

GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

SETTING OUT THE PROGRESS MADE AND WORK STILL TO DO

Summary

This paper gives an overview of the progress made in implementing what was agreed at the February 2023 group of sessions of General Synod and outlines the work still to do. More detail is provided in Annexes A-I.

Introduction

1. Since the decision made at the February 2023 group of sessions of General Synod to support the issuing of Prayers of Love and Faith and replace *Issues in Human Sexuality* with new Pastoral Guidance, significant work has been done towards implementing these decisions. This paper aims to set out that progress, the theological and legal work behind it, and the further work required to fulfil that implementation.
2. The motion agreed by Synod in February has shaped the space within which this work has been conducted; a space where the Pastoral Principles are embedded in our life as a church and in which there is a commitment to continued learning together in relation to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. The motion also committed to new guidance and prayers for the blessing of same-sex relationships being issued but with no change to the doctrine of marriage, and no change contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England.
3. In addition it was acknowledged that, while the bishops and Synod had agreed to these next steps forward, there remained significant disagreement across the Church of England and within the House and College of Bishops. This is not just about the Prayers of Love and Faith but about matters of theology and ecclesiology. There remains, however, a strong desire within the College and the House of Bishops to inhabit a generous theological, ecclesial and pastoral space that holds the Church together despite different views and interpretations of these matters.
4. Within this space, work has been done to refine the Prayers of Love and Faith, define what was needed in the Pastoral Guidance, and discern what kinds of reassurance were necessary in order to accommodate, as far as possible, the range of differences that exist within the Church. This working was presented to Synod in July and further developed subsequently.
5. Key elements of this work include:
 - Articulating the theological rationale that supported the approach taken following the February motion.
 - Dialogue with the legal advisers on how this rationale interacts with the legal basis for developing the Prayers.
 - Shaping the Pastoral Guidance to be a practical, clear and dynamic document that can be reviewed and built up as further work is done.

- Providing substantial reassurance for those who choose to use, or not to use, the Prayers in local contexts.
6. Significant theological work has been done throughout the Living in Love and Faith process, including material in the Living in Love and Faith book. However, the steps for implementing the February motion needed a clear theological rationale that respects both that body of work and where we find ourselves as a Church. The motion, as debated, amended and voted for, suggests there is a majority in favour of some change but there is only fragile agreement about this possibility and about what the content of this change needs to be. This leaves us in what is termed 'a time of uncertainty', where individuals and groups may have a certainty of opinion but corporately we are uncertain of our forward direction.
 7. Given where we are, an argument is being made for a theological rationale of 'pastoral provision in a time of uncertainty'. This is based on the trajectory of pastoral provision which already exists within our Church and tradition, which does not change doctrine in any essential matter but changes our practical pastoral response and the way we relate within the Church and outwards to the world.
 8. We recognise that for some, pastoral provision represents far too little, and is considered deeply disappointing and distressing. We also recognise that others dispute the claim that this pastoral provision does not represent a change in doctrine, if it is expressed in commended or authorised prayers for public worship, rather than just in an ad hoc, private pastoral response. A full theological analysis for the rationale of offering pastoral provision in a time of uncertainty can be found in Annex H.
 9. Following meetings of the College and House of Bishops, the text and structure of the Prayers of Love and Faith have been refined into three parts. Prayers for Covenanted Friendships have been separated out, as they celebrate relationships that, by their nature, are different from those celebrated in the rest of the Prayers. Also separated out are the suite of resources for use in private pastoral prayer or within existing regular worship within parishes. These resources are intended to be used to pray with and for same-sex couples only in acts of worship where Prayers of Love and Faith are not the principal focus or form. Both of these sections will be commended for use by the House of Bishops at a future date and issued with the relevant sections of the Pastoral Guidance that support their use.
 10. The third section of the Prayers contains the forms of service to be used for separate, standalone services (those outside of existing regular worship). These forms of service will not be commended, but will follow the process for liturgical authorisation under Canon B2. Following the Canon B2 process for these services will provide the firmest footing for those using them within the shortest possible timeframe. It will provide reassurance concerning legal challenges, both for those who wish to use the prayers and for those who do not. It will also regulate the form in which this material can be used, and enable an opt-in approach to provide clarity and transparency about which churches have decided to offer them.
 11. In addition, as the B2 route is followed there will be an opportunity for broad consultation with every diocese on the Prayers, Pastoral Guidance and the kind of reassurances that are necessary. It is important for the implementation to work in a local context and this route ensures dioceses are consulted. More details about the commendation and authorisation routes and the three sections of the Prayers themselves are contained in Annexes A, B, C and D.

12. The production of the PG was overseen by a diverse working group, and involved consultation with NCI departments and a variety of stakeholders representing different church traditions and lived experience
13. The structure of the Pastoral Guidance has also been organised into three sections, comprising: 1) Use of the Prayers of Love and Faith; 2) Church life in local contexts; and 3) Ministry. Warmth and a pastoral outlook in tone have been paramount in its drafting; the intention is that the guidance is accessible and pastorally sensitive, rather than just objective and purely factual. This has been held alongside the nature of the guidance itself and the complex space of disagreement the Church inhabits. The Pastoral Guidance is written in a question and answer format, and will be a living document, evolving and being updated as we continue as a Church on, and beyond, the LLF journey.
14. Annex E contains draft versions of Parts 1 and 2 (Use of the Prayers of Love and Faith, and Church life in local contexts), which will accompany the commended material. A significant amount of work has also been done on Part 3, which explores ministry, the life of clergy and lay ministers and the ministry of bishops. However, given the complexity of these topics, more work still needs to be completed in this area.
15. While we recognise this will be disappointing for many, particularly where there is an urgent need for clarity, it is essential that this guidance is robust and sufficient enough on key questions for long term decisions to be made. The House of Bishops' intention is that this further work will consider whether the rationale of pastoral provision might provide a basis for allowing clergy to be in same-sex marriages.
16. The work on the Pastoral Guidance and Prayers of Love and Faith has sought to incorporate, as a constant strand throughout, measures of reassurance to enable as many as possible within the Church to live with them, meeting their pastoral needs, and reducing legal and other risks that they may be concerned about.
17. Annex F gives details of where reassurance is threaded through the Pastoral Guidance and the Prayers of Love and Faith, and of the ongoing work in this area. This includes proposals for a collective statement by the House of Bishops that seeks to provide a consistency of approach nationally but retain individuals' freedom of conscience; the proposal to set up an Independent Reviewer, who can be consulted in the event of concerns that individuals are not being treated fairly; and the setting up of the Pastoral Consultative Group to help address difficult questions or situations as they arise.
18. Further work will also be done on the range of pastoral reassurance required, including exploration of formal structural pastoral provision in this time of uncertainty, where there is a consensus for change within the Church but not a consensus on what that change should be. Work on this will be commensurate with other work to give levels of reassurance appropriate to the provisions proposed and will involve engagement with stakeholder groups.
19. What is outlined above is both the progress made in implementing what was agreed at the February 2023 set of General Synod sessions and the further work necessary to take the next steps. Annex G gives more information about the further implementation work, including:
 - o Commending and authorising the suite of prayers alongside diocesan consultation and the issuing of Parts 1 and 2 of the Pastoral Guidance;

- Setting up of the Pastoral Consultative Group;
- Further work on the Ministry elements of the Pastoral Guidance, including on clergy in same-sex marriages;
- Work on the range of pastoral reassurances needed, including a joint statement by the House of Bishops, the setting up of an Independent Reviewer and possible levels of formal structural pastoral provision.

20. With this paper, and the detail papers contained in the Annexes, we are intending to show Synod the work done to implement the motion since the meeting in February. This has been, and remains, a difficult and highly complex piece of work.

21. This is partly because of the space we find ourselves in as a Church, with deeply held differences but a desire to honour Jesus' prayer that we all may be one, but also as we recognise the depth of feeling on all sides of the debate. We remain keenly aware of those whose lives, relationships and realities are deeply affected by this work and its outcomes, and for whom this has never been simply an academic theological matter.

22. The nature of the motion itself is indicative of this complex space, in which we want change but without changing the doctrine of the Church; we lament and repent of the mistakes of the past but are uncertain about the future.

23. In this space we have sought how to make the Prayers of Love and Faith available and introduce new Pastoral Guidance while providing reassurance for all concerned as these are brought forward. As ever, we are indebted to all those who have contributed to this work, directly and indirectly, acknowledging the often painful cost of doing so.

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GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

ANNEX A

PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH – A BASIS FOR MOVING FORWARD

1. The House has agreed to take certain steps in relation to the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF). We have agreed that we will separately commend the prayers for covenanted Friendship. We have agreed that we will commend the PLF Resource Section. The PLF outline forms of service ('standalone' services) will be introduced in the General Synod for approval under Canon B 2.

Prayers for covenanted friendship

2. We have agreed that we will commend the prayers for covenanted friendship. We are satisfied that these are not contrary to, or indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter and that they are suitable for use by the minister in the discretion under Canon B 5. Because the prayers for covenanted friendship are intended for a pastoral context that is different from the other parts of the PLF, we considered that they should be commended in their own right, rather than as part of the PLF Resource Section. Friendship is a valued category in Scripture, and these prayers reflect the importance of friendship in Scripture, tradition and lived experience in the Church. These prayers are not linked to questions of sexuality in any way.

PLF Resource Section

3. We have agreed that we will commend the PLF Resource Section – that is, the suite of prayers, blessings and readings that are intended to be used for same-sex couples - for use by ministers. We offer them as resources in 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. We will commend them on the basis that they are for use as part of a regular service, that is a service which would take place whether or not the PLF Resource Section were to be used. Such a service should not have the PLF as their principal focus or structure. We are proposing a different canonical route to make provision for 'standalone' services for same-sex couples and the commendation of the PLF Resource Section therefore does not include their use in that way.
4. The PLF Resource Section can be used in the context of private prayer. There are also various opportunities for using them in the context of public worship. Some authorised forms of service make their own provision for the use of prayers and other material at the discretion of the minister: for example, the prayers of intercession at the Holy Communion where "other suitable words may be used", or at a Service of the Word where the Prayers may include "petitions of intercession, litanies, thanksgivings and other forms of extempore prayer", and there is a discretion, at certain times, to use scripture readings other than those prescribed in the lectionary.

5. Under Canon B 1, "it is the minister's responsibility to have a good understanding of the forms of service used and he shall endeavour to ensure that the worship offered glorifies God and edifies the people." It is on this basis that the House of Bishops offers the prayers contained within PLF Resource Section for use by the minister where an authorised form of service makes provision for the use of prayers or other material at the discretion of the minister.
6. There may also be particular circumstances where an authorised form of service does not make provision for the use of prayers at the discretion of the minister: for example, Evening Prayer according to the Book of Common Prayer. It is nevertheless a widely accepted practice to include, for example, intercessory prayers after the third collect or after the anthem. This can be justified on the basis that it represents the use of "variations which are not of substantial importance" under the authority of Canon B 5.1. Where the minister considers it appropriate to include prayers or other material for a same-sex couple at a service which does not make its own provision for prayers at the discretion of the minister, the House of Bishops commends the PLF Resource Section for use by the minister in the discretion to make and use variations under Canon B 5.1.
7. We have considered carefully the requirement in Canon B 5 that "all variations in forms of service and all forms of service used under this Canon shall be reverent and seemly and shall be neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter".
8. First, we wish to make it clear that the PLF Resource Section is commended by the House of Bishops as a resource in praying with and for two people who love one another and who wish to give thanks for and mark that love in faith before God. To celebrate in God's presence the commitment two people have made to each other is an occasion for rejoicing. The texts are offered to express thanksgiving and hope, with prayer that those who are dedicating their life together to God may grow in faith, love and service. The PLF may be used in different ways and different combinations as suits a local context. Some churches may wish to use a wide range of material including prayers of blessing; others will wish to use a more modest selection.
9. Secondly, we are equally clear that the PLF Resource Section does not treat the relationship of the couple as being Holy Matrimony. They are not being commended for use in a way that does that or gives that impression. The material contained in the PLF Resource Section intentionally does not differentiate between couples who have and who have not entered into a civil same-sex marriage. That is because the PLF Resource Section is being offered for the purposes explained in the previous paragraph; they are not being offered to be used as a thanksgiving for marriage or a service of prayer and dedication after civil marriage and do not refer to, or take account of, a couple's civil marital status.
10. We are aware that members of Synod and others have questioned the use of prayers and other resources for same-sex couples who have entered into a same-sex marriage, arguing that such use would be contrary to, or indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in an essential matter. We have therefore considered legal advice in reaching our view that use of the PLF Resource Section would be compliant with that canonical requirement. The legal advice we received set out both sides of the argument. It also explained that we had to exercise our legally- and theologically-informed judgement in coming to a view on whether proposed prayers and other material met the requirements as to doctrine that are set out in Canon B 5 (and in other places in the Canons concerned with public worship).

