

Preserve God's gift of unity



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

The Church of England's 'Living in Love and Faith' process has entered its discernment and decision phase. Do join me in praying for the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance, as a possible way forward is framed by our bishops and debated at General Synod in February 2023.

There are, of course, diverse and conscientiously held perspectives among the bishops in relation to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage; perhaps especially over the question of how to respond faithfully to same-sex relationships. Personally, I am arguing for positive change which would enable us, as a Church, to bless, recognise and encourage signs of God's grace, presence and holiness in relationships between same-sex couples.

I am aware that many good and faithful Christians will not (or feel they *cannot* or *must not*) share my view, believing in all conscience that such a move represents an illegitimate development in the teaching of the Church. But that diversity of view is understandable in a community wrestling with human complexity, truth and the meaning of faithful witness today.

Common ground is emerging too, in the desire of the bishops to preserve the gift of unity in Christ's Body, the Church. I would argue that Christ's gift of unity runs deeper than any differences in theological, ethical or pastoral interpretation of these vital issues.

I'm drawn to the verse in John's gospel: 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'. The Greek word for 'dwelt' suggests 'tabernacled, set up tent'. It paints a beautiful picture of what God did by entering our human condition, taking flesh and enduring the Cross to draw humanity into fullness of life *in Christ*: God offers us, in Christ, a *big tent* to dwell within. Christ is our True Home.

To put it theologically, through the proclamation of the gospel, humanity is invited, through faith, baptism and the gift of the Spirit, into union with Christ's incarnate, risen and ascended life. As St Paul writes of the early church: 'our life is hid with Christ in God'.

Fortunately, we don't get to choose who Jesus invites into the Tent of his Body or calls into *ecclesia*, the Church on earth. Christ's Body is a big and hospitable tent: with space for every sinner who, by grace, hears and accepts his invitation to life.

It's Christ who invites us, who invites you, into this Tent. No test of orthodoxy, class, learning or culture is required; rather, entry is by 'yes': our responsive 'yes' to Christ's unmerited, gracious and prior 'yes' to us. Of course, navigating life within this Tent, brings untold riches, joys and a lifetime of difficulty – not least the infuriating presence of those *also* invited into the Tent on what may feel to us an indiscriminate, unsound basis.

@CofEPortsmouth

WINTER 2022

UPFRONT

- 3 Faith in Focus
- 4-9 Latest news

IN DEPTH

- 10-14 Worship groups: how talented musicians help us to engage with God
- 16-19 Cost-of-living crisis: how our churches are responding

PEOPLE

- 20-21 My Faith: dramatic healing was prelude to finding faith
- 24 The Big Issue: how parishes can be pioneering
- 25 Why I love my church: St Wilfrid's, Fratton

AND FINALLY

- 26 Top 10: our diocese's favourite hymns and worship songs

Editor: Neil Pugmire (023-9289 9673 or neil.pugmire@portsmouth.anglican.org)

Advertising: Ian Pilkington (01752-225 623 or ian@cornerstonevision.com)