



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London  
Diocese of Chelmsford

Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Chelmsford  
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Monday 23 January 2023

Dear friends,

We are well into the month of January but want to begin this letter by offering you our warmest good wishes for 2023. We trust you had a blessed and peaceful Christmas season and that many of you will have been able to take a break or enjoy a period of rest since then.

### Travelling Well Together

As you know, over the past 12-18 months we have been on a journey to discern our future direction of travel as a diocese. This started when I (+Guli) first became your Diocesan Bishop and began an intentional period of listening, noticing and praying. My own reflections and discerning were further developed during a 48 hour period away with the Area Bishops when the first draft of the attached paper, *Travelling Well Together*, was produced.

Since then the paper has been further refined and modified through an iterative process, although its essence – that it is an invitational approach, built on values and our calling to love God and neighbour – has remained unchanged. The Bishop's Leadership Team has discussed the approach at some length, over the course of several meetings and the Area Deans engaged with it at a Residential with the Bishops before Christmas. Most recently, Bishop's Council have explored it on an away day, and so now the time has come to share it more widely, across the diocese.

We as your bishops are inviting, and indeed encouraging, you to read and reflect on *Travelling Well Together* which we are sending along with this letter. We trust that it will be self-explanatory but hope it will be helpful for us to emphasise a few things. First, to stress that this is not designed as a top-down initiative; there will be no grand unveiling with a programme and a ten-step plan to follow. It is, rather, an invitation to engage with an approach that seeks to empower local contexts to discern for themselves how they are to be faithful in discipleship, mission and ministry.

*Travelling Well Together* is about *how we are* as a diocese – it is about *being* rather than *doing* and aims to provide a framework for conversations that can help us, in our local contexts, to discern our vocation to be the people of God in our particular part of the Kingdom. As a



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Bishop's Leadership Team, we have begun to take responsibility for engaging with this material deeply and it is already informing us and shaping us as we seek to be fruitful and faithful disciples. We are therefore confident in commending it to parishes, PCCs, congregations, MMUs, deaneries etc. And, in turn, through a process of diocesan wide consultation we will seek to ensure that central resources are used, as much as possible, to provide the support you need to help you fulfil your calling in a spirit of mutual accountability.

We want to acknowledge that lack of trust still exists in some places between parishes and 'The Diocese', the so-called centre. We know that this lack of trust has grown out of hurt, pain and anger. We are now inviting you to receive this new approach as a gift that can help restore trust and enable us to develop a stronger shared identity, mutually loving and trusting one another, as part of one diocesan family. Not to eradicate or ignore differences that exist but to commit ourselves to continue striving towards that unity to which Jesus calls us: "... that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17. 21)

Whilst this may be a new approach, it seeks to build on all that has been good in the past and brought us to this point. So we encourage you to consider how you are already living by the values articulated in *Travelling Well Together* – how they *already* reflect something of our shared life - even as you prayerfully consider how they might help us grow further.

This is not the end of a process. We fully expect the conversations to continue. *Travelling Well Together* is offered as an approach for this next phase and we will need to continue being attentive to one another and the Holy Spirit as we discern the future direction of travel faithfully.

At their away day, Bishop's Council, explored the question, "How will we know if the approach is being successful?" and concluded that metrics and outcomes will be difficult to measure and that, in fact, these are not always helpful. Instead, we can all be looking for "just noticeable differences" in our shared life locally and more widely across the diocese, in how our relationships develop and in how God blesses our intentions to live faithfully and sacrificially.

Paper copies of *Travelling Well Together* will be available as a resource for discussion, reflection and prayer for Parishes and Worshipping Communities. If you would find that helpful, you can [order them by clicking here](#). The resource will also be made available on the Diocesan Website in the coming days.



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### Living in Love and Faith

All this brings us to say something about *Living in Love and Faith*, the process of deep listening that has been taking place in the Church of England over the past 5-6 years around relationships, human sexuality and marriage.

We had not planned to share *Travelling Well Together* just at the same time as [the College and House of Bishops produced the material that was published and shared last week](#) and which will now go to General Synod in early February. But we regard the timing as God given. It is our fervent hope and prayer that the approach offered in *Travelling Well Together* will provide us with the means to move forward in mutual love, respect and humility despite our deep differences in this area.

As your bishops, all three of us are entirely supportive of the approach taken by the House of Bishops. The material seeks honestly to acknowledge differences that exist between bishops and at the same time offers a way for Christians who engage seriously with Scripture, Tradition and Reason and arrive at different conclusions about same sex relationships, to continue walking together.

We want to reiterate the apology issued to all LGBTQI+ people who have experienced homophobia in the church. We are deeply sorry for the times you have been rejected or excluded; when we have not loved you as God loves you. As the pastoral letter from the College of Bishops says, “we affirm, publicly and unequivocally, that LGBTQI+ people are welcome and valued: we are all children of God.” As bishops in the Diocese of Chelmsford we are delighted that, where parishes wish to, there will now be the option to offer prayers of dedication, thanksgiving and blessing for those in committed faithful same sex relationships and those who have entered same sex civil marriage.

At present there is no consensus among the College of Bishops about equal marriage and, indeed, there are some differences of understanding and perspective among the three of us also. However, as bishops, we are committed to working together, continuing to talk and listen in love, faith and humility and we urge you to do the same. Our calling is to demonstrate to the world a way of living well with difference.

So we encourage you to use the *Travelling Well Together* document ([alongside the LLF Pastoral Principles](#)) as you continue to engage in local conversations. We had hoped to do exactly that during our away day with Bishop’s Council last Saturday. As it happened, we were left without the time we would need to have a proper and meaningful discussion but Bishop’s Council unanimously agreed that this was probably providential. It felt a little early to engage so deeply, especially as the resources have not yet been to General Synod. We



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agreed, however, to devote time to this on the agenda when we next meet and will seek (as will the Bishop's Leadership Team) to model a way of being that reflects to the wider diocese our intention to continue travelling well together. Before long we will be sharing some Lent resources around the values for individual or group use. If you already have other plans for a Lent course, the material can be used at any other time.

In the days, weeks and months ahead, we urge you to consider carefully how you express your views relating to LLF in your preaching, your use of social media and in all your communication and relationships. We hope there will be honesty but a *gentle* honesty that respects the deeply held views of others that may be different from our own. Honesty that acknowledges we are all God's children, seeking to be faithful and committed, in love, to one another.

Finally, we commend for your use, individually and in your local context, the prayer at the end of the *Travelling Well Together* document:

*God of the journey,*

*you invite us to travel well together*

*as the body of Christ*

*in the Diocese of Chelmsford:*

*enlarge our hearts with*

*an awareness of your grace,*

*the knowledge of your presence,*

*and an openness to your calling,*

*that, with gratitude for the past,*

*we may step out with confidence into your future;*

*through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,*

*Amen.*



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Please be assured of our ongoing prayers for all of you and our deep gratitude for our shared ministry in Christ.

Yours,

*+ Guli Chelmsford*

The Rt Revd Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, Bishop of Chelmsford

*+ Roger Colchester*

The Rt Revd Roger Morris, Bishop of Colchester

*+ Lynne Barking*

The Rt Revd Lynne Cullens, Bishop of Barking



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