11. In the light of the legal and theological advice we have received, we consider the following points to be significant. The PLF Resource Section does not treat those couples who have entered a same-sex civil marriage any differently from the way they treat a same-sex couple who are in a civil partnership or who have not acquired any formal civil status for their relationship. The use of the PLF Resource Section for a couple who have entered into a civil same-sex marriage does not therefore imply that their civil status is something that the Church considers distinguishes the couple from other same-sex couples who wish to dedicate their life together to God. The materials contained in the PLF Resource Section are not a celebration of a couple's civil same-sex marriage. They are for praying with and for two people who love one another and who wish to give thanks for and mark that love in faith before God.
12. It is our intention, when we commend the PLF Resource Section, that ministers who wish to use them may do so without there being any assumption that a couple are or are not in an active sexual relationship. Again, we have considered relevant theological and canonical issues in coming to that position.
13. The Church's doctrine remains as set out in Canon B 30 (Of Holy Matrimony); we have been clear that we have no intention of changing that doctrine. We also note that the Church's teaching on sexual relations has been treated as being part of the Church's doctrine of marriage. We are not proposing to change that teaching.
14. We are therefore offering the PLF Resource Section as a form of pastoral provision. The theological rationale for doing that is set out in detail in Annex H. In summary, our reasoning is as follows:
 - i. The PLF are a type of legitimate pastoral provision whereby the Church recognises the reality of people's lives and seeks to respond in ways that affirms what is good, and pray for growth towards God.
 - ii. Pastoral provision recognises that there is currently uncertainty about the outcome of the church's discernment in relation to same-sex relationships and acknowledges a "provisionality of our knowledge and responses in ways that err on the side of grace rather than judgement".
 - iii. To introduce a consistent way of pastoral provision would be to stand in a long line of the pastoral practice of finding ways to help people move forward in holiness in a world that falls far short of ideals in every area, without giving up on the idea of the ideal altogether. This would bring out more explicitly the principle that grace is a central concept in Christian doctrine, which interacts strongly with the pastoral outworkings of doctrines like the doctrine of marriage.
 - iv. The PLF acknowledge and respect the doctrine of marriage. They bear witness to the norm of Holy Matrimony by affirming very clear goods that bear a family resemblance to the goods of marriage: stability, faithfulness, exclusive, lifelong commitment, fruitfulness, mutual nurture and work for the flourishing of each partner and all those with whom a couple comes into contact.
 - v. The PLF do not seek to simulate marriage, or equalise these relationships, or pretend that our Church has made a decision to extend marriage to same-sex couples. But they do discern and affirm what is good, and pray for God's presence and blessing over the people within the relationship. They are 'prayers on the way': the way of people seeking to grow in God, but also the way of a Church seeking to discern how to respond well to the diversity of the Body, and to the complexity of a rapidly changing social context.

15. In short, the theological basis for pastoral provision is that it is a pastoral outworking for a time of uncertainty that respects the Church of England's unchanged doctrine of marriage, including the aspects of that doctrine that are concerned with sexual intimacy. On that basis, we have concluded that making the PLF available for same-sex couples without there being an assumption as to their sexual relationships would not be *contrary to* the doctrine of the Church of England.
16. However, we have been advised that whether liturgical provision is "indicative of a departure" from doctrine poses a different question from whether it "is contrary to" that doctrine. It includes consideration of what a liturgical provision indicates about the Church's understanding of its doctrine and what that doctrine requires.
17. We have also been advised that it would be difficult to say that making the PLF available for same-sex couples without there being an assumption as to their sexual relationships was not indicative of any departure from the Church's doctrine. Existing pastoral statements of the House of Bishops (issued in 2005, 2014 and 2019) state that because some same-sex couples will be "living consistently with the teaching of the Church, others not", it would "not be right to produce an authorised public liturgy in connection with the registering of [civil partnerships/same-sex marriages] and "that clergy of the Church of England should not provide services of blessing for those who [register a civil partnership/enter a same sex marriage]". If the PLF are to be available for same-sex couples without there being an assumption as to their sexual relationships, there would have been a change in the Church's formal position on what its doctrine of marriage, and the place of sex within it, did and did not preclude in terms of public worship. Such a change might indicate a departure from the previous understanding that the Church's teaching precluded public worship being offered for a same sex couple who were or might be in a sexually active relationship.
18. If that is so, it is necessary to go on to consider whether that departure would be indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England "in any essential matter".
19. The words "in any essential matter" were included in the draft Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure as introduced in the General Synod (and are now contained in the 1974 Measure as enacted). On considering a proposal that those words be omitted from the draft Measure on the basis that they "seemed otiose and it would be difficult to decide what matters were essential", the Revision Committee for the Measure ultimately decided to retain them on the following basis:

If they were omitted it became equally difficult to determine what issues were or were not contrary to or indicative of any departure from the doctrine of the Church of England. The words 'in any essential matter' ensured that there was a proper degree of flexibility so that new insights into doctrine compatible with the general Anglican approach could be reflected in forms of worship and decisions of the Synod.
20. The explanatory memorandum for the Amending Canon which implemented the Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure 1974 (GS 129) explained the words as follows:

Attention is drawn [in Canon B 2] to the last four words 'in any essential matter', which are new. They enable the Synod to make small changes in matters which are regarded as doctrinal, provided that the essential doctrines of the Church of England are safeguarded. This formula is also used in the revised versions of Canons B 4 and B 5. The words used in the present Canons seem to preclude any changes at all, which appears unduly rigid and arguably does not accord with existing practice.

21. In considering whether what we are proposing would be a departure from doctrine "in any essential matter" we have therefore asked ourselves the following questions:
 - i. Would making the PLF available in those circumstances represent a proper degree of flexibility (a "small change ... in a matter regarded as doctrinal") so that new insights into doctrine can be reflected in forms of worship?
 - ii. Are those new insights compatible with the general Anglican approach?
 - iii. Are the essential doctrines of the Church of England safeguarded?
22. In considering those questions, we have had careful regard to the theological rationale for the making of pastoral provision which includes the following:
 - that it is not intended to change the Church of England's doctrine of marriage;
 - that the Church's teaching on sexual activity is regarded as part of that doctrine;
 - that the PLF are intended to recognise and respect that doctrine;
 - that the PLF affirm the goods in same-sex relationships, including stability, faithfulness, exclusive, lifelong commitment etc.;
 - that the PLF say nothing about sex but many same-sex couples will be in active sexual relationships.
23. We consider that what is envisaged by way of pastoral provision – which involves acknowledging and celebrating what is good in same-sex relationships even if the Church is unable to commend every aspect of some relationships – is a new insight into doctrine that can be reflected in forms of worship and that doing so represents a proper degree of flexibility.
24. We consider that the new insight is compatible with the general Anglican approach. The theological rationale set out in Annex H for making this pastoral provision explains why that is the case, and in particular how this pastoral provision would stand in a long line of the pastoral practice of finding ways to help people move forward in holiness in a world that falls far short of any ideals, without giving up on the idea of the ideal altogether.
25. We consider that the essential doctrines of the Church of England are safeguarded. The PLF do not seek to simulate marriage, or pretend that the Church has made a decision to extend marriage to same-sex couples. But they do discern and affirm what is good, and pray for God's presence and blessing over the people within the relationship.
26. We have therefore come to the view that, in so far as making the PLF available for couples in an active sexual relationship does involve any departure from doctrine, it nevertheless does not involve a departure from doctrine "in any essential matter", and that doing so is compatible with the relevant canonical requirements.

PLF outline services ('standalone' services)

27. We have agreed that the PLF outline forms of service – which are intended to provide forms of standalone service for same-sex couples – should be introduced in the General Synod for approval under Canon B 2. The Synodical process for liturgical business set out in the Synod's standing orders will therefore apply.
28. Similar provisions as to compatibility with doctrine as are set out above apply to forms of service that are proposed for approval by the General Synod. A form of service approved by the General Synod must be such as in the opinion of the General Synod is neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter. The final approval by the General Synod of a form of service conclusively determines that the Synod is of such opinion. Much of what we have said above about the PLF Resource Section will therefore be relevant to the Synod's consideration of the PLF outline services.
29. Additionally, the Synod's standing orders that apply to liturgical business provide for the Synod to request a formal report on a question of doctrine. The House stands ready to respond to such a request if it is made. The procedure for liturgical business also provides opportunities for the revision of the draft liturgical text. Final approval of a form of service requires majorities in each House of not less than two-thirds of those present and voting.
30. We look forward to the Synod's consideration of the proposed outline forms of service and hope that this process will begin with the First Consideration Stage at the February 2024 group of sessions.

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Annex B

Prayers of Love and Faith
Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship

These prayers are **commended by the House of Bishops** as being suitable for use by ministers in exercise of their discretion under Canon B 5.

At the sealing of a covenanted friendship, the minister may say:

N and N, we delight in your desire to dwell more deeply in the grace of Jesus Christ by sealing a covenant of friendship with each other. We pray that, strengthened by the prayers of your family and friends, you may know God's help to live in love and faithfulness.

The couple may say to one another:

*N, I offer myself to you in love and friendship;
may these words be a seal
of my trust and delight in you.
Where you go, I shall go:
I will seek to share your burdens and your joys.
I will pray that you will know God's blessing
and walk with you wherever God calls us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

The minister may say the following prayer:

*Faithful God,
in whose love we are called to abide;
give N and N the grace
to dwell in the gift of devoted friendship.
In their life together,
may they be bound in your love and promise
all the days of their lives,
seeking each other's welfare,
bearing each other's burdens
and sharing each other's joys;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

All **Amen.**

Notes

As with all use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, careful attention should be paid to the associated Pastoral Guidance.

1 **Covenanted friendship**

Friendship is an important category of relationship in Scripture and in Christian tradition. Christians belong to those whom Jesus Christ calls his friends, for whom he lays down his life. Christian friendship involves mutual love and harmony with one another, sharing one another's burdens and joys, in conformity to Christ.

These Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship are available for those who wish to express their mutual love and loyalty before God in a deeper way. The conditions needed are defined by these friends, as are the type of goods they commit to embody. The inclusion of covenanted friendships in the *Prayers of Love and Faith* reflects the importance of deep friendship, particularly in a world in which commitment is often associated only with sexual relationships. Covenanted friendships embody a type of relationship that is both committed and non-sexual, which is not exclusive, yet deeply meaningful, particular, and seeking to grow in holiness.

Covenanted friendships are relationships of an entirely different nature to marriage. Those who wish to seal a covenanted friendship may be of the same sex or opposite sexes. The friends may be married to other people, or unmarried. The friendship is by definition not sexually intimate. It will likely be expressed in practical forms of sharing aspects of life together. As with all friendships, care will need to be taken to identify the nature of the covenant and how the bonds of covenanted friendship will complement other friendships and (where relevant) the bonds of marriage.

2 **Use in public worship**

Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship may be used in different situations: in private prayer and pastoral conversation, privately in church before a minister, or in the context of public worship. When the latter option is appropriate, it will be helpful for all present to be able to read or hear an explanation of the nature of covenanted friendship, which may be drawn from Note 1 (above).

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Living in Love and Faith

Annex C

*Prayers of Love and Faith***Resource Section: Prayers, Acclamations, Promises**

These prayers are **commended by the House of Bishops** as being suitable for use by ministers, including, where applicable, in the exercise of their discretion under Canon B 5.

Introduction

The *Prayers of Love and Faith* are offered as resources in 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. To celebrate in God's presence the commitment two people have made to each other is an occasion for rejoicing. The texts are offered to express thanksgiving and hope, with prayer that those who are dedicating their life together to God may grow in faith, love and service as God's blessing rests upon them.

This suite of resources is one of the fruits of the Church of England's project *Living in Love and Faith*. It brings together a variety of liturgical resources in a desire to give thanks and praise to God for the gift of a loving relationship between two people, to mark their commitment to one another, and to pray with and for them. Recognising and celebrating the goods in faithful, committed same-sex relationships and seeking God's help and blessing in growing in faith, love and holiness, these prayers seek to help couples grow in holiness. The *Prayers of Love and Faith* are not a form of marriage service, nor do they equate the relationships brought before God to Holy Matrimony. Nevertheless, they recognise all that is good, and holy, and faithful in these relationships and enable the people in these relationships to place themselves before God and ask for God's blessing for their journey of love and faith. The prayers are drawn from existing sources but also include newly commissioned material.

This Resource Section provides prayers, acclamations, and promises, together with passages from Scripture, which can be used in a variety of different contexts. These materials can be used in private prayer and conversation as well as in weekday or Sunday worship regularly offered by a church, in the discretion of the minister under Canon B 5. Material from the Resource Section should not at present be used to offer special or 'standalone' services (thereafter, 'standalone services'). These are services that do not fall within the normal, usual pattern of worship for a parish, and are designed primarily around the *Prayers of Love and Faith*.

Subject to final approval of the General Synod under Canon B 2, it is envisaged that the materials here could also be used in 'standalone' services, where the incumbent and PCC have agreed to opt in to the use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith: Service Structures and Sample Services*.

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As with all use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, careful attention should be paid to the associated Pastoral Guidance issued by the House of Bishops.

How to use these resources

A minister (who may be either ordained or a lay minister) who is asked by a couple to offer prayers with and for them will want to consider the full range of materials offered here. Couples' situations, hopes and expectations will vary greatly, and ministers are encouraged to engage in conversation with them at an early stage to discuss how, where and when prayers might best be shaped, and which resources would be most appropriately used. There is considerable scope for creativity and flexibility available here, provided ministers remain within the requirements relating to worship.

Some authorised forms of service make their own provision for the use of prayers and other material at the discretion of the minister: for example, the prayers of intercession at the Holy Communion where "other suitable words may be used", or at a Service of the Word where the Prayers may include "petitions of intercession, litanies, thanksgivings and other forms of extempore prayer", and there is a discretion, at certain times, to use scripture readings other than those prescribed in the lectionary. Under Canon B 1, "it is the minister's responsibility to have a good understanding of the forms of service used and he shall endeavour to ensure that the worship offered glorifies God and edifies the people." It is on this basis that the House of Bishops offers the prayers contained within *Prayers of Love and Faith* for use by the minister where an authorised form of service makes provision for the use of prayers or other material at the discretion of the minister.

