

STATEMENT

Date 16 December 2020

ST HELEN'S BISHOPSGATE ANNOUNCES "BROKEN PARTNERSHIP" WITH HOUSE OF BISHOPS

St Helen's Bishopsgate, following much prayer and reflection, has announced a state of broken partnership with the House of Bishops of the Church of England.

St Helen's and many other churches have over a prolonged period called for and prayed for Bishops, as the denomination's senior leaders, to uphold their vows to teach what the Bible says, including in the area of sex and marriage, and to deny false teaching and practice. Instead the House of Bishops is divided on sex and marriage; its official orthodox doctrine is expressly undermined by how some bishops speak and act, and by the failure to speak and act of many others. This has resulted in a muddled message and confusion for churchgoers across England. Despite their consecration vows, Bishops have overseen the appointment to influential leadership positions of people who openly advocate change to the Church of England's doctrine and/or forms of service, and Bishops have permitted alternative services and events that do not uphold the Church of England's stated doctrinal position on sexual ethics.

Seven years ago the House of Bishops published the *Pilling Report* which called for '*facilitated discussions*' on sexuality. Earlier this month the House of Bishops published the *Living in Love and Faith* book, course, and library of resources which call for yet further discussion. *Living in Love and Faith* demonstrates the division in the House of Bishops with some sections setting out the orthodox biblical teaching but others erroneous alternative views. The overall effect suggests that the clear biblical teaching on sex and marriage is *not* clear. The House of Bishops is responsible for upholding biblical doctrine in the Church of England. Whilst St Helen's is encouraged by the faithful work of some involved in the LLF project, the clarity and consistency of the bible's teaching on sex and marriage is in marked contrast to the House of Bishops' muddled message.

In good conscience, St Helen's is no longer able to remain in gospel partnership with the House of Bishops until they again speak and act consistently in accordance with the plain reading and plain teaching of scripture on sex and marriage, as recognised by the church down the centuries.

The loving summons of the Lord Jesus to '*repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand*' leads his followers into a life of rich fulfilment that stretches into eternity. Thus, when Church of England bishops depart from proclaiming and defending clear biblical teaching, it is not just a breach of the Canons of the Church of England, but more seriously it is unloving and painful to the many people within the Church of England who want to live faithful and sacrificial lives following Jesus, and it risks causing others to stray from the way of salvation revealed in the scriptures.

St Helen's has a deep love and concern for those in the church who experience same-sex attraction, and seeks to provide support and care for such men and women in our own congregations. Sadly when Church of England leaders contradict or fail to promote the clear teaching of scripture in the area of sexual ethics, they are heard by our and other congregations to say that scripture does not matter and the personal obedience of committed Christians desiring to be faithful to Jesus' teaching does not matter.

St Helen's, like the great majority of Anglicans around the world, believes that scripture clearly and consistently teaches that it is God's good plan that the only loving and God-honouring place for sexual practice is within the marriage of one man and one woman, and that this is a matter of primary biblical importance. It is not merely a

'secondary matter' over which faithful Christian disciples can 'agree to disagree', rather it is a matter of the authority of God's word to which all disciples of Jesus Christ should seek to submit (and not reword).

Tracey, a member of St Helen's who knew she was gay when she was 12, lived an active gay lifestyle in her twenties until she became a Christian a few years ago.

She says, "Now that I'm a Christian it doesn't mean that I have become straight. I've always been attracted to girls. The thing that helped me was understanding that temptation and sin were different things. I have a choice: I can either honour God with my actions or dishonour him."

She continues, "I find it upsetting when Christians take different bits of the Bible and say, I'll go with this and not that, as it was quite clear to me what the Bible taught on homosexuality. There is a cost and it is tricky, but holding onto the truths in the Bible, I choose to honour Jesus. I have a wonderful church family who are incredibly supportive."

St Helen's is not leaving the Church of England and will remain a member of its Deanery and Diocesan structures for the most part. However St Helen's will be withdrawing from those activities which indicate full spiritual partnership. This is likely to include the selection and recommendation of people going forward for ordination, as well as planting new Church of England churches. We have been in regular communication with both the current Bishop of London and her predecessor about our developing concerns. We are grateful that the Bishop of London has, in response, proposed working with St Helen's to assess how the potential consequences of broken partnership could be addressed.

William Taylor, Rector of St Helen's says, "The House of Bishops has responsibility for spiritual leadership in the Church of England – teaching the truth, correcting error and exercising discipline. Their failure of leadership over many years is responsible for the confusion that the Church of England now finds itself in. By contrast the Bible's teaching is clear, authoritative and loving as is the historic doctrine of the Church of England. Sadly, therefore, we find that although authentically Anglican, we are not, for the time being, in gospel partnership with the House of Bishops. We feel obliged to take this step to differentiate ourselves visibly from the House of Bishops."

He continues, "We are grateful for the ongoing faithful ministry of the Bishop of Maidstone, Rod Thomas, who is not himself a voting member of the House of Bishops but has repeatedly and faithfully raised these concerns about departure from the Scriptures. Rod will review me annually in my role as Rector of St Helen's, with input from the churchwardens and other members of the team at St Helen's. We will also continue to pray for the leadership of the Church of England and for the House of Bishops, especially that they will stand strong in the orthodox truths and have the confidence to be unashamed in preaching the gospel as set out in scripture - the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, no matter how counter-cultural it may seem to contemporary society."

Many local church leaders, from different Anglican churches across the country, share similar concerns to those expressed by St Helen's. We wish to support and remain in full partnership with these likeminded churches, who seek to teach the good news of Jesus with faithfulness and compassion and provide on-going care, love and support for those within their congregations experiencing same-sex attraction.

Ends

For more information, please see www.st-helens.org.uk/about/cofe and/or contact media@st-helens.org.uk

Notes to Editors

Located in the heart of London St Helen's Bishopsgate is a welcoming church working to reach people across London and beyond by teaching, building up and inviting everyone to sit and listen to Jesus. Our aim as a church family is to bring glory to God by knowing him and making him known in everything that we do and in all that we are.