

The College of Bishops met on Thursday to continue considering next steps for the Church of England following the recent debate at General Synod on identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

Last month's Synod considered proposals from the bishops which would enable same-sex couples who have marked a significant stage of their relationship such as a civil marriage or civil partnership to come to church to give thanks, offer prayers of dedication to God and to receive God's blessing. Synod members also met in small groups to consider and comment on a set of draft texts for these prayers known as Prayers of Love and Faith, and to offer their views on proposed pastoral guidance.

At Thursday's meeting, in London, bishops began reviewing those comments and considered how to approach the task of refining the Prayers of Love and Faith and preparing the new pastoral guidance.

They agreed to setting up three working groups and a steering group to oversee and coordinate their work, each to be made up of bishops assisted by a group of advisers drawn from across the Church, both lay and ordained.

The working groups will focus on:

- Pastoral Guidance – with responsibility for drafting new Pastoral Guidance.
- Prayers of Love and Faith – to further refine the texts in the light of feedback from General Synod
- Pastoral Reassurance – to examine what will be required to ensure freedom of conscience for clergy.

It is anticipated that the steering group will be chaired by the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, and will include the chairs of the three working groups.

The final membership of the working groups will be confirmed and published in due course.

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