



The West Hereford Team Ministry
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Hello everyone,

Advent may be a time of waiting, but that does not mean that we should all go to sleep! There is such a thing as active waiting and that is what we are called to be; active in our waiting, as many of our recent Bible readings have told us. We are to be prepared and found to be active in our service of the Kingdom of God when the day of reckoning arrives and the King arrives in glory. We are not to be like the servant that buried his talent in the ground, the foolish virgins who did not have oil in their lamps when the bridegroom appeared. We are not to be like those who ignored those in need of food and clothing or who were in prison. Even last week our gospel reading contained that exhortation, "And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake!"

The outcome of the lengthy Living in Love and Faith project (let's call it 'LLF' for short) was published by the Church of England in early November. Just in time for us all to be starting our thinking about our own response to it during this season of active waiting.

If you rely on the mainstream media for your news the publishing event, which is the culmination of over three years work, may have passed you by since it didn't take up many column inches. So what's it all about?

At the heart of issues which have caused ructions in the Church of England and the whole Anglican communion in recent years are considerations of tradition and Biblical interpretation. This was the case in respect of the ordination of women and admission of women as bishops. LLF is a whole suit of resources including a substantial book, videos and podcasts designed to provide a huge amount of background material and case studies to enable a balanced debate on another issue relating to sexuality - What should the church's response to the society-led decision to provide for same sex marriage?

The LLF material brings with it and distils the wisdom and experience of many highly qualified specialists. More than 40 theologians, historians, biologists and social scientists were recruited to the panel appointed back in 2017. It is intended to kick-start a broad and well-informed discussion which it is hoped will help lead the Church as a whole to debate the matter in 2022 within the context of its decision making mechanisms. The approach is to ask us all to come to the debate with an open mind and with a willingness to learn about the many and complex issues involved. Those who attended the Bible Course might bring to mind the memorable phrase, 'If you take a text out of context you are left with a con.' We are being asked to consider the whole context. The history and norms of societies who first received the relevant writings set out in the Bible, the whole drift of the Biblical narrative, the development of scientific knowledge and of course the traditions of the church as well as the attitudes of the society in which we live.

As time moves on the Team will be considering the best ways in which we can engage with the published resources. The published material does not 'tell us what to think' but invites us to embrace all sides of the argument and become better informed. The House of Bishops is urging people to engage with the materials in the spirit of the six pastoral principles: to address ignorance, acknowledge prejudice, admit hypocrisy, cast out fear, speak into silence and pay attention to power. Here is a link to the site for those who have access to the internet <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith>. For those who don't, you can obtain a copy of the book from Church Times Bookshop for £17.99. telephone 01603 785923.

Happy active waiting to you all.

Chris Webb