

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Thank you for the warm welcome I have received as I have come to join with you in the diocese for the year ahead. The diocesan confirmation in the Cathedral with 50 candidates will stay in my memory for a long time, demonstrating something of the joy and diversity that mark our faith in Christ.

Thank you too, for all you have given in mission and ministry over this past year. Your faithful care and commitment to God, and those you serve, is much appreciated. I am confident that I have care of a diocese united in its purpose to follow Christ and with a heart to engage in the ministry of reconciliation. I hope that as you share the message of hope that Advent and Christmas offer us, that you too will find your own hope, peace and joy renewed.

I am aware that the motion passed at last month's General Synod regarding LLF has caused a wide range of responses. For some, the motion will not have been nearly enough and for others it crossed a line of theological acceptability. In addition, this was at a time of transition within the diocese with the departure of both Bishop Christopher and Bishop John, which has heightened anxiety.

Together with Bishop Saju, I am now writing to you following the decisions made at the House of Bishops yesterday, (at which I was present as your Acting Bishop of Coventry, but where I do not have a vote, and where Bishop Saju was present as a participant observer.) Simply put, the House agreed to **commend** the suite of Prayers of Love and Faith for use in **private prayer or regular public worship**, and to publish them as a resource on the Church of England website. It was agreed that the resources can be used as from Sunday, December 17th, in accordance with the undertaking to General Synod to do so by the end of the year. You can find the links to the press release; prayers and guidance [here](#).

There is no provision as yet for any 'stand-alone' services. This requires further consideration and the process options will be discussed at the College of Bishops on January 18th and 19th.

Bishop Saju and I appreciate that many of you are trying to balance many pressing matters with all your preparations for Christmas and so the timing of this announcement may feel like overload. Please let us assure you of our support for you personally. Firstly, there is no requirement for anyone to respond immediately to this latest news. We believe it is important for you to be fully informed and have the opportunity to see what is published and read the guidance offered.

Secondly, in the spirit of reconciliation and continuing in this diocese's charism of holding difference well, we want you to know that we will support each of you according to your conscience. There will be some of you who welcome these resources and wish to use them as soon as you are able. Others will feel unable to do so. And others who are unclear as to your personal response. This is a question of integrity for each of us and so please take the time you need to consider prayerfully and listen to God's voice and assurance of love for you.

You will see from the guidance that the use of the resources in pastoral ministry and as part of intercessions in regular worship, is a personal decision for us as ministers but conversations with your church leadership are recommended, and the use of the Pastoral Principles suggested. If you need help to do this then please do speak with your Area Dean who will liaise as needed with Archdeacons and myself.

The Bishop's Core Staff Team had some discussion last week on matters to do with LLF and the proposed Dialogue group. Informed by your feedback and conversations with Area Deans, we have agreed that there is a need to extend our thinking beyond a small group alone, and therefore, we propose to offer additional opportunities for listening, conversation and debate. We will be meeting for our **clergy study morning on January 30th** at which we intend to give further information and some space to air views.

As I close, I want to share words from Colossians 3 for us to reflect on together:

'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.'

Bishop Saju and the Archidiaconal team join with me in praying God's blessing on you and your loved ones this Christmas!

With love and prayers

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a small plus sign followed by a stylized, cursive name that appears to be 'Saju'.

December 13th 2023