



Epiphanytide 2026

**To all who hold my authority to minister
in the Diocese of Southwark, and to all the faithful**

Dearly beloved,

Our life together in the Diocese of Southwark as fellow members of the Body of Christ

In recent months, I have had a number of meetings with groups of clergy who have shared with me their distress and anxiety at developments both in the Church and, to some extent, in our society more generally. This has been particularly true of LGBT+ clergy and their supporters, following recent developments in the Living in Love and Faith process, and has also included those who have been concerned that the Church of England was moving away from its traditional understanding of marriage.

Whilst I continue to believe that the Church is on an irreversible journey towards the greater acceptance of LGBT+ people and the blessing of same-sex relationships – a journey that I support including a more general permission for clergy and those in discernment to be in same-sex marriages without sanctions – it is clear that the steps that have already been taken in the LLF programme have gone as far as is going to be possible for the time being.

My consistent priority as your Bishop has been to rejoice in the diversity of our Diocese, which I see as God's gift and blessing, to honour, support and uphold the ministry of those who, in good faith, hold a variety of theological convictions, to encourage the people of our Diocese always to speak well of one another and to give to all clergy and parishes the confidence and security to live out their callings to the full. To that end, I have been in discussion with our Area Bishops and others about how we might better support our LGBT+ clergy, lay ministers and congregation members to know that they are safe, valued and cherished in our Diocese. I want to be equally clear that I continue to seek to extend that same affirmation to those who take a conservative position on these matters and I would gladly extend the kind of provision I have in mind to support those who hold this view if there is a sense that this would be helpful.

In the light of recent events, I am considering a range of practical steps to ensure that people who are LGBT+ feel supported and are confident that their concerns are well understood and inform our life together. These are likely to include arrangements at an Area and Diocesan level for LGBT+ chaplains or advocates who would be a source of support, encouragement and advice for those with particular concerns and reflect back to my staff team matters that have been raised with them.

We hope that this provision would also ensure that LGBT+ people continue to feel confident in entering the vocations discernment process for lay and ordained ministry, and also support our schools and chaplaincies as they seek to minister to all. I have also asked our Communications team to consider how they can publicise and signpost a range of resources and activities which seek to offer practical help to those seeking to minister effectively to LGBT+ people.

Finally, I think that this is an opportunity to invite us all to think more deeply, whatever position we personally hold, about how we provide effective pastoral care for those among whom we minister, especially for any who find that they are particularly vulnerable because of these issues. These measures are designed to give reassurance to all God's people in this Diocese going forward.

I thank God for this Diocese, for the many and wonderful signs of hope and renewal across the breadth of its geography and traditions and I truly hope and pray that this will be an encouragement as we continue to work together to share God's love with the people of South London and East Surrey.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15.13).

With my esteem for you all, as ever in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Christopher Southwark'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with 'Christopher' and 'Southwark' connected.

**The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun
The Bishop of Southwark**