**Jo**

**I don’t think it will come as a surprise to most of you, that James and I have a different perspective on LLF, and our report now won’t allow sufficient time for us to communicate fully the nuance of what we both think and feel.**

**In terms of process, if you haven’t watched those 8 hours of Synod already, contrary to my own fears, the debate *was* conducted in a respectful and intelligent way. My worry though, looking ahead, is that Synod members live so much in their own echo chambers and ‘parties’ that we don’t have the chance of encountering fully a view wholly different to our own.**

**As an example, I attended the Open Synod ‘fringe’ lunch on the first day of the LLF debate. Theoretically Open Synod is a forum for people of different perspectives to meet, but only about a dozen people attended.**

**Your team of Bath & Wells General Synod reps reflects, almost perfectly, the breadth of opinion within the Church of England on this particular issue. Hopefully, our relationships with one another are a model for how to disagree profoundly, but still love and respect our brothers and sisters in Christ.**

**Unlike James, I do not believe that schism at a parish level is inevitable if we have already had (or choose to have now) some of the hard conversations that these new prayers invite. In Ilminster, like many of you here I’m sure, we’ve used the Pastoral Principles, taken part in LLF and made opportunities to talk to one another across the theological divide. But I do want to acknowledge the very real pain that Bishop Michael talked about.**

**On my way here this morning, unlocking The Minster, I stopped to see a parishioner with whom I pray most Saturday mornings to let them know that I wouldn’t be there today. They told me that they would be leaving the church to join a congregation whose theology on these issues are more aligned with their own. We love and care about each other, so their leaving is a source of pain – for both of us. Nonetheless, I continue to hope and pray that unity *is* possible both locally and nationally.**

**On a personal note, my engagement with the issues around LLF dates to the time when, as a much younger person, worshipping within a reasonably conservative evangelical tradition, I went to work at Southwark Cathedral – a well-known bastion of ‘liberal’ Christianity. To my surprise, I encountered people who understood their faith quite differently to me and yet were clearly Christians, serving with their whole hearts the same God as me.**

**So, and acknowledging that the passing of the vote in favour of commending these prayers was a source of deep pain for many in the chamber, for me it was a profoundly moving moment, especially as I looked around and saw LGBTQI+ people, many of whom were clergy, tears silently streaming down their faces, finally feeling that the Church, which they love and serve, might just genuinely love them back.**

**I am under no illusions about the challenges ahead, but I pray that as we approach Easter, and encounter again the wounded and risen Christ, we may be able to hold both our woundedness and our hope within the one body.**