



Geoff Crawford / Church of England

Special services of prayer and dedication asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples should be introduced soon in the Church of England on a trial basis, General Synod has agreed.

Synod, which has been meeting in London this week, voted in favour of a motion containing an amendment tabled by the Bishop of Oxford, Steven Croft, to bring forward the standalone services based around texts known as Prayers of Love and Faith.

Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF) is a collection of prayers, readings and other resources for praying with and for a same-sex couple who love one another and who wish to give thanks for and mark that love in faith before God.

Last month the House of Bishops agreed to commend the Prayers of Love and Faith for use in existing church services. Synod heard that that is likely to take place by mid-December.

At last month's meeting the House of Bishops also agreed that structures for special standalone services based on the PLF could also go forward to be formally authorised under canon law under a process expected to take about two years.

However, today's amended motion means that the services could be authorised for use sooner, but temporarily, under separate legislation. That would enable the first standalone Prayers of Love and Faith services to take place in churches at the same time as the process of seeking permanent authorisation is under way.

Synod also reviewed other work to implement the landmark motion agreed by Synod in February on the Church's approach to same-sex relationships. That motion called on the Church to "lament and repent" of the Church's treatment of LGBTQI+ people, and called on the House of Bishops to further refine and commend the Prayers of Love and Faith for use in the Church of England, together with new pastoral guidance and proposals for pastoral reassurance.

The Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, and the Bishop of Winchester, Philip Mounstephen, who have been co-chairing the Living in Love and Faith steering group, said: "During more than nine hours of debate we have heard very clearly what has been said, with passion and deep conviction, from a whole range of different perspectives.

"The truth is – and as we have seen again today – that the Church of England is not of one mind on questions of sexuality and marriage.

"Synod has agreed – narrowly – that standalone church services for same-sex couples should be authorised under Canon law on a trial basis.

"The House of Bishops will now consider how best to implement that call as we also commend the Prayers of Love and Faith for use in worship.

"Yet we must also reflect on all that we have heard from Synod – from across the whole spectrum - and redouble our efforts to find a space

where we can live with our current disagreements because we believe that is what God is calling us to do.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell, said: “We have heard loud and clear, through an extensive debate over two days, the depth of feeling across the Church on these hugely important questions.

“In particular, we have heard deep and heartfelt concern about the way the bishops have sought to implement Synod’s earlier decision on the Prayers of Love and Faith.”

“So while this motion was passed, narrowly, we do not underestimate the depth of feeling and will reflect on all that we have heard as we seek to move forward together.”

Notes to editors

The motion passed, as amended, was:

The Bishop of London to move:

‘That this Synod, conscious that the Church is not of one mind on the issues raised by Living in Love and Faith, that we are in a period of uncertainty, and that many in the Church on all sides are being deeply hurt at this time, recognise the progress made by the House of Bishops towards implementing the motion on Living in Love and Faith passed by this Synod in February 2023, as reported in GS 2328, encourage the House to continue its work of implementation, and ask the House to consider whether some standalone services for same-sex couples could be made available for use, possibly on a trial basis, on the timescale envisaged by the motion passed by the Synod in February 2023.’

The voting on the final motion was:

- Bishops: 23 for, 10 against, 4 abstained
- Clergy: 100 for, 93 against, 1 abstained
- Laity: 104 for, 100 against, 0 abstained

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