

Statement from Archbishop Justin Welby following the Living in Love and Faith debate at General Synod:

I welcome the support that General Synod has given to the motion on Living in Love and Faith. Along with Archbishop Stephen and our sister and brother bishops, I am pleased we have found a way forward on this journey together. For the sake of transparency, I want to explain why I abstained from voting on the motion yesterday.

I recognise there remain divisions within the Church of England over these questions. Those divisions are even deeper within the Anglican Communion, where the majority of Provinces remain committed to the traditional Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality, while a minority have adopted blessings or marriage for same-sex couples.

Archbishops of Canterbury must always work for the maximum possible unity in the Church, however impossible that may seem and however deep our differences. For that reason, I abstained on yesterday's vote because my pastoral responsibility extends to everyone in the Church of England and global Anglican Communion.

As I said at the Lambeth Conference last year:

“For the large majority of the Anglican Communion the traditional understanding of marriage is something that is understood, accepted and without question, not only by Bishops but their entire Church, and the societies in which they live. For them, to question this teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries would make the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For many churches to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

“For a minority, we can say almost the same. They have not arrived lightly at their ideas that traditional teaching needs to change. They are not careless about scripture. They do not reject Christ. But they have come to a different view on sexuality after long prayer, deep study and reflection on understandings of human nature. For them, to question this different teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries is making the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For these churches not to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

“So let us not treat each other lightly or carelessly. We are deeply divided. That will not end soon. We are called by Christ himself both to truth and unity.”

That continues to be my call to us all – and it will be my prayer for the Church in the weeks and months to come.

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