



LIVING
IN LOVE
& FAITH

The House of Bishops has set out the key areas in which it is requesting further work from the implementation groups taking forward the decision of General Synod on offering prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and for God's blessing for same-sex couples.

During its meeting in York earlier this week, the House spent time reviewing the work of the three implementation groups set up after the debate at Synod in February on proposals on identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

The proposals debated at Synod, which were developed after a six-year period of listening, learning and discernment known as Living in Love and Faith, would mean that, for the first time, same-sex couples could have a service in church in which there would be prayers of dedication, thanksgiving or for God's blessing on the two people concerned, following a civil marriage or civil partnership.

The proposals would not, however, change the Church's doctrine of Holy Matrimony. The texts known as Prayers of Love and Faith will be voluntary, with freedom of choice about their use.

There will be protections both for those who, on grounds of conscience, will not be able to offer them and those who will.

Three implementation groups have been set up to refine the draft texts of Prayers of Love and Faith; work on new pastoral guidance for the Church of England; and examine what pastoral reassurance will be required to ensure freedom of conscience for clergy and laity.

At this week's meeting, the House agreed that while the Bishops' views differ on matters of sexuality and marriage, they wish to create a generous theological, ecclesial and pastoral space holding the Church together in one body.

After spending time meeting informally, reviewing the work so far, the Bishops have provided further steers for the implementation groups to shape their work.

They are requesting further work around key subjects which will shape the new pastoral guidance. They are also asking for specific proposals to be developed that will ensure that those who offer the Prayers of Love and Faith, and those who don't, are respected, supported and protected, recognising they are made out of theological conviction.

A further update will be provided before the July meeting of General Synod.

The Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, and Bishop of Truro, Philip Mounstephen, co-chairs of the group co-ordinating the work of the implementation groups, said: "The House of Bishops had a very constructive meeting in York this week and it has been pleasing to see how much progress has been made by the implementation groups even in a short time.

"We look forward to further proposals being developed.

"It is important to take the time we need to get this right however there is a strong sense of progress in implementing what Synod agreed."