

An email to all the people of our Diocese from Bishop Martin

from  
+Martin



Diocese of St Edmundsbury  
and Ipswich



I have just returned from a two-day meeting of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England to review the developments in the "Living in Love and Faith" project. This project will produce resources that will help the Church to learn how questions about human identity, relationships, marriage and sexuality fit within the bigger picture of what it means to embody a Christian vision of living holy lives in love and faith in our culture. It is seeking to find a way through our deep differences on these matters.

The meeting began and ended with expressions of great sorrow and distress about last week's publication of "Pastoral Guidance on Civil Partnerships for same sex and opposite sex couples." As you may be very aware, this and the resulting comments have caused a great deal of hurt to many people, both within the church and in wider society. An apology, signed by the Archbishops on behalf of the Bishops, is due to be issued on Friday.

Whilst this statement was generated when I was on sabbatical, I share in the corporate responsibility for its production. I am very sorry that it was published, and indeed produced in the first place, and for the deep personal pain and sense of rejection that so many have felt by its content and tone.

I and a number of my colleagues asked that the document be withdrawn, but this was decided against by the majority. Whilst I accept it expresses the existing official position of the Church of England on the place of sexual activity in our lives, I cannot grasp why it needed to be stated now and in this way, particularly since we are currently in the process of questioning, learning and reflecting as part of the "Living in Love and Faith" project.

I recognise that some hold that the current teaching is exactly what we should be saying; others feel that we can say it, but in a way that suggests it is an aspiration; and still others want the Church's teaching to more clearly reflect the ways in which sex is part of relationships that are not, or not yet, marriage.

Personally, I would hope that we can move away from this narrow focus on sexual activity towards encouraging relationships which embody and reflect God's love for us, in which we support one another, and those who seek our help, whether single or in a faithful and committed relationships, to deepen lives in which we ever more truly know and show the fullness of God's love for us all.

+ Martin