There may also be particular circumstances where an authorised form of service does not make provision for the use of prayers at the discretion of the minister: for example, Evening Prayer according to the Book of Common Prayer. It is nevertheless a widely accepted practice to include, for example, intercessory prayers after the third collect or after the anthem. This can be justified on the basis that it represents the use of "variations which are not of substantial importance" under the authority of Canon B 5.1. Where the minister considers it appropriate to include prayers or other material for a same-sex couple at a service which does not make its own provision for prayers at the discretion of the minister, the House of Bishops commends the resources contained in *Prayers of Love and Faith* for use by the minister in the discretion to make and use variations under Canon B 5.1.

Prayers of Gathering

A prayer of preparation

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

An introductory bidding

Dear friends in Christ,
we gather with *N* and *N* to celebrate with them
their love, faithfulness, and commitment.
We come to hear God's holy word,
and to surround *N* and *N* with our love and prayer
as they seek the blessings of God's kingdom
in their life together.

For the fruit of the Spirit

Almighty God,
you send your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of all your people.
Open the hearts of *N* and *N* to the riches of his grace,
that they may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

For the gift of love

God of wonder and of joy:
grace comes from you,
and you alone are the source of life and love.
Without you, we cannot please you;
without your love, our deeds are worth nothing.
Send your Holy Spirit,
and pour into our hearts
that most excellent gift of love,
that we may worship you now
with thankful hearts
and serve you always with willing minds;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Prayers of Dedication and Thanksgiving

A Prayer of Dedication

God of grace,
whose beauty, ever ancient, ever new,
sings through all creation:
enfold your servants *N* and *N*
with your encouragement, hope, and love.
Fill them with the grace to rejoice always
in their love for one another,
and to follow the Way of holiness and hope
revealed in your Son Jesus Christ.

All **Amen.**

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gracious God,
from love we are made
and to love we shall return.
May our love for one another
kindle flames of joy and hope.
May the light and warmth of your grace
inspire us to follow the Way of Jesus Christ,
and serve you in your Kingdom,
now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

For guidance

Father of all,
in Jesus Christ you open to us
the treasures of your kingdom;
guide us by your Holy Spirit
that we may receive your redeeming grace
and reflect the perfect unity of your love,
for you live and reign,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

For companionship

Gracious God,
who taught us through your Son
that love is the fulfilling of the law:
give grace to your servants *N* and *N*,
that they may be companions in joy
and comfort in times of trouble;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

For grace to live well

Faithful God,
giver of all good things,
give *N* and *N* wisdom and devotion
in the ordering of their life together.
May they dwell together in love and peace
all the days of their life,
seeking one another's welfare,
bearing one another's burdens
and sharing one another's joys;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

An Acclamation

For your goodness to us at all times,
All **we praise you, O Lord.**
 For the gift of life and love
All **we praise you, O Lord.**
 For the means of grace and the hope of glory
All **we praise you, O Lord.**
 May the blessing of our God be upon us, now and always.
All **Prosper the work of our hands, O Lord.**
Prosper the work of our hands.

Prayers for God's Blessing

God of generosity and joy,
 with you is the well of life and in your light, we see light:
 we give you thanks for *N and N*,
 for the love and friendship they share,
 and for their commitment to one another.
 As they come before you this day,
 trusting you as the giver of all good gifts,
 strengthen their love by your love,
 and gladden their hearts with your joy,
 that their journey through life
 may become a pilgrimage of grace.
 By your blessing,
 and with you as their companion and guide,
 may they rejoice in hope and be sustained in love
 all the days of their life and in the age to come,
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

(or)

Blessed are you, sovereign God,
 the author of all good things:
 you have made us in your image
 to reflect your truth and light.
 In your Son, Jesus Christ,
 you call us no longer servants, but friends.
 Pour out, we pray, the abundance of your grace
 upon *N and N* in their life together.
 By your blessing,
 may they share in the joy of your kingdom
 where goodness and mercy abound;
 and bring them to feast with your saints for ever
 in your heavenly home,
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

(or)

The Lord bless you and watch over you,
the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,
the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace;
this day and for ever.

All **Amen**

Prayers which may be said with or by a couple

A general thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
we your unworthy servants give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving kindness.
We bless you for our creation, preservation,
and all the blessings of this life;
but above all for your immeasurable love
in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies
that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful,
and that we show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,
and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, for ever and ever.

All **Amen.**

A prayer to the Holy Spirit

O Holy Spirit, giver of light and life,
impart to us thoughts better than our own thoughts,
and prayers better than our own prayers,
and powers better than our own powers, that we may spend and be spent
in the ways of love and goodness,
after the perfect image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

All **Amen.**

For lifelong peace

God of all grace,
friend and companion,
look with favour on *N* and *N*
as they journey together through life.
Deepen their love
and strengthen their wills
to honour the commitment they have made,

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that they may continue
in lifelong faithfulness and friendship to each other;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

A prayer of commitment

The couple may say together

God of all good things,
we offer you our lives,
our hopes and hurts,
our praise and promise,
in a covenant of faith and hope.
Unite our wills in your will,
that we may support one another
and show forth your love
all the days of our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The minister may say

May almighty God
give you grace to persevere with joy,
that he may complete
the work he has begun in you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

A prayer of Augustine of Hippo

Eternal God,
the light of the minds that know you,
the joy of the hearts that love you,
and the strength of the wills that serve you:
grant us so to know you
that we may truly love you,
so to love you that we may truly serve you,
whose service is perfect freedom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

A prayer of Richard of Chichester

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you
for all the benefits that you have won for us,
for all the pains and insults that you have borne for us.
Most merciful redeemer,
friend and brother,
may we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day.

All **Amen.**

For faithfulness and peace

God of love and faithfulness,
look mercifully upon *N* and *N* in their life together.
Unite them evermore in your love.
Keep them faithful to the commitment they have made to one another;
strengthen them with every good gift;
and let your peace reign in their hearts,
now and always;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

For the healing of memory

Loving God,
you are merciful and forgiving.
Grant that those who are suffering the hurts of the past
may experience your generous love.
Heal their memories, comfort them,
and send them all from here renewed and hopeful;
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

For discipleship

Eternal God,
without your grace nothing is strong, nothing is sure.
Strengthen *N* and *N* with patience, kindness, gentleness
and all other gifts of the Holy Spirit,
so that they may fulfil the commitment they have made.
Keep them faithful to each other and to you.
Fill them with such love and joy
that they may build a home of peace and welcome.
Make their life together a sign of Christ's love
in this broken world,
that unity may overcome estrangement,
forgiveness heal guilt,
and joy conquer despair;

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through Jesus Christ our Lord.
All **Amen.**

For the support of friends

Holy Spirit of God,
 you know our strength
 and have compassion on our frailty.
 Be with *N* and *N*
 in all they undertake.
 And grant that we their friends,
 with all who become their friends,
 may love and support them in the years ahead;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Prayers for a Household and Family

For a home

God of love and mercy,
 look with kindness on your servants *N* and *N*.
 Give them wisdom and devotion in their life together,
 that each may be to the other
 a strength in need, a counsellor in perplexity,
 a comfort in sorrow and a companion in joy.
 May the hospitality of their home
 bring refreshment and joy to all around them;
 may their love overflow to neighbours in need
 and embrace those in distress.
 May those whose lives are brought together
 be given wisdom, patience and courage
 to serve one another.
 We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

(or)

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
 who shared at Nazareth the life of an earthly home:
 reign in the home of *N* and *N* as Lord and King;
 give them grace to minister to others
 as you have ministered to them,
 and grant that by deed and word
 they may be witnesses of your saving love
 to those among whom they live;
 for the sake of your holy name.

All **Amen.**

The Blessing of a Home

[Insert here the rite for the Blessing of a Home in the form commended by the House of Bishops in July 2023.]

A Prayer for a Couple's Family

Holy and living God,
 from whom every family
 in heaven and earth is named;
 with thanksgiving and gladness
 we bring before you the *family/children* of *N* and *N*.
 We thank you for the grace they have received from you,
 and for the love and support they give.
 May they receive the blessing
 of your love as they support and cherish
N and *N* now and in the years to come.

All **Amen.**

For a new family brought together

God of all grace and goodness,
 we thank you for this new family,
 and for everything parents and children have to share;
 by your Spirit of peace draw them together
 and help them to be true friends to one another.
 Let your love surround them
 and your care protect them;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

A Prayer as a Couple make a Home Together

God, our refuge and strength,
 our hearts are restless
 until they find their rest in you.
 As *N* and *N* build their life together,
 may your delight and love fill their home.
 May their home be free
 of the snares of the evil one,
 and filled with the joys of self-giving.
 May they be generous in hospitality and hope,
 and reflect the grace of your love
 in Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Psalms and Readings

Any suitable translation may be used.

Psalms

Psalm 67

Psalm 121

Psalm 133

Old Testament

1 Samuel 18.1-5

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him; as a result, Saul set him over the army. And all the people, even the servants of Saul, approved.

Ruth 1.15-22

So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!'

When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?' She said to them, 'Call me no longer Naomi,

call me Mara,

for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi

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when the Lord has dealt harshly with me,
and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?’

So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Jeremiah 31.31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Epistle*Romans 12.1,2,9-13*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a

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child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Ephesians 3.14-end

I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Philippians 4.4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Colossians 3.12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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1 John 3.18-end

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

Gospel*Matthew 5.1-10*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

John 15.1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

John 15.9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so

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that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.'

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GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

Annex D

Prayers of Love and Faith **Service Structures and Sample Services**

These forms of service are to be **submitted to the General Synod for approval under Canon B 2**. It is the outline orders of service that are to be formally authorised. The sample orders of service are examples illustrating what a service following the authorised outline might comprise.

The *Prayers of Love and Faith* may be used in a variety of contexts, including in church or at home. The Prayers of Love and Faith are not a form of marriage service, nor do they equate the relationships brought before God to Holy Matrimony. Nevertheless, they recognise all that is good, and holy, and faithful in these relationships and enable the people in these relationships to place themselves before God and ask for God's blessing for their journey of love and faith. Where it is desired to pray for a same-sex couple in the context of a 'standalone' service, these Structures, which are authorised forms of service, should be used. As they are not prescriptive as to the whole of their content they allow for a suitable degree of flexibility, as described in the Notes, to cover differing pastoral circumstances. It will be important for all to understand what these services set out to do, which may be summarised in the following bidding:

Dear friends in Christ,
we gather with *N* and *N* to celebrate with them
their love, faithfulness, and commitment.
We come to hear God's holy word,
and to surround *N* and *N* with our love and prayer
as they seek the blessings of God's kingdom
in their life together.

The use of the 'Prayers of Love and Faith: service structures' is optional for clergy and for churches. Many churches will choose to use them. Many may not. None are required to use them. In order to help with local decisions on whether to use them, to provide transparency, and to protect freedom of conscience, churches that wish to offer them will need to write to their bishop opting into their use, having reached agreement on this point between the incumbent and the parochial church council (or equivalent in other church contexts).

The Notes offer important instructions for the use of the Service Structures and are an integral part of this authorised provision. As with all use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, careful attention should also be paid to the associated Pastoral Guidance.

Two Sample Services are provided to illustrate how the Service Structures can be used. They draw on the materials in *Prayers of Love and Faith: Resource Section*.

An Outline Order for a Service of the Word

Preparation

The Welcome
The Collect

The Liturgy of the Word

Readings
Sermon

Prayers

The Dedication
Acclamation
Prayers of Intercession
The Lord's Prayer

Conclusion

The Dismissal

An Outline Order for a Service within a Celebration of Holy Communion

*Sections marked with an asterisk * must follow an authorized text.*

Preparation

The Welcome
Prayers of Penitence*
The Collect*

The Liturgy of the Word

Readings
Gospel Reading
Sermon
The Creed*

Prayers

The Dedication
Acclamation
Prayers of Intercession

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

The Peace
Preparation of the Table
Taking of the Bread and Wine
The Eucharistic Prayer*
The Lord's Prayer
Breaking of the Bread
Giving of Communion
Prayer after Communion

Conclusion

The Dismissal

Notes

As with all use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, careful attention should be paid to the associated Pastoral Guidance.

1 Structures

These structures correspond respectively with the structure of A Service of the Word, or the structure of A Service of the Word with a Celebration of Holy Communion. The minister should have reference to the relevant Notes, including for the celebration of Holy Communion where appropriate (Common Worship main volume, pp.21-26 and 330-335).

2 Agreement to use 'standalone' services

In order to ensure that the standalone services offered follow a particular form and are not indicative of a departure from the doctrine of marriage, churches that wish to offer them will need to write to their bishop opting into their use. Where it is intended to use them in a parish, they may be used only if the minister with the cure of souls has obtained the agreement of the parochial church council to do so.

Ordained ministers and licenced lay ministers alike, in churches and other places which have opted in to the use of standalone services may officiate (except services including Holy Communion where the president must be a priest).

3 Preparation

The minister should greet the congregation and the couple with a liturgical greeting and may introduce the service in his or her own words. The introduction – as with any other part of the service – must not suggest that the service is a marriage service or that it is a form of Prayer and Dedication after Civil Marriage or Thanksgiving for Marriage.

