

 THE CHURCH



...r God's blessing for same-sex couples commended.

A selection of readings and prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples can be used in Church of England services for the first time from Sunday, December 17, following approval by the House of Bishops.

The final texts of *Prayers of Love and Faith*, commended for use in regular public worship or private prayer, are published today, together with pastoral guidance which sets out how they could be used.

At a meeting held online this morning, the House of Bishops confirmed its earlier decision to commend the *Prayers of Love and Faith* resources for use in regular public worship and agreed that this should take effect from Sunday December 17.

The *Prayers* can be used in regular scheduled services, such as a Sunday Eucharist or Evensong.

The House also continued to discuss separate proposals for special standalone services for same-sex couples to be formally authorised under canon law.

This follows a motion agreed by General Synod in November calling on the bishops to consider whether standalone services for same-sex couples could be made available for use, possibly on a trial basis.

The *Prayers of Love and Faith* were developed as part of the outcome of a seven-year period of listening, learning and discernment known as Living in Love and Faith.

The House of Bishops has said it will consider pastoral provision to protect the conscience of those who wish to use the *Prayers* and of those who do not.

It is intended that there will be wide process of consultation regarding the provision to ensure that whatever is agreed serves to promote unity and has broad support across the Church.

The Bishop of Leicester, Martyn Snow, and the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley, are chairing the group overseeing the introduction of *Prayers of Love and Faith*.

Bishop Helen-Ann said: "The *Prayers of Love and Faith* are resources to pray with and for a same-sex couple who are committed to one another in faithfulness and love. They are intended to enable those who wish to give thanks for and joyfully mark that commitment before God and their community of faith."

Bishop Martyn added: "We know not everyone in the Church of England agrees on these important questions which go the heart of who we are – about people's lives, their love and our shared faith. This is reflected in the House of Bishops, where there remain different views on the best

ways to proceed.

“These *Prayers* are offered as pastoral provision. It is our prayer that they can be used with grace and understanding. Sharing them will be a blessing to the whole Church.”

The House agreed by 24 votes to 11, with three abstentions, in favour of a motion (see full text below) to make the *Prayers of Love and Faith* resources available with effect from December 17. Bishops also approved a motion to commend the Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship from the same date by 30 votes to six, with two abstentions. They are published together with the *Prayers of Love and Faith* resources.

## More information

### The motions approved were:

1. That this House, having agreed at its meeting of 9 October to commend the PLF Resource Section ('PLF RS') for use in the minster's discretion under Canon B 5, now resolve that the PLF RS be commended with effect from December 17 2023 and published accordingly
2. That this House, having agreed at its meeting of 9 October to commend the Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship for use in the minster's discretion under Canon B 5, now resolve that the Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship be commended with effect from December 17 2023 and published accordingly.

### Further notes:

- The Prayers of Love and Faith have been commended for use from Sunday December 17. Given the busy Advent Season, it is likely that they will be more widely used in the New Year.
- The final texts are available both as a [downloadable resource and as text](#) on the Church of England website.
- The Church's understanding of marriage – or Holy Matrimony – remains as a lifelong, faithful and exclusive covenant between one man and one woman. Yet some may wish to recognise the commitment same-sex couples make to each other and publicly pray for God's blessing on them.
- Commendation is when prayers or other liturgical materials are put forward by the House of Bishops as being suitable for use by ministers in exercise of their discretion under Canon B5.
- Authorisation is more formal and means that a service becomes an integral part of the official liturgical resources of the Church of England available for use.