

Dear Friends

I've explained at our prayer meetings and written previously, with much sorrow, about the decision last month of the General Synod of Church of England, by a narrow margin, to welcome proposals by nearly all the bishops (including our own, the Bishop of Ely) to commend prayers of blessing for same-sex couples to be used to mark occasions like civil partnerships or same-sex weddings.

In case you haven't seen it, here is a link to a short article explaining why this matters, and why it inevitably matters to us.

Our PCC has given considerable thought to our response, and this letter is to let you know what this will be.

Before I go any further, however, I want to remind us all that at StAG we want to extend a warm welcome to *all* people, in the hope that, through trust in Christ, all will come to know His saving love and the beautiful life of holiness He calls us to. In God's goodness there is a diversity of people within our church; our membership includes some who would describe themselves as same-sex attracted or gay and celibate. Some of them have said how opposed they are to proposals such as these, which seem to deny the validity of their own pursuit of holiness.

The bishops are due to bring their proposals back to Synod in July, so we have a window of opportunity now to make the strength and breadth of our concerns known. I ask you to pray for the bishops to drop these plans altogether; but that if they don't, that they provide full and non-compromised new structures for us to operate in, so that we can have the support of bishops who hold the Bible's line, and local networks that do the same.

Many churches are considering their response, and CEEC, the Church of England Evangelical Council, a body linked to a broad range of many churches (including several in Cambridge), has published advice on how this can be done. In line with that advice, we are taking these steps, standing with many other churches, to try to ensure that the Church of England stays faithful to its Biblical foundations. Our hope is that they need only be temporary.

Our PCC has resolved to request our clergy not to conduct such 'blessings'. The PCC has also written to the Bishop of Ely to express our profound concerns about them, and to tell him that so long as he supports them, we are in "impaired communion" with him, that is, not able to share in worship services together, or those of the diocese or deanery. (We will, however, continue to engage in the synods, that is the councils of the church.) We are resolved to strengthen our relationships with faithful Anglicans locally and globally, and to stand together with them.

We are also reviewing our financial relationship with Ely diocese, to take account of these changing circumstances, and will be establishing, with other churches, a "Good Stewards' Trust" across Ely Diocese to receive contributions from us and other churches, from which

appropriate donations to the diocese can be made. While this is happening, we are pausing our Parish Share contributions to the diocese.

As a matter of prudent foresight, the PCC will also establish a working group to begin to research and consider our options for continuation of ministry outside the current structures of the C of E, if satisfactory long-term provision for orthodox biblical ministry were not to be forthcoming. We so greatly hope that this will not be necessary, and ask you to join us in earnest prayer that it won't be.

At this time I find myself remembering Jude's ever-relevant words, as he introduces his letter: *Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people* (Jude 3).

Finally, please remember, in difficult days, that our Lord is the Head and Keeper of His church, and we know we are in His gracious, all-powerful, loving hands.

Alasdair

PS. Some links to further resources, which may be helpful:

[A video](#) from the Church of England Evangelical Council (see the other resources on their pages, too!)

[The response of Anglicans in the Global South](#) (mainly Majority World churches)

Glossary

Structures

- **Church of England (CofE):** the established church in England, to which we belong. Formed during the Reformation, its law and doctrine are founded on Scripture. The CofE is arranged into two provinces and forty-two dioceses.
- **Province:** the largest administrative region in the Church of England: Canterbury (Southern England) and York (Northern England), each administered by an archbishop. We are in the province of Canterbury.
- **Diocese:** an administrative region within the Church of England, roughly equivalent to a county. Each diocese is administered by several bishops. We are in Ely Diocese.

- **Deanery:** a smaller administrative region within a diocese. We are in Cambridge North Deanery, along with a number of other evangelical churches.
- **Anglican/Anglican Communion:** the term used to describe churches with a historical connection to the Church of England, including many churches in the majority world.
- **General Synod:** the national 'parliament' of CofE, arranged into House of Laity, House of Clergy, and House of Bishops.
- **PCC:** StAG's church council, made up of clergy, and elected laity from the church family. The PCC are the trustees of our church.
- **Clergy:** ordained ministers in the Church of England. In StAG this is Alasdair Paine, John Percival and Robbie Strachan, as well as some retired ministers.
- **Laity:** the Church of England's term for those who are not ordained.
- **Ministry Share:** the voluntary contribution churches make to their diocese to provide funds for clergy stipends, administrative costs, and wider mission initiatives.

Groups

- **ReNew:** an annual conference bringing together a network of conservative evangelical Anglicans, represented in local ReNew groups.
- **CEEC:** Church of England Evangelical Council. National body of evangelical Anglicans, broader than ReNew, represented in local Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship (DEF) groups.
- **GAFCON:** Global Anglican Future Conference. Worldwide gathering of those seeking to retain orthodox teaching in the Anglican communion, next meeting in Kigali in April 2023.
- **Good Stewards Trust:** charities set up by evangelicals in some dioceses to signify differentiation and administer ministry share contributions.
- **AMiE:** Anglican Mission in England. A grouping of conservative Anglican churches outside the structures of the CofE, affiliated with GAFCON. Lee McMunn, one of our UK mission partners, is a bishop in AMiE, although we are not otherwise affiliated.