Prayers of Penitence and an authorized Absolution are always used within a service of Holy Communion. The Preparation should conclude with a Collect from the Resource Section, such as:

Almighty God,
you send your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of all your people.
Open the hearts of *N* and *N* to the riches of his grace,
that they may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

4 The Liturgy of the Word

There should preferably be at least two readings from the Bible. When this Service is combined with Holy Communion on Sundays and Principal Holy Days, the readings of the day are normally used. At other times, they may be taken from the Resource Section or from other provision. A sermon will normally be preached, even if this is not the principal service on Sunday.

5 The Creed

The Creed or authorized Affirmation of Faith may be omitted except at the principal service on Sundays and Principal Holy Days.

6 The Dedication

The prayers in the *Prayers of Love and Faith* Resource Section may be used as pastoral circumstances dictate. If a prayer for God's blessing is to be included, a choice of three texts is provided in the Resource Section. Alternatively, other prayers from the Resource Section may be chosen for The Dedication. Any adaptation or new texts added by the minister here or elsewhere in the service must not involve the incorporation of the blessings contained in the Marriage Service from the Book of Common Prayer or Common Worship.

7 Symbolism

Pastoral preparation with the couple should cover the fact that the service is not a marriage, or a Thanksgiving for Marriage or A Service of Prayer and Dedication after Civil Marriage.

After The Dedication, the minister may pray over rings worn by the couple, or at the lighting of a candle, or over other objects which have symbolic value to the couple. To avoid the impression that the service is a marriage service, rings are not given or exchanged. A prayer from the Resource Section, or one of the following, may be used:

A prayer when rings are worn

God of faithfulness and joy,
whose love is revealed in Jesus Christ
and poured out in the Holy Spirit:
may these rings worn by your servants N and N
be signs of their hope-filled covenant
and of your everlasting love
revealed in Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

A prayer at the lighting of a candle

Loving God,
your Son is the Light of the World
whose flame of love is kindled through the Holy Spirit:
may the light of this candle be for N and N
a sign of Jesus Christ's call to follow him,
that they may shine as lights in the world
to your glory.

All **Amen.**

8 Acclamation

The Acclamation provided in the Sample Services, or another suitable responsorial text, may be used, or a hymn or song sung instead.

9 Prayers of Intercession

Suitable prayers for the couple from the Resource Section may be used, or new prayers of intercession may be written.

The couple may wish to pray together, either at the conclusion of the intercessions or, in a service of Holy Communion, as a Prayer after Communion before the Dismissal.

10 Preparation of the Table

At the Preparation of the Table in a service of Holy Communion, one or both of the couple, or their family and friends, may be invited to bring the elements of bread and wine to the holy table.

11 The Dismissal

The liturgical blessing which forms part of the Conclusion is offered for the whole congregation.

Sample Service 1: A Service of the Word

Preparation

The Welcome

The minister welcomes the congregation in these or other words:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you

All **and also with you.**

The minister may introduce the service in these or other appropriate words:

Dear friends in Christ,
we gather with *N* and *N* to celebrate with them
their love, faithfulness, and commitment.
We come to hear God's holy word,
and to surround *N* and *N* with our love and prayer
as they seek the blessings of God's kingdom
in their life together.

The introduction may conclude with this or another suitable prayer:

Almighty God,
you send your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of all your people.
Open the hearts of *N* and *N* to the riches of his grace,
that they may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

A hymn may be sung.

The Liturgy of the Word

Readings

Readings from the Resource Section, or other readings from the Bible, may be used here.

Sermon

Prayers

The Dedication

The Dedication may take this form, or another form as described in Note 6.

The couple stands before the minister, who says

N and *N*, you have come before God today,

having made your commitment to one another,
to seek God's blessing and guidance.
Supported by your friends and family,
we pray the blessings of God's kingdom on you.

One or more of the prayers from the Resource Section may be used here.

The couple may pray together:

God of all good things, we offer you our lives,
our hopes and hurts, our praise and promise,
in a covenant of faith and hope.
Unite our wills in your will,
that we may support one another
and show forth your love
all the days of our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The minister may say

May almighty God
give you grace to persevere with joy,
that he may complete
the work he has begun in you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

These or other prayers from the Resource Section may be used.

God of love and mercy,
look with kindness on your servants *N* and *N*.
Give them wisdom and devotion in their life together,
that each may be to the other
a strength in need, a counsellor in perplexity,
a comfort in sorrow and a companion in joy.
Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

May the hospitality of their home
bring refreshment and joy to all around them;
may their love overflow to neighbours in need
and embrace those in distress.
Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

We pray that those whose lives are brought together
may be given wisdom, patience and courage
to serve one another in Christ's name.

Help them to desire all that is good,
that the offering of their lives may speak your praise.
Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

May the friends and family gathered here,
and those separated by distance,
be strengthened and blessed this day.
Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

Sustain *N* and *N* throughout their lives
and finally, in your mercy, bring them
to the joy of your heavenly city
where we will all see you face to face.

All Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers,
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

All As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
Our Father in heaven...

(or)

All Let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us.
Our Father, who art in heaven...

A hymn may be sung.

The minister may say

God of grace,
whose beauty, ever ancient, ever new,
sings through all creation:
enfold your servants *N* and *N*
with your encouragement, hope, and love.
Fill them with the grace to rejoice always
in their love for one another,
and to follow the Way of holiness and hope
revealed in your Son Jesus Christ.

All **Amen.**

Dismissal

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;

Conclusion

and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

DRAFT

Sample Service 2: Holy Communion

Reference should be made to the Notes for Holy Communion (Common Worship main volume, pp.330-335) and the Notes for this service.

Preparation

The Welcome

The president may say

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

All **Amen.**

The president greets the people

The Lord be with you

All **and also with you.**

The president may introduce the service in appropriate words. One or more prayers from the Resource Section may be used.

Prayers of Penitence

These or other Prayers of Penitence may be prayed.

God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ
to save us from our sins,
to be our advocate in heaven,
and to bring us to eternal life.
Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith,
firmly resolved to keep God's commandments
and to live in love and peace with all.

All **Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.**

If another confession has already been used, the Kyrie eleison may be used without interpolation here or after the absolution.

The president says

Almighty God,
 who forgives all who truly repent,
 have mercy upon *you*,
 pardon and deliver *you* from all *your* sins,
 confirm and strengthen *you* in all goodness,
 and keep *you* in life eternal;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The Gloria in excelsis may be used.

The Collect

The president introduces a period of silent prayer with the words ‘Let us pray’ or a more specific bidding.

This Collect, or another prayer from the Resource Section, or the Collect of the Day is said.

Almighty God,
 you send your Holy Spirit
 to be the life and light of all your people.
 Open the hearts of *N* and *N* to the riches of his grace,
 that they may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
 in love and joy and peace;
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Word

Readings

Either one or two readings from Scripture precede the Gospel reading.

At the end of each the reader may say

This is the word of the Lord.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Reading

An acclamation may herald the Gospel reading.

When the Gospel is announced the reader says

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to *N*.

All **Glory to you, O Lord.**

At the end

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

All **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

A sermon is preached.

The Creed

On Sundays and Principal Holy Days an authorized translation of the Nicene Creed is used, or on occasion the Apostles' Creed or an authorized Affirmation of Faith may be used.

Prayers

The Dedication

The Dedication may take this form, or another form as described in Note 6.

The couple stands before the minister, who says

*N and N,
we rejoice with you
as you stand before God today
cherished and supported
by your family and friends.
We join our prayers with yours,
asking God in his love to guide and support you
now and in the years to come.*

This prayer of dedication, or another prayer from the Resource Section, may be used.

*Faithful God,
giver of all good things,
give N and N wisdom and devotion
in the ordering of their life together.
May they dwell together in love and peace
all the days of their life,
seeking one another's welfare,
bearing one another's burdens
and sharing one another's joys;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

All **Amen.**

The couple may pray together:

*God of all good things,
we offer you our lives,
our hopes and hurts,
our praise and promise,
in a covenant of faith and hope.
Unite our wills in your will,
that we may support one another
and show forth your love*

all the days of our lives;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The minister may say

May almighty God
give you grace to persevere with joy,
that he may complete
the work he has begun in you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

Acclamation

The following Acclamation may be said, or a hymn or song may be sung.

All For your goodness to us at all times,
we praise you, O Lord.
For the gift of life and love
All **we praise you, O Lord.**
For the means of grace and the hope of glory
All **we praise you, O Lord.**
May the blessing of our God be upon us, now and always.
All **Prosper the work of our hands, O Lord.**
Prosper the work of our hands.

Prayers of Intercession

These or other prayers from the Resource Section may be used.

God of love and mercy,
look with kindness on your servants *N* and *N*.
Give them wisdom and devotion in their life together,
that each may be to the other
a strength in need, a counsellor in perplexity,
a comfort in sorrow and a companion in joy.
Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

May the hospitality of their home
bring refreshment and joy to all around them;
may their love overflow to neighbours in need
and embrace those in distress.

Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

We pray that those whose lives are brought together
may be given wisdom, patience and courage
to serve one another in Christ's name.

Help them to desire all that is good,
that the offering of their lives may speak your praise.
Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

May the friends and family gathered here,
and those separated by distance,
be strengthened and blessed this day.
Lord, in your mercy

All **hear our prayer.**

Sustain *N* and *N* throughout their lives
and finally, in your mercy, bring them
to the joy of your heavenly city
where we will all see you face to face.

All Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers,
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

The Peace

The president may introduce the Peace with a suitable sentence and then says

All The peace of the Lord be always with you
and also with you.

These words may be added

Let us offer one another a sign of peace.

All may exchange a sign of peace.

Preparation of the Table

Taking of the Bread and Wine

A hymn may be sung.

The gifts of the people may be gathered and presented.

The table is prepared and bread and wine are placed upon it.

One or more of the prayers at the preparation of the table may be said.

The president takes the bread and wine.

The Eucharistic Prayer

An authorized Eucharistic Prayer is used.

The Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

The president breaks the consecrated bread.

We break this bread
to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

Giving of Communion

The president says this or another invitation to communion:

Draw near with faith.
Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.
Eat and drink
in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

The president and people receive communion.

*Authorized words of distribution are used and the communicant replies **Amen.***

During the distribution hymns and anthems may be sung.

Prayer after Communion

Silence is kept.

The Post Communion or another suitable prayer, from the Resource Section or elsewhere, is said.

All **Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out
in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.**

Conclusion**The Dismissal**

A hymn may be sung.

The president may use the following, or some other suitable blessing:

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

A minister says

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

Annex E

PASTORAL GUIDANCE COVER NOTE

This document is still in DRAFT form. It comprises the first two sections of the Pastoral Guidance, which deal specifically with the use and implementation of the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF). The PLF resources are being commended, whilst the PLF forms of service will be subject to a full synodical process for authorisation under Canon B 2. Even though the outcome of the Canon B 2 process is uncertain, this draft guidance nevertheless outlines how suitable guidance may be articulated around both commended and authorised material, should the outcome of the B 2 process be successful. However, all sections relating to the possibility of authorised forms of service are therefore highly provisional and subject to change, and are only offered as an exemplar of what could be. These are indicated by being in italics.

We recognise that the Pastoral Guidance needs some further refinement before finalisation and promulgation, because there has not yet been time to incorporate fully the implications of the House's decision to move to B2 authorization for the standalone services.

Significant amounts of work have been done on Part 3, which will explore ministry, the life of clergy and lay ministers and the ministry of bishops. Further work still needs to be completed in this area.

Drafting Group

A small but diverse drafting group contributed and helped shape the draft. In addition, the following people and departments have been consulted:

- The legal department
- The national ministry team: discernment, vocations, formation and lay ministries in particular
- The national lead for chaplaincy
- National Liturgical Adviser
- The education team
- The National Safeguarding Team
- RACS
- Representatives of the College of Deans regarding cathedrals

While working on this guidance, particular care was taken to include the questions and concerns raised by General Synod, including those voices in the meeting of the House of Clergy. The draft was also run past a number of LGBTQI+ readers from different church traditions whose comments and suggestions were taken into account.

Guiding principles

The draft has been arranged in a question and answer format in an effort to be user-friendly and accessible, and to find a format that can be easily added to as further questions emerge. It is

intended to be a living document. The format however means that it is not possible to make a consistent theological and pastoral argument in quite the same way as in *Issues in Human Sexuality*. The underlying theological work for the use and implementation of the PLF can be found in the Theological Rationale. The Q&A format also leads to some repetition, but allows people to search for the answers they are looking for without having to keep going back to previous pages. It was decided that this should be clearly set out as guidance, and that the theological framework should be written separately.

In writing this draft, the following principles have guided the work:

- Warmth and a pastoral outlook in tone have been paramount; the intention is for the draft to be accessible and pastorally sensitive, rather than clinical and purely factual. However, because of the nature of providing guidance, and the complex space of disagreement we inhabit, readers may find the tone to be more restricted than what we would have liked to model.
- Writing has tried to minimise rather than amplify the othering of LGBTQI+ people, but as above, the nature of the work means that this has not always been as possible as had been hoped.
- The assumption has been that at every level, national, diocesan or parochial, there will always be a diversity of views and experience among any group and any congregation, regardless of the strength of the steer given by their leadership.
- The principle has been followed that everything that can be devolved to local decision-making should be, though this has had to be balanced with the need for national advice at a time when some may feel fearful of attack or threatened legal action.
- Finally, this guidance has been drafted with the expectation that standalone services using the PLF will be authorised, that the pastoral guidance will be applied consistently, and that there will be an independent reviewer to ensure fairness and consistency.

