth Lane (Pioneer Minister for Berryfields, Aylesbury)

The Revd Chris Leslie (PTO Minister, London Reach Benefice, Chairman Diocesan Board of Patronage)

The Revd David Little (Team Vicar, Loddon Reach, Reading Benefice)

The Revd Peter Matthew (Senior Minister, Windsor Fellowship Church, with PTO)

The Revd Eddie Marquez-Picon (Vicar, St John the Evangelist, Woodley)

The Revd Canon Andrew Marsden (Vicar, St Sebastian's, Wokingham)

The Revd Charles Mason (Priest in Charge, Waltham St Lawrence)

The Revd Joy Mawdesley (Assistant Curate, St Nicolas Newbury and St Mary Speen)

The Revd Julian McAllen (Associate Minister, Parish of Finchampstead & California)

The Revd Neil McCathie (Vicar, St. George's Church Britwell)

The Revd David McDougall (Rector, St Mary's Bletchley)

The Revd Dan McGowan (Vicar, St Paul's Church, Banbury)

The Revd David McLeod (Vicar, St Mary's Greenham, Diocesan Synod)

The Revd Kevin Mentzel (PTO Army Chaplain)

The Revd Keith Nicholls (Vicar, Parish of Burchetts Green)

The Revd Dr Tim Norman (Vicar, Latimer Minster Ascot)

Father Ross Northing (St Mary & St Giles, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes)

The Revd Canon Dr Frog Orr-Ewing (Rector, Latimer Minster, General Synod member)

The Revd Paul Pavlou (Curate, St Mary's Bletchley)

The Revd William Pearson-Gee (Rector, Buckingham Parish Church and ODEF coordinator Buckinghamshire)

The Revd David Pickering (Rector, Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor and Fyfield with Tubney)

The Revd Simon Ponsonby (Assistant Minister, St Aldates Church Oxford)

The Revd Matt Pope (Associate Minister, St Ebbe's Oxford)

The Revd Richard Power (Curate, St Paul's Banbury)

The Revd Geoff Price (House-for-Duty Vicar, Cherwell Valley)

The Revd Canon Vaughan Roberts (Rector, St Ebbe's Oxford)

The Revd David Salter (Diocesan Synod, Kingham & Churchill)

The Revd Andrew Savage (Chaplain, Kingham Hill School, PTO)

The Revd Nick Seward (Headmaster of Kingham Hill School, PTO)

The Revd John Shepherd (Team Vicar, Emmanuel Church, Parish of Gt Chesham)

The Revd Canon Roger Simpson (Archbishop's evangelist to the north, St Mary's Chipping Norton)

The Revd Ursula Simpson (Team Minister, Chipping Norton Benefice)

The Revd William Stileman (Vicar, St Mary's Maidenhead and ODEF Chair)

The Revd Oliver Strange (Curate, Burford Benefice)

The Revd Andrew Symes (Executive Secretary; Anglican Mainstream; PTO, Parish of Kingston Bagpuize with Fyfield and Tubney)

The Revd James Talbot (Associate Vicar, Broughton Church, Pioneer minister for the Kingsbrook Estate)

The Revd James Taylor (Vicar, St Andrew's Sonning)

The Revd Dr Justyn Terry (Vice Principal and Academic Dean at Wycliffe Hall)

The Revd Ben Topham (Associate Rector, St James Gerrards Cross)

The Revd Charles Trefusis (Vicar, Holy Trinity Aylesbury)

The Revd Vanessa Watts (Curate, Christ Church, Abingdon)

The Revd Will Watts (Vicar, Basildon, Aldworth & Ashampstead Benefice)

The Revd Paul White (Vicar, Broughton Church Aylesbury)

The Revd Paul White (Associate Vicar, St Andrews North Oxford)

The Revd Richard White (Curate, St Marys, Cogges and St James, South Leigh)

The Revd Jonathan Widdess (Vicar, St Michel's Cumnor)

The Revd Pete Wilkinson (Associate Minister, St Ebbe's Oxford)

Lay People

Dr Andrew Bell (General Synod, Bishop's Council, and Churchwarden, St James Gerrards Cross)

Ian Bensted (LLM, Fyfield, Tubney and Kingston Benefice)

Michael Byrne (St. James', Barkham & Sonning Deanery Synod)

Julia Cameron (Oxford Deanery synod & St Ebbe's PCC)

Graham Caskie (General Synod, Oxford and St Nicolas Newbury PCC)

Anita Cleverly (Senior Leadership, St Aldates Church)

Luke Cornelius (Ordinand, Wycliffe Hall)

Prudence Daily (General Synod, Oxford)

John Erbetta (PCC Chair, Holy Trinity Nuffield)

Derek Foster (LLM, Eynsham)
Jill Gordon (Assistant Chaplain, Kingham Hill School)
Alyson Grove (Churchwarden, St Nicholas, Fyfield)
Trevor Hames (Burford Church)
Ian Hamilton (PCC and Deanery Synod Member, Parish of Gt Chesham)
Annabel Heywood (Associate Minister (Women and Parish), St Ebbe's Oxford)
David Horrocks (Associate Minister, St James' Church, Barkham, Sonning Deanery)
Al Horn (Lay Minister, St Ebbe's Headington)
Roland Knight (Church Warden, Parish of North Abingdon)
Joe W. Martin (Honorary member of staff, St Ebbe's Church)
Ian Miller (Ordinand, Amersham)
Michael Molano (Ordinand, Wycliffe Hall)
Elizabeth Mortimer (Administrator, ODEF)
Jill Palfrey (LLM, St Marys Maidenhead)
David Robinson LVO (LLM & Archdeaconry Advisor for Aylesbury, Wendover & Amersham Deaneries)
Ian Smith (LLM, St Mary's Cogges & St James South Leigh)
David Stuart Stockdale (Parish Warden of the Parish of Great Chesham)
Paul Wallace (LLM, St Peter & St Paul Buckingham)

Retired clergy

The Revd Stephen Coe (retired Minister, St Peter's Wootton)
The Revd Martin Down (PTO Diocese of Oxford)
The Revd David Fletcher (retired Rector, St. Ebbes Church, Oxford)
The Revd Canon Dr Michael Green (PTO Diocese of Oxford)
The Revd Michael Greig (Buckingham Parish Church, PTO for Buckingham & Dorchester)
The Revd Roger Howell (retired Rector, Purley on Thames 1991-2008)
The Revd Canon John Hughes (retired with PTO)
The Revd Chris Murray (retired Priest, St Peter & St Paul Buckingham)

The Revd Alex Ross (Associate Vicar, Burford)

The Revd Michael Sams (PTO, Christchurch Abingdon)

The Revd Maurice Stanton-Saringer (PTO, St Peter & St Paul Buckingham)

Canon Dr Chris Sugden (Former member of General Synod, PTO St Leonard's Eynsham)

The Revd Dr David Wenham

The Revd Neil Weston (PTO, Christ Church Abingdon)

The Revd Stephen Whitmore

The Revd Max Wigley (retired Canon of Leeds)

The Revd Canon Dr Peter Williams (PTO, St Peter's & St Paul's, Buckingham)

The Revd Canon Andrew Wingfield Digby (Burford Benefice and co-pastor Swinbrook@11)

3 others, 2 serving clergy & 1 lay person, signed the original letter but wish to remain anonymous.