

The Rt Revd Tony Robison
Chairman of the Council of Bishops

18 November 2013

Dear Supporter,

This letter comes to you because you have sent in a form or an email to express your support for the Society. To those who did so quite some time ago I apologise that this will be the first communication that you have received.

The Society is intended to address a situation that does not yet exist and, following the failure of the Women Bishops Measure last November, will not exist for two or three years at least. This has given us more time to make preparations, and has made the announcement of detailed plans somewhat less urgent. It also means that the precise context for the Society's life, and therefore the precise shape that it will need to take, are not yet clear.

The last three years have been years of change and growth. We are delighted that in some dioceses and regions the Society has come to life locally and given a new identity to those are committed to the catholic faith and catholic order as the Church of England received them. The increase in the number of ordination candidates from our tradition is a heartening sign. The consecration of the present Bishops of Richborough, Fulham, Beverley and Ebbsfleet in 2011 and 2013 has also given encouragement – not least to their fellow bishops.

We have been meeting regularly as the Council of Bishops of the Society, consulting with leading representatives of the Catholic Group in General Synod and the Catholic Societies, as well as with our retired brother bishops, and laying plans for the future. I write now to share some of these plans with you. Further news will appear in due course on our re-designed website: www.sswsh.com

The Council of Bishops is working closely with the Catholic Societies. We look to the Additional Curates Society, for example, to take a lead in vocations work and support for parishes, and to the Church Union to develop resources for education and catechesis.

On the original website we explained that the Society would not itself be 'yet one more Catholic society'. Instead, the vision was and is that it will become 'an Ecclesial Body'. We said that, because it costs nothing to join the Church, there would be no subscription fee, but that we would invite those who could afford it to make a small financial contribution to administrative costs.

This would have required the creation of a new organization with charitable status, and a new administrative structure to support it. We have concluded that this is not necessary. Forward in Faith already exists as a charity whose Constitution gives it 'power to seek an ecclesial structure which will continue the orders of bishop and priest as the Church has received them and which can guarantee a true sacramental life'. The Society will be that ecclesial structure, and once women have been ordained to the episcopate in the Church of England, Forward in Faith's main purpose will be to support it. Already, the new Director of Forward in Faith, Dr Colin Podmore, is acting as Secretary to the Council of Bishops, and necessary costs (such as the cost of developing the new website) are met by Forward in Faith.

So there is a distinct contrast between Forward in Faith, as a membership organisation, and the Society, which is an ecclesial body. Membership of the Society is not gained by subscription but through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist, and the consequent practice of Christian discipleship. This discipleship is lived out in the conscious decision to identify oneself with the teaching and practice of the bishops of the Society and the priests and people who look to them for sacramental and pastoral provision.

We envisage the Society and Forward in Faith as two sides of the same coin: the same people – structured as an ecclesial body led by bishops for the sake of mission, sacramental ministry and pastoral care; structured also as a democratically-run charitable organization, offering advice, support, advocacy and, where necessary, defence.

When he commissioned Dr Podmore for his new role back in April, the Bishop of Fulham described Forward in Faith as 'the Marmite among ecclesiastical organisations, loved and loathed in equal measure'. Like the catholic movement as a whole, it too has undergone significant changes. Its Chairman (the Bishop of Fulham), Vice-Chairman (Dr Lindsay Newcombe), Secretary (Fr Ross Northing) and Director have all taken up office in the last three years.

Many of the recipients of this letter have long been members of Forward in Faith – some since its inception. Others have, in the past, stood back from joining what has necessarily been a campaigning organization. The same is true of the members of the Council of Bishops. Some have been members of Forward in Faith for a very long time, while others have joined only in recent months.

All of the bishops of the Society are now members of Forward in Faith, and we encourage all those who see the Society as the context for their future life in the Church of England to help build up and finance the necessary support structure by joining Forward in Faith. A membership form is enclosed with this letter and we would encourage you to consider joining so that we can continue to resource the important work of our part of the Church and make a positive contribution to the Church of England.

Our other immediate request is for your prayers. Please pray for us, your bishops, as we seek to discern the future that God wills for us as a Society within the Church of England. As a focus for your prayers, a prayer card is also enclosed with this letter.



The Rt Revd Tony Robinson
Bishop of Pontefract
Chairman of the Council of Bishops

✦ GLYN BEVERLEY

✦ JONATHAN EBBSFLEET

✦ MARK HORSHAM

✦ ROGER JUPP

✦ JOHN BURNLEY

✦ PETER EDMONTON

✦ NORMAN RICHBOROUGH

✦ MARTIN CICESTR:

✦ JONATHAN FULHAM

✦ LINDSAY URWIN