You will see that there are a number of 'placeholders' in the text. These either represent complex issues that are not urgent and can be explored at a later stage, or drafting that needs to be done once the shape of pastoral reassurance is clearer.

Commended prayers and standalone services

In various places reference is made to standalone services; this is intended to be a reference to the forms of service proposed for approval by the Synod under Canon B 2, and to enable to clearly distinguish between what is allowed with regard to the commended prayers in the PLF Resource Section, and what can only be done if and once the forms of service have been authorised. The text relating to standalone services is liable to change in the course of the synodical process for authorisation. If that process concluded that the PLF services could not be authorised, then these passages from the Pastoral Guidance would then be removed entirely. For now, these are indicated in italics.

LLF Pastoral Guidance

1 GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF THE PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH

The Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF hereafter) are a resource for God's pilgrim people as they journey on the way of Christ toward the fulness of his Kingdom. They are another means by which to give thanks for God's gifts in creation and redemption, to turn from sin, and to seek God's aid in becoming holy, in proclaiming the gospel, in loving our neighbours and pursuing justice.

The Church of England teaches that Holy Matrimony is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman, blessed by God in creation and pointing to the love between Christ and the Church; a way of life which Christ makes holy. It is within marriage that sexual intimacy finds its proper place. However, marriage is not open to all, and even for those who enter it, there is often a road of growth and development. Many wish to celebrate God's gifts and grace in other forms of committed, faithful relationships that are not marriage but nevertheless contains qualities and goods that are worth affirming and celebrating. Many would also like to pray for God's guidance and blessing as they seek to grow in love and faith. The PLF make provision for stable, faithful relationships between same-sex couples and for giving thanks for their faithfulness and their fruitfulness in service to God and neighbour. In that sense, they recognise the couple's commitments to one another. They ask for God's grace in the holy ordering of companionship and godly love as they follow Christ and seek to grow in holiness. They ask for God's blessing for them and their families as they offer self-giving love to one another, and in their witness and service to their neighbours. The PLF are specifically written for same-sex couples, because no provision is currently made for them through public forms of prayer. The PLF are not a form of marriage service, nor do they equate the relationships brought before God to Holy Matrimony. Nevertheless, they recognise all that is good, and holy, and faithful in these relationships and enable the people in these relationships to place themselves before God and ask for God's blessing for their journey of love and faith.

This first section of the guidance will address how a church may decide to start using the PLF, how they may relate to couples enquiring about the PLF, and how services may be offered, planned and enacted.

1.1 MAKING THE DECISION TO OFFER THE PRAYERS

1.1.1 Is there a process for a church to decide to offer the PLF?

The PLF are a suite of resources, which can be used and adapted in different ways for different purposes. When prayer is offered informally in private pastoral situations, outside of acts of public worship, this is left to the discretion of the minister, as part of sensitive, discerning pastoral ministry.

The PLF contain materials which can be used in prayers in regularly scheduled Sunday or weekday services. Again, this is a routine part of pastoral ministry, which is best handled by an incumbent who knows their congregation and has established a pastoral relationship with a couple asking for prayer as part of their journey of faith. The commended PLF Resource Section is designed for use in these regular services, but should not be used to offer standalone or special services (hereafter, 'standalone services'). These are services that do not fall within the normal, usual pattern of worship for a parish, and are designed primarily around the PLF.

While this more informal use of the PLF as part of regular worship is left to the discretion of the minister, it would be wise for them to discuss use in public services with their PCC and work within the tradition and sensitivities of their local context. A conversation with the PCC would need to be conducted according to the Pastoral Principles. Agreeing a simple policy on how the commended prayers would or would not be used could also be helpful, and help churches be transparent in this area. Given that the PLF would then be used as part of regular worship, involving congregations in discussion and feedback would be helpful. The LLF course could be used for this purpose. In any congregation, there will be a range of views and lived experience, so that the conversation needs handling with care and gentleness, and supported with the offer of additional pastoral care. Such a process would be one that exemplifies good practice, but in the end, use of the commended material is still left to the decision of the minister only, and they cannot be pressurised into using material they are not comfortable with, nor can a PCC veto the use of the PLF as part of regular services. Guidance in case of serious disagreement is offered in Section 2.2.

The PLF also aims to provide a form of service for which authorisation is being sought in the General Synod. Only in this case could the PLF be used as a standalone service of public worship. The PLF here would offer a discrete structure for a particular and distinctive liturgical act – a rite for marking a significant stage in a committed and faithful same-sex relationship. The following paragraphs set out how, if such a form of service became authorised, the PLF may be adopted in local contexts.

This rite was designed specifically with same-sex couples in mind, for whom no other provision is made currently. Such a service is an opportunity to celebrate the goods of their relationship, and to ask for God's guidance and care as they grow in faith and love. The service is designed specifically for couples whose relationship is faithful, exclusive, permanent and stable. The PLF provide a way for a couple's relationship to be rejoiced in by the people of God and remembered in prayer. These services are not a form of Holy Matrimony, and must not be made to look like Holy Matrimony. The Notes to this form of service supply more detail. [\[insert hyperlink\]](#)

Such services are still a subject of disagreement in the Church of England, and some churches will want to offer them joyfully, while others will choose not to do so. Many others may welcome forms of prayers to be used with couples, without wanting to use the full suite, or go as far as using the standalone forms of service. In order to ensure that those standalone services offered follow a particular form and are not indicative of a change to the doctrine of marriage the churches that wish to offer them will need to agree to the authorised form by writing to their bishop and opting into their use. Once they have officially opted in, their details will be added to the diocesan record of churches that offer the service so that same-sex couples looking for a church where the service could take place can be directed to their nearest suitable parish. Dioceses will need to decide whether it is possible or appropriate for the list to be kept and accessed at deanery level, and how this needs to be administered.

Prior to opting in, agreement must be reached between PCC and incumbent (see below).

Services for covenanted friendship are of a slightly different kind, and, given they do not concern sexual relationships, can be offered at the discretion of the incumbent in whatever form is appropriate.

1.1.2 If a form of standalone service became authorised, how should the decision to offer them be made?

The decision to offer the rite described in the question above will need to be carefully negotiated in a local context. Although an incumbent or priest-in-charge has oversight of worship, the culture and church tradition of their local community needs to be taken into account. Given the strength of feeling around this question, it is wise to come to an agreed, negotiated decision after a process of sensitive consultation, informed by the Pastoral Principles (these can be found here [The Pastoral Principles | The Church of England](#)) for any use of the PLF as part of public worship. If a church wants to offer a standalone service, however, it is a requirement that the decision must be agreed between PCC and incumbent, and reflected in a PCC resolution. No minister can be made to use a form of service against their conscience, and no incumbent may override a decision by the PCC not to offer the prayers in that parish.

Most churches, in practice, will gather people who hold a range of opinions. Consultation with the wider congregation needs to enable people to express freely and safely what their views are, and explore together why these are the views they hold. The LLF course, the Pastoral Principles course, and the wider LLF resources and advocates can help local leaders to hold conversations in gracious and undefended ways, so that when decisions are taken, they rest on a transparent process that attends to different voices.

In cases of conflict or intractable difference between PCC and incumbent, the area/rural dean, archdeacon and/or bishop should be asked for advice and mediation. If no agreement can be reached at this time, PLF standalone services cannot be used in that setting, though this does not preclude future exploration of underlying questions, feelings and reasons for the disagreement with a view to revisit the decision at a later stage. No minister can be made to use a form of service against their conscience even if a PCC would like them to; conversely, an incumbent cannot overrule the decision of a PCC if they have decided not to use the PLF.

When a church opts in to offer this type of service, they should refer to a PCC resolution on the matter, and briefly explain how they have consulted with the wider congregation. Churches must notify the bishop and the area/rural dean of a decision to opt in.

It will be the role of the Pastoral Consultative Committee to respond to questions and develop guidance where particularly complex local arrangements give rise to further questions.

1.1.3 Can the PLF be offered in a cathedral?

The PLF can be offered in cathedrals, subject to proper cathedral process.

Cathedrals have a particular place within the life of a diocese, and need to function as places where all are welcome. This is particularly difficult with regard to the PLF, because either offering, or not offering them, may cause consternation with certain parts of the church. However, cathedrals are also well practiced at being places of welcome for many, and strive to enable all groups in a diocese to find a home there, and access the cathedral – in attending services, in using the premises and in relationships with the staff. The range of clergy in any one cathedral may include different opinions on the PLF, and this diversity can be an asset in relating to all in the diocese. Cathedrals have a particular role in modelling gracious disagreement and welcome to all, and, in their practice, refuting any sense of taint by association with a space where the prayers are, or are not, offered.

The decision to use any form of commended prayers would be at the discretion of the Dean, subject to the same restrictions about not using them for a standalone service, or a service whose main or entire focus is the PLF. The same good practice guidance about consultation and transparency would apply as with parishes.

Should standalone forms of service be authorised, the following principles would apply.

At one level, the process for cathedrals opting in to using the prayers will be similar to other churches. Agreement should be arrived at between the dean and the chapter. Consultation with the College of canons and key stakeholders would be desirable, but the ultimate decision lies with the dean and chapter.

Given part of the role of cathedrals as the seat of the bishop, chapters should seek the views of their diocesan bishop before making a decision, rather than simply notify the bishop. This conversation is primarily about ensuring good ongoing relationships, recognising that the final decision lies with the dean and chapter.

1.1.4 Can the prayers be used in chaplaincy contexts?

Yes, the prayers can be used in these contexts. Where there is a chapel or worship space associated with the chaplaincy, the same principles as with local churches should be followed to come to an agreement to use the prayers in the place of worship where they will take place. A local church may be used in consultation with the incumbent, *and, should standalone services be authorised, may only be used for standalone services where this has been agreed between PCC and incumbent.*

[placeholder: work will need to be done on different types of chaplaincy arrangements – college chapels, hospital chapels etc, including where ecumenical and interfaith elements are present; in addition, further consideration will be given to chaplaincy contexts in the development of the parts of the Guidance that deal with ministry]

1.1.5 Can some of the prayers be offered, but not all of them?

Yes. The PLF are a suite of resources, and different churches will feel able to offer different combinations of prayers for different circumstances. Some churches may want to offer private prayers only, others none at all, others may wish to offer the full range and, *if standalone services are authorised, opt in to be able to offer full standalone services*, while yet others may wish to use forms of prayers as part of their regular services only. Some may wish to use only prayers that do not include blessings. The PLF are meant to offer the flexibility needed for the wide range of local contexts of the CofE.

1.1.6 How can a church explain their decision not to offer the prayers?

The provision of an opt-in system for standalone services, should they be authorised, means that churches that wish to offer the full suite of prayers can say so proactively and joyfully, and be identified as doing so easily for those looking for such provision.

For those using commended resources, churches that wish to offer the PLF as part of regular services may also advertise, including by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.

For churches that choose a more limited approach, they will need to decide how far they explain this in their public presence (such as social media), and how to respond pastorally to questions from those who ask. Transparency and honesty, with kindness and generosity, are strongly recommended. Specific wording should be thought through locally and reflect the particular concerns of the parish, and make every effort to be positive without being misleading.

Churches may choose not to offer the PLF for a range of reasons, and it is incumbent upon all other church leaders and diocesan staff not to speculate, condemn or pressurise churches that are either not ready or not willing to offer the PLF. Where churches are challenged by local groups or people for not opting in, appropriate support should be offered by archdeacons and diocesan communications officers.

[Placeholder: examples of possible wording would be helpful; this could be a task for the pastoral consultative committee]

1.1.7 Who can offer the prayers?

Informal prayer drawing on the PLF suite of resources, such as, for instance, the prayer of Richard of Chichester, may be used by anyone to pray for others in private contexts.

In the context of a service of public worship, the PLF should only be used by licensed ministers, lay or ordained, as well as those who hold the bishop's Permission to Officiate, under the authority of the minister with the cure of souls.

1.1.8 Is the decision to use the prayers binding on all clergy in a team, including curates, associates, SSMs and retired clergy, and in all places?

Using commended prayers as part of regular worship can only happen at the discretion of the minister with the cure of souls. No minister can ever be forced to use the prayers against their conscience. Ministers who use commended prayers must ensure that they comply with the requirement that they should not seek to replicate or imply an equivalence with Holy Matrimony, and, if they are not the minister with the cure of souls, must obtain permission to do so.

Should the PLF forms of service be authorised, then the following principles would apply.

The decision of whether to use the prayers is made jointly between the incumbent and the PCC for this specific church, and binding on all ministers. No member of the team may use the prayers in that parish if the PCC and incumbent had not agreed that they should be used. If the PCC and incumbent had agreed that they could be used, however, no member of the clergy and licenced ministers team may be compelled to conduct a service using the prayers against their conscience.

The decision is parish-specific, which means that if a clergy person was the incumbent of a church that did not agree to opt in to use the PLF for separate services but was invited to conduct such a service in a different church, whose PCC and incumbent agreed to them being used, they would be at liberty to do so. This may, of course, create friction with their own congregation, which they would have to consider in making their own decision on whether to accept such an invitation.

Similarly, other members of the ministerial team would be at liberty to conduct a service in another church with the agreement of that parish's incumbent and PCC. Yet again, this may cause friction within the team and with the original parish, and needs considering carefully and prayerfully.

Where a parish has made a decision, it is expected that members of the ministerial team would generously support it, whilst not having to go against their own conscience. Diversity within a team can be a source of conflict, but it can also be an asset in ministering to groups of people who will never be fully monochrome, and gives an opportunity to model generous handling of difference.

