

Statement from St Nicholas Cole Abbey

At St Nicholas Cole Abbey¹ we seek to know Jesus and to make Jesus known. We want anyone, regardless of who they are or who they are attracted to, to feel welcomed in our church family and to join us at Jesus' feet as we seek to know him through his loving word. The church family at St Nick's longs to be obedient to Christ and takes seriously Jesus' call to contend for his gospel. In light of this, in October 2021 a group from the church family met with Sarah Mullally, Bishop of London, to discuss our concerns with the Living in Love and Faith ("LLF") process. In particular we sought to convey our disappointment at the failure of the House of Bishops to uphold their vows to contend for, and only for, the Bible's view of marriage, which is clearly expressed in the historic doctrine of the Church of England. This is vital as we seek to love those in our pastoral care, all of whom need clarity and biblical conviction, not confusion, in this area.

Over the last year, some of our church family have prayerfully engaged with the LLF process and accompanying materials. They raised a number of concerns, summarised below, which we expressed at our meeting. We are very grateful to Bishop Sarah for graciously meeting us, listening to us and engaging with our concerns.

Our pastoral concern

We are a pastoral home for many men and women who cherish and seek to live out the Bible's good and clear teaching on marriage, namely that all sexual activity should take place in, and only in, a life-long union between one man and one woman.

As in any church, many struggle with attraction towards those to whom they are not married, regardless of whether they are same-sex or opposite-sex attracted. They consider us to be a safe place where they can flourish as human beings, both spiritually and emotionally. They want us to keep encouraging them to resist worldly ideas and erroneous teaching on matters of sexuality and sexual conduct and instead to hold to the positive biblical vision for those created in God's image.

Whether intentionally or otherwise, the LLF process and materials suggest that there is ambiguity in the teaching of the Bible on these issues. By endorsing the LLF process, and by refusing to contend publicly and unequivocally for the Bible's teaching, the House of Bishops sends a mixed message to those in our church family who are struggling with these issues.

Our theological concern

God has made his good design for sexual relationships clear in the Bible; therefore, God's design is not a matter of opinion or ongoing debate. The official doctrine of the Church of England clearly reflects what the Bible clearly teaches. By embracing the LLF process, the House of Bishops denies the clarity of the Bible's teaching and Jesus' call to obedience in this area, ultimately putting people's salvation at risk.

Our conclusion

After prayerful consideration as a church family, and with sadness, we agreed on the necessity of some form of visible differentiation from the House of Bishops. This is our aim in conveying our concerns to Bishop Sarah, and in making our concerns known publicly through this statement. We long for the House of Bishops to be clear and unequivocal in teaching, defending and upholding the life-giving truths of the Bible in this area, and we will continue to pray for them and to this end.

St Nick's will continue to be a safe and welcoming place for all people to know Jesus Christ, as a church family eager to listen humbly to his word and grow in loving fellowship with one another.

16 October 2021

¹ St Nicholas Cole Abbey refers to the charity from which we run five ministries: St Nick's Church, Fleet Street Talks, St Nick's Talks, London Bridge Talks & (soon-to-be-launched) Victoria Talks. The term 'St Nick's' will be used hereafter to denote all five ministries which come under the St Nicholas Cole Abbey umbrella.