



25th January 2021

Dear friends and partners in the gospel

Living in Love and Faith (LLF)

In November I wrote to let you know that the resources for LLF had been released, what they included, and the process and journey which they were designed to enable across dioceses of the Church of England. I encouraged you to share the letter more widely with any others you believed it would be appropriate and helpful for them to receive. Thank you for doing this.

I write now to share plans which the Bishop's Staff Team have agreed so that we in Bristol Diocese can engage fruitfully and well with LLF and make our own relational journey of learning together in relation to matters of human identity and sexuality. Each diocese will be engaging with LLF with timelines which work best for them in 2021 ready to contribute to Synodical processes in 2022.

As you will be aware, we are now embarking on *Transforming Church* and this will require time, energy and focus in the coming months and year. Recognising the demands of engagement with two significant processes we have scheduled **two half-day conferences in May** to formally begin our collective engagement with LLF as a diocese. These will be led by the Revd Dr Eeva John, the Church of England's Enabling Officer for LLF, and her team and be **open to the whole people of God**, not restricted to clergy and those holding ministerial or other responsibility in the Church.

Each conference will have similar format and content, and we anticipate them taking place online, even if Covid measures have been relaxed. The dates are as follows:

Saturday 8 May: 9.30am – 1.30pm

Saturday 22 May: 9.30am – 1.30pm

We very much hope that holding the conferences on a Saturday and offering two dates will enable greater participation. Eeva was very pleased that we are looking to engage the whole people of God and gather a range of attendees at this starting point in the process. **Please do your best to encourage this, and particularly a variety of age and social backgrounds.**

We would be grateful for you ensuring that these dates are communicated across the worshipping communities you serve **as soon as possible and saved in diaries**. Booking is free and can be done through Eventbrite via <https://bristoldiocese.eventbrite.co.uk>. We anticipate the conferences taking place through the means of video, even if Covid-19 Measures have relaxed from what they are now.

Although the conferences mark a significant step in collective diocesan engagement, **the LLF resources are available for individuals and churches to engage with at any time**. However, we encourage parishes focus on *Transforming Church* in the coming months and then LLF following the diocesan Conferences. The latter will provide a good launch point as well as guidance as to how parishes and other settings can best make best use of them. A very important dimension of this is how those with very different views, perspectives and experiences can express them with conviction while also demonstrating respect and honour for those who hold very different positions.

Those overseeing LLF nationally have asked each diocese to appoint two Advocates to assist and enable processes locally, **and I am delighted that The Revd Dr Araminta (Minty) Hull and The Revd Chris Dobson have accepted the invitation by the Bishop's Staff to work with me as our LLF Advocates** and one of their first tasks has been in preparing this letter with me.

As Advocates we are in the process of forming a Support Group for LLF which will include representation from each of the seven deaneries. Members will be given training by the Enabling Officer and her team and contribute to leading and facilitating events in parishes and other settings.

Some will act as chaplains at such events. **A key aim is to ensure that all those who participate in an LLF event feel safe and that pastoral care will be available for any who find themselves in emotional distress.**

Together with the Advocates, members of the Support Group will be listening to various voices in relation to how LLF is being received across the diocese and monitor what is going on and where. **We are looking for the LLF Support Group to have a breadth and diversity of membership.** Within the Support Group we shall also be recruiting those with technical skills who can be called upon to assist with issues around technology. This will include helping those in settings which do not have a great deal of expertise in this area, and also editing recorded material to make it more appropriate for a particular need or setting. We have created a separate Diocesan Mailbox in order to contact the Advocates and Support Group and will be setting up a page to access via the diocesan website for information and FAQs.

If you know somebody with the qualities or skills which would potentially make them a good addition to the LLF Support Group, please would you ask them to get in touch with either Minty, Chris or me through LLF@bristoldiocese.org

Our hope is that this letter will provide greater clarity on how we in Bristol Diocese will be engaging with LLF over the coming months. Although there are some dioceses which have already held launch conferences, there are many which, like us, will not be fully engaging until the Spring. One of the advantages of this will be to learn from the experiences of others.

As with the earlier letter, please would you share this one with those who lead in your setting and any others you believe would value seeing this letter. Please would you encourage people to mark the dates and Register for one or other of the Diocesan LLF Conferences.

The LLF Advocates, and all who have been involved in the production of the resources and the conversations which have taken place over a number of years, are acutely aware of the significance of prayer in this process, and the Support Group will play a role in encouraging this over the coming weeks. Here is one prayer which we hope you might find helpful:

Merciful and Holy Lord
Your Son taught us that the truth will set us free,
and that if the Son should set us free
we shall be free indeed.

We acknowledge that on issues of human identity and sexuality
we have struggled to be of one mind
and have often disowned or disrespected others.

In the journey we are now making with *Living in Love and Faith*,
we ask for ears to hear one another well and to speak with respect and kindness.
Above all may we honour you
and discern what your Spirit is saying to us
in faithfulness to the one who remains
the Way, the Truth and the Life.
May this be to your glory, now and forever. Amen

Minty Hull, Chris Dobson & Bishop Lee