The configuration of team ministries is varied, and specific circumstances and questions may vary. Complex local questions may be referred to the Pastoral Consultative Committee.

1.1.9 Can decisions around the use of the prayers be reversed by a new incumbent? What happens if an incumbent changes their mind?

No minister can be required to use the prayers. When a new incumbent comes into post, this will have followed an appointment process. If the parish has strong views on whether the prayers should or should not be offered, and in what form, this should be agreed in advance of appointment and clearly flagged in the paperwork, so that there would be no surprises when a new incumbent takes up their post.

It is up to the discretion of the minister with the cure of souls to use or not use the commended prayers, in accordance with the notes to the PLF. However, it would be good practice to be transparent and collaborative in making and implementing decisions locally.

If standalone forms of service are authorised, then for churches that have already had a conversation and made a formal decision, jointly between PCC and incumbent, there is no reason why this could not be revisited in a PCC meeting if an incumbent changes their mind. Here, the principles set out in 1.1.1 would apply again, asking for consultation and agreement with the PCC. Conversely, revisiting the decision could also happen in response to a motion brought by a PCC member.

If either a new incumbent comes in and wishes to revisit the status quo, or an existing incumbent changes their mind, in a way that creates conflict and strong disagreement with the PCC, mediation and advice should be sought from suitably qualified persons – this may be the area/rural dean, archdeacon, or a locally appointed LLF advisor. Dioceses should nurture a small team of people able to come alongside parishes and ministers; mediators need suitable skills, capacity, and the willingness to remain impartial.

In addition, it would be advisable for PCCs and incumbents to build in a review period after their first conversation on this matter. If they decided to offer the full suite of PLF, this would allow for review of how this has been received, what has worked well, and how they may want to continue, as well as make it possible for those who disagree to express their thoughts. If they decided not to offer the full suite of resources, it is also an opportunity for evaluation and seeking to learn from practice so far. In both cases, such a conversation would open the way for possible changes.

1.1.10 How can a church who are not choosing to use the prayers, either publicly or privately, still respond well to enquiries by couples asking for a service?

Churches should strive for a position of maximum transparency over their practice, so that couples who attend the church regularly would know what the stated position is, and those who are not regular attenders would be able to find out easily. It would be helpful to be clear about how far a church may go – would they offer private prayers at all, private prayers only, prayers as part of regular Sunday worship – as well as what they will not do (a standalone service following a civil ceremony, or using prayers of blessing). However, no church is required to make their position known.

If an enquiry is made from outside the regular congregation, an appropriate pastoral response needs to be made, which explains the reasons for not offering the prayers or service that a couple is requesting, without trying to coerce a couple into the church's own perspective. The couple should be signposted to a church that offers the type of service they are looking for, or to the deanery or diocesan point of contact who could do so. Every diocese has a responsibility to ensure that a system is in place to facilitate this. Whether a list and point of contact are available at deanery, area or diocesan level will be dependent on local context, sensitivities and capacity.

Contact with a couple should always be sensitive and generous, and avoid becoming judgemental or coercive. Local churches need to be aware that, whatever their reasons, and however well they try to explain them, the simple fact of saying 'no' can be taken as deep rejection and judgement. Entering into protracted conversations or arguments over this is not appropriate.

It would still be appropriate however to welcome a couple warmly if they attend on a Sunday and offer a conversation if they found it helpful.

If an enquiry is made from within the regular congregation, it is possible that messaging is unclear about what the church would or would not offer out of the suite of resources. It could also indicate a lack of transparency over doctrine and teaching, and reveal how much diversity there often is in most churches, even when the leadership assume that the majority or totality of a church agrees with them. It would be helpful for local leaders to reflect on how they can engage the wider congregation in thinking about questions of sexuality, and on how ministry can take into account the reality of diversity within the congregation in the most appropriate way.

An open, pastorally sensitive conversation should be had, where the couple's perspective can be expressed safely, whether they decide to stay within the church and abide by its teaching, stay within the church and live with difference but still seek the service they long for in another church, or decide to move to another church.

1.1.11 Can a church decide to only offer the PLF in private situations?

The canons regulate the forms of service that may be used in public prayer and the administration of the sacraments. Prayers in private, pastoral contexts are left to the discretion of the incumbent. A church is completely at liberty not to offer any of the PLF within the context of public worship, but this would not bar ministers from praying with people in other contexts.

1.1.12 What is the system for ensuring all couples can be signposted to a church that will offer the prayers for them?

Churches that wish to use the commended resources as part of regular services may indicate this on their website.

Should standalone forms of services be authorised, then the opt-in system for churches to decide whether to offer a standalone service for same-sex couples will be the main mechanism to enable such a system. A list will be kept at diocesan level, and, if appropriate, at deanery level. A point of contact should be available either at diocesan or deanery level, and publicised clearly on the diocesan website, so couples could be signposted to their nearest church able to offer these services. Churches that have opted in may signal this by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.com.

It is important to note however that there is no automatic right for such a service to be offered – even when a church has opted in, it is still left to the discretion of the minister whether to offer them to a particular couple, based on a pastoral conversation.

Churches that opt in to offer these services will in all likelihood offer the full range of PLF. Other churches may offer prayers as part of a Sunday service in more informal ways, on a case-by-case basis, and it will be up to them to explain and make clear what they would or would not do.

1.1.13 If a church offers the prayers, do couples have an automatic right to have a service?

There is no legal entitlement to these prayers, unlike the entitlement of opposite-sex couples to get married in a parish church where they live or have a qualifying connection.

The offer of a service in a particular case is at the discretion of the local minister. Having said this, it would be good practice to have a pastoral conversation, and, if the church normally offers such services, the minister should have a valid pastoral or other reason (including reasons of conscience) for refusing, and be able to support the couple in understanding their decision. Ministers should be satisfied that the couple's relationship is permanent, faithful, stable and exclusive.

Conversely, because there is no legal requirement for residence or a qualifying connection, couples are free to ask for the prayers within any church in their area.

1.1.14 Are there prayers for single people or friends?

There are already many prayers already available for many different life situations, which ministers should be familiar with. However, one stream of further work identified in LLF was to give more attention to singleness and friendship, and additional prayers may be part of that work.

A number of prayers in the resource section of the PLF may be suitable for friends, and the sample service for a Covenanted Friendship shows how this may be shaped.

1.1.15 Can the prayers be used with opposite-sex couples?

The PLF were designed specifically for same-sex couples, for whom no other provision is currently made. There are prayers included in the PLF that may be suitable for opposite-sex couples, some of which are already commended elsewhere.

The possibility of a separate rite however is conceived with same-sex couples in mind only, as there is already ample provision for opposite-sex couples which is not available for same-sex couples. If an opposite sex couple wanted a service following a civil marriage, there is existing provision in Common Worship with the Order for Dedication after a Civil Marriage or the Thanksgiving for Marriage.

1.1.16 Should standalone services be authorised, would the opt-in system protect churches who choose not to opt in from litigation under the Equality Act 2010 ("EqA")?

A same-sex couple who want a standalone service of prayer following a civil marriage might wish to challenge the decision of a PCC not to opt in, or the refusal of a minister whose PCC has opted in not to themselves lead such a service, on the basis that a Common Worship Order for Dedication after a Civil Marriage or the Thanksgiving for Marriage would have been given to an opposite-sex couple, and so they are being treated less favourably on the basis of their sexual orientation. The risk that such legal action will be commenced cannot be avoided, but it is unlikely to be successful. The EqA makes it unlawful to discriminate (i.e. treat a person less favourably) because of a 'protected characteristic' (one of which is sexual orientation) but only within certain areas of activity defined in the EqA. Discriminatory acts committed outside those areas are not unlawful. There are also some discriminatory acts which, although prima facie unlawful, can be the subject of exceptions which make them lawful.

The only area of activity that is likely to be relevant is 'services and public functions'. It is unlawful for a 'service-provider' to discriminate against a person requiring the service by not providing the person with the service (EqA s.29(1)). The EqA does not comprehensively define 'service' but the [statutory code of practice issued](#) by the Equality and Human Rights Commission states (at para 13.69) that acts of worship do not themselves constitute 'services' within the meaning of the EqA. This reflects what was said in the explanatory notes to the EqA (see [Explanatory Notes](#), para 742).

In the unlikely event that a court were to decide that the EqA should be read in a way contrary to that taken by the EHRC, and hold that the provision of 'services' includes worship services, it would be

possible for the PCC or the minister to rely on the exemption in the EqA (schedule 23, para 2) for 'organisations relating to religion or belief'. That permits an organisation the purpose of which is to practise a religion or belief, and its ministers, to restrict participation in its activities by reference to a person's sexual orientation if the restriction is imposed to avoid conflict with strongly held convictions of a significant number of a religion's followers ('the non-conflict principle'). As it is clearly the case that there are a significant number of active members of the Church of England who strongly hold the conviction that it would be wrong to use a PLF stand-alone service, this should not be difficult to demonstrate.

1.2 MEETING COUPLES AND PLANNING THE SERVICE

1.2.1 Can the prayers be used within services of public worship?

The PLF are designed for use in a range of contexts, following conversations between couple and minister about what pastoral need the prayers meet and how the church is able to respond.

Prayers from the Resource Section of the PLF may be included in the intercessions or prayers of a regular service. Like all prayers in public worship, the intercessions at such a service must not be 'contrary to, or indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter'. They may not, however, be used to construct an entire service whose focus is the PLF.

Should standalone forms of service be authorised, prayers from the Resource Section may form part of a standalone or special service which follows the service structure provided in the PLF, provided that it does not look like and cannot be mistaken for a service of Holy Matrimony; these are services that a local church would have to opt in to use, by agreement of incumbent and PCC.

1.2.2 Can the prayers be used in standalone services?

Only if these are authorised via the B2 process. At this point, they could be used, provided the service does not look like and cannot be mistaken for Holy Matrimony. A public standalone service may be appropriate following a civil ceremony (civil partnership or civil wedding) but would be subject to an opt-in requirement whereby an incumbent and PCC have to jointly agree that these services will be offered and notify the bishop that they will do so, after which the church will be added to the diocesan (and deanery if appropriate) list of churches offering this type of service.

1.2.3 Do the PLF presuppose sexual activity? Could or should a minister ask questions of the couple with regards to sexual activity?

The PLF make no assumptions with regards to sexual intimacy. Instead they seek to encourage the relationship as a whole to display virtues of stability, faithfulness, loyalty and exclusivity and to seek God's help in growing in those.

It would not be appropriate for a minister to ask questions that concentrate on the details of any couple's intimate relationship – whether this is a couple asking for the PLF, or an opposite-sex wedding couple.

Having said this, appropriate preparation should encourage a positive, lifegiving, mutual, faithful, respectful relationship. The focus of preparation should be on each partner enabling the other to flourish and grow more fully into the likeness of Christ as well as how their household may model increasing grace and loving generosity.

1.2.4 Who can the prayers be offered to?

The decision to offer the PLF in any form is a primarily pastoral decision to be taken by the minister in conversation with a couple. The discernment of the minister here is paramount, though they can only offer the PLF to consenting adults (over 18), and can only offer standalone services if they become authorised, and then only in agreement with the PCC.

Faithfulness and commitment to long-term relationships matters and are appropriate subjects to discuss with an enquiring couple. As with all pastoral contact around relationships, wisdom and good discernment will be necessary. The decision to recognise and pray for a relationship in public worship is significant, since public services help to communicate the types of goods and virtues that we value in a relationship. Public worship also helps to embody our theology. The PLF embody a theology of pastoral provision that affirms everything that is good, faithful and fruitful and seeks God's help and blessing in growing in faith, love and holiness.

Preparation for any couple, in any case, should include a discussion of the type of Christian virtues that they are committing to develop within their relationship, such as stability and faithfulness within a monogamous lifestyle. The focus of preparation is what kind of commitment the couple intend to make, and their readiness to make it. If the minister has grave doubts about the relationship – because of infidelity or in cases of unhealthy or abusive dynamics of power, for instance – then they should have a conversation with the couple with a view to help them work on their relationship. It may be appropriate to delay or refuse formal prayers. If concerns emerge that are of a safeguarding nature, appropriate referrals should be made.

It nevertheless remains that the overall ethos of the PLF is to help a couple grow in holiness with the help of the church around them, praying for them, where holiness is a goal to work towards rather than something already owned – as indeed is the case for all human beings.

1.2.5 Can the prayers be offered after a couple has contracted a civil marriage or civil partnership?
Yes, they can. Ministers should consult the Notes to the service for advice and guidance in shaping the service.

1.2.6 What are covenanted friendships?

Friendship is an important category of relationship in Scripture and in Christian tradition. Many of us will have a number of friendships, and these will have different degrees of intimacy and commitment. Christians belong to those whom Jesus Christ calls his friends, for whom he lays down his life. Christian friendship involves mutual love and harmony with one another, sharing one another's burdens and joys, in conformity to Christ. It is something more than a bond over common interests, tastes or affiliations. Friendship is a form of affectionate, hospitable shared Christian life we need to recover. However, it is possible that some such friendships take on a special meaning, or that two people may want to express the depth of commitment and trust of their friendship, for the deeper pursuit of its goods, in a more formal way. An example of this is found in the covenant between David and Jonathan in the Bible (1 Samuel 20), and there are other precedents in Christian tradition.

There is no template for this type of covenant, no preconditions. It is the free decision of two friends who wish to express their mutual love and loyalty before God in a deeper way. The conditions needed are defined by these friends, as are the type of goods they commit to embody. The inclusion of covenanted friendships in the PLF reflects the importance of deep friendship, particularly in a world in which commitment is often associated only with sexual relationships. Covenanted

friendships in contrast embody a type of relationship that is both committed and non-sexual, which is not exclusive, yet deeply meaningful, particular, and seeking to grow in holiness.

1.2.7 Can prayers for covenanted friendship be offered to any set of friends? Do they presume exclusivity? Can married people enter into a covenanted friendship with other people?

Friendships are relationships of an entirely different nature to marriage. Those who wish to seal a covenanted friendship may be of the same sex or opposite sexes. The friends may be married to other people, or unmarried. The friendship is by definition not sexually intimate. It will likely be expressed in practical forms of sharing aspects of life together.

As with all friendships, care will need to be taken to identify the nature of the covenant and how the bonds of covenanted friendship will complement other friendships and (where relevant) the bonds of marriage.

Covenants with respect to friendship are of a fundamentally different nature to a marriage covenant, and this difference needs to be explored thoroughly. If a person seeking to enter a covenanted friendship is married, it would be good practice to explore how this different type of covenant may impact or enrich the distinct and still deeper covenant of marriage to which they are already committed..

1.2.8 Can churches choose to use the prayers for covenanted friendship, but not the other PLF? Yes, churches can choose which aspects of the PLF they want to draw on for their own particular context.

1.2.9 What kind of preparation may be appropriate for couples ahead of a service using the PLF? Can they be invited to marriage preparation classes with other couples?

It is appropriate to offer a form of preparation for any couple who wish to mark a significant stage in their relationship, and support them in growing in their lives together before God. Whether this is best done individually or with other couples is a question that should be discussed locally, with the couple, and with a careful consideration of the context, and how different types of relationships and services will be acknowledged. It should not be assumed that a same-sex couple cannot join preparation or relationship nurture classes with opposite-sex couples; conversely, it should not be assumed that they should automatically feel comfortable in doing so. Pastorally sensitive conversations that explore different options and possibilities, and are honest about the opportunities and complexities of a local context, are essential.

1.2.10 How can local churches (individually or together) offer appropriate relationship support in terms of both preparation, and follow up?

Churches should follow good practice developed with any other couple when working with those requesting the PLF: pastoral conversations and preparation as well as post-service contact and pastoral follow up are appropriate and show the care and concern of the local church, and their commitment to support a couple in their growth in commitment, love and faith.

It would be at the discretion of churches locally to develop further resources, and consider whether preparation and follow up could be done jointly. The sharing of good practice and learning points at deanery level should be encouraged.

1.2.11 Do we ask questions about previous relationships? (including, if the person has been previously married, checking that they are legally divorced?)

The work of preparation with any couple needs to be done kindly, generously and sensitively. Good preparation does involve speaking of previous relationships and the way in which they may colour the current relationship, whether through learning and experience, or the presence of scars, or both. The aim of the conversation is not to judge the worth of a couple but to enable them to grow in their current relationship and establish solid foundations. Where a previous relationship is not formally dissolved, offering any kind of public prayers must be delayed until this is resolved.

Grace and generosity need to be the hallmark of such conversations, with a recognition that there is much that will remain unsaid, and that relationships fail for all kinds of reasons. Whilst it is appropriate for a minister to ask about former relationships, it would not be appropriate to push or pry.

1.2.12 If someone has been divorced, or had a CP dissolved, does this affect whether we can offer the prayers? Should appropriate prayers of repentance be included?

This should be approached with an appropriate sense of pastoral tenderness and attention to God's abundant grace. There will be individual circumstances in which there may well be a longing for an opportunity for repentance, but it will be important to contextualise that in a rich and gracious sense that while all enter marriage and civil partnerships with a commitment to lifelong faithfulness and devotion, some relationships break down for a multitude of reasons, and new promise is offered in new relationships; no sense of judgment or condemnation should be implied by any kind of conversation about relationships which have come to an end.

However, equally, if after conversation with the couple the minister feels uncomfortable that it would be appropriate to offer the prayers, they should feel under no compulsion to do so. It would be pastorally appropriate for the minister to be clear about their reasons for not doing so as part of the conversation, but again with no sense of judgement or condemnation.

1.2.13 What prayers and services are appropriate for a couple where one or both partners have transitioned?

It is already possible for a person who has transitioned to marry in their legally acquired gender within an opposite-sex marriage in church, but the usual legal obligation for parish priests to marry them does not apply.

The PLF were designed to be broad and generous. It would be entirely appropriate and consistent with the intent of the PLF for them to be used to affirm the goods found in the relationship of a couple where one partner has transitioned, and to pray for God's help and support as they seek to grow in love and faith together.

1.3 GUIDELINES FOR A PUBLIC SERVICE INCLUDING THE PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH

1.3.1 Are lay ministers authorised to offer the prayers?

Yes, they are, with the oversight of the incumbent and in line with any agreement between PCC and incumbent.

1.3.2 How might we include children in conversation/preparation/the ceremony?

Children can be included in the same way as we might include them in preparing for and participating in other occasional services. Decisions on how this may happen rely on the wisdom, experience and discernment of local ministers.

1.3.3 When the PLF are used in a service of public worship, should that fact be recorded in the service register?

When the PLF are used within a regular service, a note can be made in the service register. *If standalone forms of service become authorised and a separate service is offered, this service should be recorded in the service register, with its own entry.* No record should be made in the register of marriage services, as it is for marriages only.

1.3.4 Can some form of certificate be issued?

Churches can design a certificate if they wish to do so in order to mark the occasion. This would be purely commemorative and have no official or legal status. Such certificates must not suggest or imply in their wording or design that they commemorate or are proof of a marriage.

1.3.5 Are there things we cannot do in a service using the PLF, in terms of words and symbols?

Ministers should take care in the use of words and symbolic actions such as vesture that these are reverent and seemly, and do not indicate any departure from the doctrine of the Church of England. The PLF should not give the impression of simulating marriage. No parts of the authorised text for the solemnisation of Holy Matrimony may be used in a service using the PLF.

As for any other occasional services, the shape and content of the service should be discussed and planned within a pastoral setting with the persons seeking the prayers.

1.3.6 Are there expectations about dress (for the couple and for clergy)? Should couples be told not to wear traditional wedding dress? What about other wedding traditions?

Pastoral preparation with the couple should cover the fact that this is not a wedding, in the same way that Prayers of dedication after a civil marriage, or the blessing of a marriage, are not services of Holy Matrimony. The use of the prayers in the service should not attempt to resemble Holy Matrimony. The aims and nature of the service should be clearly explained as part of a warm welcome to all who attend.

What couples choose to wear, the music they choose, how different people are involved in the service, chosen readings and so on, are rooted in evolving cultures and subcultures rather than in theological or liturgical principle. How these are incorporated (or not) properly belongs to decisions made locally by the minister after conversation between minister and couple.

1.3.7 How much space is there to adapt the service, and to explain what it means?

Where material from the Resource Section (commended material) is used in a public service, it must not be the central focus of that service, or constitute a separate, standalone service. It must not seek to replicate Holy Matrimony.

If standalone services came to be authorised then, like all authorized forms of service, they may be subject to variations not of substantial importance, provided that they are not 'contrary to, or indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter'. A form of words to explain the service can be found in the preface to the prayers.

1.3.8 What happens if the relationship prayed for through the PLF comes to an end?

Just as with the breakdown of any relationship, compassionate pastoral support is the best way to care for a couple whose relationship has broken down. The PLF do not affect a couple's legal status, and there are therefore no official steps to be taken.

1.3.9 What financial contribution is expected for the PLF?

No fee is chargeable, but payment may be requested to cover direct expenses associated with a standalone service.

2 CHURCH LIFE IN LOCAL CONTEXTS

2.1 MAKING TRANSPARENT DECISIONS LOCALLY

2.1.1 How can a local church come to a common mind about the PLF?

While use of the commended prayers from the resource sections of the PLF is down to the incumbent, it would be very wise for this decision to be discussed with the PCC, with some consultation with the wider congregation, and made known ahead of time.

It is important to acknowledge the honest limits of a church's 'common mind': in almost every church there will always be a range of views on any matter. Coming to a common mind, therefore, may be a matter of coming to a considered mind among the leadership: that is, agreement at the level of minister and PCC (in short, establishing a policy commitment which reflects the considered mind of the leadership).

In very many cases, coming to a considered mind will be a reasonably straightforward outworking of deep bonds of trust and shared work between lay and ordained leaders. As with very many pressure points in church life, finding consensus will likely entail compromise and generosity, grounded in a desire to focus on the church's mission and call.

It is also important, at the outset, to be honest about the fact that the PLF are only part of a wider conversation, and that the decision of whether or not to offer the PLF in any form needs to be taken against the backdrop of these wider conversations about being human, sexuality, church and ethics. These wider conversations can be sustained through the material offered by LLF ([Living in Love and Faith \(churchofengland.org\)](http://Living in Love and Faith (churchofengland.org))) and need to be framed by consistent use of the Pastoral Principles (The Pastoral Principles | The Church of England).

As set out in 1.1.2, should standalone services be authorised, the process for agreeing the PLF will be as follows:

The decision to offer the rite described in the question above will need to be carefully negotiated in a local context. Although an incumbent or priest-in-charge has oversight of worship, the culture and church tradition of their local community needs to be taken into account. Given the strength of feeling around this question, it is wise to come to an agreed, negotiated decision after a process of sensitive consultation, informed by the Pastoral Principles (these can be found here The Pastoral Principles | The Church of England) for any use of the PLF as part of public worship. If a church wants to offer a standalone service however, it is a requirement that the decision must be agreed between PCC and incumbent, and reflected in a PCC resolution. No minister can be made to use a form of

service against their conscience, and no incumbent may override a decision by the PCC not to offer the prayer in that parish

Most churches, in practice, will gather people who hold a range of opinions. Consultation with the wider congregation needs to enable people to express freely and safely what their views are, and explore together why these are the views they hold. The LLF course, the Pastoral Principles course, and the wider LLF resources and advocates can help local leaders to hold conversations in gracious and undefended ways, so that when decisions are taken, they rest on a transparent process that attends to different voices.

In cases of conflict of intractable difference between PCC and incumbent, the area/rural dean, archdeacon and/or bishop should be asked for advice and mediation. If no agreement can be reached, PLF standalone services cannot be used in that setting, though this does not preclude future exploration of underlying questions, feelings and reasons for the disagreement with a view to revisit the decision at a later stage. No minister can be made to use a form of service against their conscience even if a PCC would like them to; conversely, an incumbent cannot overrule the decision of a PCC if they have decided not to use the PLF.

When a church opts in to offer this type of service, they should refer to a PCC resolution on the matter, and briefly explain how they have consulted with the wider congregation. Churches must notify the bishop and the area/rural dean of a decision to opt in.

2.1.2 Is there any help/ are there any resources in enabling good conversation in churches and PCCs?

There is a great wealth of resources, in the CofE, in the wider church and in non-profit organisations to help facilitate good conversations on difficult topics. Some of these are more generic and not specific to conversations around sexuality, like training for leaders by Bridgebuilders or various coaching organisations, or the Difference Course ([The Difference Course | The Archbishop of Canterbury](#)); CPAS has resources for PCCs; and dioceses have members of staff, particularly archdeacons, who have wisdom and experience in helping churches in times of conflict.

More specific resources are available on the LLF hub ([Living in Love and Faith | The Church of England](#)) with the LLF course and wider resources, and of course the Pastoral Principles as a starting point. All of these should help churches have good conversations within a respectful, open environment that promotes learning together in contexts of disagreement. Diocesan LLF advocates may wish to continue their role and offer support in this way.

In addition, it would be highly desirable for every diocese or group of dioceses to consider having trained facilitators who can come alongside churches, either at the point of first conversation, or when/if these conversations become conflictual.

2.1.3 What does a church need to say on their website and information about their stance on sexuality?

There is no formal or legal requirement for local churches to make the whole of their theological views known. Detailed statements on websites may not be the best way to convey information about deeply sensitive, pastoral matters, but this needs to be balanced by concerns for transparency, and care for those looking for a church that will welcome them.

Given that websites can be a first point of contact for enquirers, transparency is strongly recommended, with a statement about whether the church offers the PLF, and to what extent is highly recommended. If a church does not offer the PLF, it would be pastorally appropriate to have

details of how couples can contact someone to help them find a church that does (the deanery or diocesan point of contact).

The importance of transparency is discussed in section 1.1.6 above:

The provision of an opt-in system for standalone services, should they be authorised, means that churches who wish to offer the full suite of prayers can say so proactively and joyfully, and be identified as doing so easily for those looking for such provision. While the authorisation process takes its course, churches that wish to offer the PLF as part of regular services may also advertise, including by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.

For churches that choose a more limited approach, they will need to decide how far they explain this in their public presence (such as social media), and how to respond pastorally to questions from those who ask. Transparency and honesty, with kindness and generosity, are strongly recommended. Specific wording should be thought through locally and reflect the particular concerns of the parish, and make every effort to be positive without being misleading.

Churches may choose not to offer the PLF for a range of reason, and it is incumbent upon all other church leaders and diocesan staff not to speculate, condemn or pressurise churches that are either not ready or not willing to offer the PLF. Where churches are challenged by local groups or people for not opting in, appropriate support should be offered by archdeacons and diocesan communications officers.

2.1.4 How can a church model honesty, clarity and respect in teaching, whatever their theological outlook?

The Pastoral Principles offer a solid basis on which to base the teaching of a church. They do not prescribe any one view, but concentrate on the type of underlying attitude that makes for respectful, honest and caring speech. The wider LLF material can also help resource teaching, especially for churches that are used to engaging with clearly delineated perspectives, so that they can be confident that they do not misrepresent perspectives other than their own.

Churches cannot assume that their congregations will be monolithic, with everyone agreeing with a stated position; any group of people will contain theological and experiential difference. And in any church, there will be members who have friends, family and loved ones who are deeply affected by these matters, and what is said must therefore hold these relationships gently and generously.

Good teaching helps others learn, and therefore needs to make space for discussion and for the respectful consideration of the best of all positions, without pretending that all positions are equal. In all things, avoiding homophobia, hatred, caricature and *ad hominem* accusations is a hallmark of good teaching. Incumbents are responsible for the oversight of all other leaders, who may not have received the same level of training or been exposed to the same breadth of perspectives; it is therefore their responsibility to ensure a culture of respectful teaching and learning in local communities.

2.1.5 How can a church explore its practices and their impact on people, in particular in relation to homophobia?

As with the previous question, there are ample resources already available to help churches do this. The LLF course and the Pastoral Principles course would be helpful, along with robust self-examination on the part of the minister(s) and PCC, and reading the resources mentioned in the LLF book and the online library. There are also LGBTQIA+ Christian organisations and professionals who hold expertise and wisdom in facilitating conversations with congregations, PCCs, and individuals

that may be fruitful. These organisations span the full breadth of the theological spectrum, and every church should be able to find support and advice sensitive to their theological views.

An undefended listening exercise which asks for feedback may also be indicated, though this would be better done if facilitated by someone with experience and wisdom in this area.

An additional upcoming resources from the Church of England, *Teach us to pray* [[insert hyperlink when ready](#)], will help churches explore their practice in relation to pastoral prayer and prayer ministry, with a view to nurture healthy cultures with respect to prayer in pastoral setting, including (but not limited to) questions around sexuality.

Familiarity with and implementation of [safeguarding guidelines around spiritual abuse](#) and guidelines for nurturing healthy cultures is also crucial in this respect.

2.2 DISAGREEMENT AND CONFLICT

Significant disagreement is and always has been part of the life of the church in its journey, and strives toward deeper accord in its shared fellowship in Jesus Christ, not only because of sin but also because Christians have to work out what it means to proclaim and respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ in their particular contexts and cultures (or, as the Declaration of Assent puts it, to 'proclaim afresh in each generation'). Responses to disagreement should respect and express the fellowship or communion, the common participation we have in Christ and lead to its deepening, even where we discern serious error and need for repentance in one another. Disagreeing well in the church is framed by such recognition and impelled by the command to love one another. It aims to avoid destructive conflict and the settled antagonism of opposed parties, to value every member, and to move 'creatively through disagreement toward the fullness of agreement in God's truth, so that this may be proclaimed before God in worship and before humanity in mission.'¹ In practice, it involves the practice of consultation that reflects the participation of every member of the body in the shared gift of divine wisdom, the practice of conciliar decision-making attentive to the wider catholicity of the churches, and a concern for the conscience of each person.

2.2.1 What guidance can be offered to an incumbent of multiple churches with different traditions and wishes regarding the prayers?

It will always be advisable to find pastoral provisions in contexts where the wishes and traditions of the churches differ on the use of PLF; such an approach may require deep love, grace and respect (as well as 'agreeable disagreement') between the vicar and the different churches; love, grace and respect are marks of communities seeking to grow ever more like Christ – where there are different churches in, for example, a team where there are a range of convictions, it will be crucial that fellowships never lose sight of their vocation to be sites of character and grace.

Use of commended prayers in regular services will be the prerogative of the incumbent, but it would still be wise for this to be discussed extensively with the PCC, though they would have no right of veto.

If standalone forms of service were authorised, then, practically, each parish/PCC would have to make its own decision, together with the incumbent, on whether to use the PLF, following the guidance in 1.1.2. No church can demand that their incumbent should offer the PLF against their will,

¹ Faith and Order Commission, *Communion and Disagreement* (GS Misc 1139, 2016).
[communion and disagreement faoc report gs misc 1139.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#)

nor can they veto their incumbent offering the prayers in a different church if that church's PCC has agreed to the PLF being offered.

Where more than one clergy person is available, or there are LLMs willing to offer the prayers, it would be possible for the ministry team to agree between them that some ministers do not offer the prayers while others do. However, this could never override the decision of each parish, and the agreement to offer the prayers in any parish must be reached between the incumbent and the PCC.

2.2.2 What guidance can be given in cases of deep differences of opinion between vicar and PCC/church?

When there are deep differences, it can be helpful for the parties involved to take space for de-escalating conflict and reflect prayerfully. This might entail a season in which a vicar and PCC are advised to take a period of time for prayer and further learning before considering again questions about the use of PLF. During this time, the disagreeing parties might undertake the LLF course together, and/or the Pastoral Principles course, or even simply agree to hold a time when the matter is not on the agenda. External help and facilitation are often a key to having better conversations where each party can have space to articulate their views and feeling without having to simultaneously hold the process for the entire room.

Every diocese should issue guidance that is appropriate to their local context, and reflects the availability and skills of local staff, advocates and advisors who may be able to help. This might include deanery chapters, senior staff, MDR consultants, and clergy counselling or dispute advisory services. Bringing in outside trained facilitators would also be important, but would need to be at the invitation of/with the agreement of the incumbent.

If differences over the PLF and the wider questions it connects to threaten a pastoral breakdown between clergy and PCC, the archdeacon should be brought in at the earliest opportunity.

2.2.3 What support is there for clergy in cases of conflict with their congregation, with PCCs, with the bishop or with schools or other organisations they work with?

This question is one that is best fleshed out at local level, with knowledge of local resources. As above, it might include deanery chapters, senior staff, MDR consultants, and clergy counselling or dispute advisory services. Dioceses should also consider facilitated support groups for clergy and lay ministers.

In addition, clergy and lay ministers are encouraged to speak to their spiritual director, and, if appropriate, seek the advice of a work consultant or coach.

[placeholder for comment on PR: If the conflict is with the bishop, the pastoral reassurance provision would apply, including the possibility of adjudication by an independent reviewer.]

2.2.4 How do we protect clergy against malicious claims (of discrimination, or of conduct unbecoming)?

It is not possible to protect clergy against all malicious claims if someone is determined to complain. However, ongoing work around the new Clergy Conduct Measure needs to take this matter into close consideration. What does and does not constitute grounds for a complaint needs to be made clear at national and diocesan levels: if clergy are acting in line with what has been agreed nationally then they cannot be the subject of a complaint, so a complaint should not be raised, and if it is, it should be dismissed.

It is also important to note that the use of the PLF is a matter of 'doctrine, ritual and ceremonial', and therefore specifically excluded from the current CDM and draft CCM. The bishop should be consulted in order to arrange pastoral and practical support where needed.

Any formal proceedings relating to use of the PLF would probably need to be brought under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1963 (on the basis that they involved matter of doctrine, ritual or ceremonial) rather than under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003.

2.2.5 What should a church do if attacked (in person, online etc) for their stance on sexuality?
Churches should respond as they would normally do when attacked for any reason, by contacting their diocesan communications team for advice, and act on that advice. If the action involves threats to persons or criminal damage, they should report it to the police.

It is good practice for all churches to develop a simple communications policy about who responds, and when/how, to any attacks, however they come, regardless of the motive.

Support should also be offered through area/rural deans and archdeacons.

2.2.6 What are the expectations and boundaries for clergy in speaking about their personal views?
Clergy in the Church of England have longstanding freedom in expressing a variety of views, and twice during the creation of the current CDM Synod rejected the possibility of a form of misconduct for expressing particular opinions. The expectations and boundaries would remain what they currently are under the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy.

Neither clergy nor LLMs should engage in any kind of hate speech, incite violence or engage in actions that would be criminalised.

All ministers should balance their right to free speech with appropriate sensitivity and respect for the views and lives of others, and have particular regard for the way in which their own views may affect their parishioners, and their partners in the community.

2.2.7 Is there a social media code of conduct for how we speak of one another in public, in times of deep disagreement on sexuality?

There is no official national set of guidelines on conduct online, however, the principles outlined in the previous question apply here.

The Pastoral Principles offer powerful ways of reflection on how we relate to one another in both online and offline life.

Dioceses, benefices or churches may consider adapting the C of E social media guidelines for local use, which can be found here <https://www.churchofengland.org/terms-and-conditions/our-social-media-community-guidelines>.

2.2.8 What protection to freedom of conscience will be given to lay people who are currently involved in weddings- e.g. vergers, choir, bellringers and organists, who do not wish to be involved in services using the Prayers of Love & Faith?

It would not be appropriate to force a lay person to participate in a standalone PLF service should these be authorised, just as clergy cannot be forced to do so.

If the PLF are being used in the context of a regular act of worship, this would be more complicated, especially in the case of an organist or member of the choir if they have a contract, and especially in smaller churches where there may not be other organists available locally, even at deanery level.

In both cases, a pastoral conversation with the lay people involved, which respects their conscience, would need to happen with a view to reach an agreement on the way forward. If employment issues arise, advice should be taken from the archdeacon and/or the diocesan registrar.

2.2.9 Can an incumbent say that they do not wish the church building to be used at all for services using the PLF or would there be an expectation that they would allow the building to be used by other ministers if the PCC wishes them to be?

In terms of the use of the PLF as part of regular public worship, it would be wise for incumbent and PCC to agree a policy, but use of the prayers falls under the discretion of the incumbent.

Churches can only be used for standalone services using the PLF if those are authorised, and then only by agreement between the incumbent and the PCC following which they opt in to using the prayers and notify the diocese that they are doing so. It would be perfectly possible for an incumbent to agree that the building could be used for services led by another minister if the PCC wished them to be, but this would have to be freely agreed by the incumbent.

2.2.10 What will be done in response to accusations of homophobia, coercive prayer/conversion therapy and safeguarding risk?

The decision of a church or minister to adopt the PLF or not is a statement about the theological position it holds, and does not reflect positively or negatively on its safeguarding practices. All churches are required to comply with House of Bishops' Safeguarding Guidance and Safeguarding Code of Practice, and therefore people can reasonably expect safeguarding allegations to be dealt with in the same way regardless of where they might occur.

Instances of, for example, spiritual abuse or coercive prayer can occur anywhere, in any denomination, and in churches of all theological positions. The critical factor therefore relates to how healthy its culture is, how well people can challenge unhealthy behaviour, and how well disclosures of abuse are responded to.

Guidelines for good practice in pastoral prayer, *Teach us to pray* [[insert hyperlink when ready](#)] are being prepared and will help churches examine their own practices to ensure healthy practices of prayer with those who ask for it.

Where the alleged behaviour amounts to a crime, this should be reported to the police, and in relation to clergy, a CDM should be considered. It is important that adequate pastoral care is provided to the person reporting the crime, irrespective of both parties theological positions.

There may be occasions where the behaviour does not amount to a crime, but is still deemed to be unhealthy Christian behaviour, and is at risk of becoming spiritually abusive. Examples of such behaviours and potential responses can be found in the [Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults](#) guidance. It is important that at very local levels, all church officers and indeed congregations are aware of (and vigilant to) the hallmarks of a healthy culture, and the indications that either an individual, or a group of individuals, may be moving the wrong way along the spectrum of behaviour.

Where the person making the accusation is a child, young person or vulnerable adult, then the [House of Bishops Safeguarding Guidance](#) [[insert hyperlink](#)] must be followed.

2.3 RELATING TO OTHER CHURCHES LOCALLY

2.3.1 What is the role of deaneries or wider groupings of churches in ensuring that all couples can find a place of welcome and belonging?

This was explored earlier in question 1.1.12.

Churches that wish to use the commended resources as part of regular services may indicate this on their website.

Should standalone forms of services be authorised, then the opt-in system for churches to decide whether to offer a standalone service for same-sex couples will be the main mechanism to enable such a system. A list will be kept at diocesan level, and, if appropriate, at deanery level. A point of contact should be available either at diocesan or deanery level, and publicised clearly on the diocesan website, so couples could be signposted to their nearest church able to offer these services. Churches that have opted in may signal this by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.com.

It is important to note however that there is no automatic right for such a service to be offered – even when a church has opted in, it is still left to the discretion of the minister whether to offer them to a particular couple, based on a pastoral conversation.

Churches that opt in to offer these services will in all likelihood offer the full range of PLF. Other churches may offer prayers as part of a Sunday service in more informal ways, on a case-by-case basis, and it will be up to them to explain and make clear what they would or would not do.

In addition, churches may want to use deaneries and other local structures to share good practice and learning with regards to the PLF and wider LLF conversations.

2.4 CHURCH SCHOOL AND EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

2.4.1 How can church schools be encouraged to work with clergy holding a breadth of different views?

Church schools are expected to have a meaningful and reciprocal relationship with their parish church. This relationship will often extend to other churches in the locality and deanery. A school should undertake its best endeavours to foster a good relationship with its parish church where possible.

Within a school's locality there will be churches and clergy holding a breadth of views on many issues. The Prayers of Love and Faith have been authorised for use but not everyone will agree they should be used or want to use them, and School leaders must recognise the validity of these different positions within the Church of England.

All relationships between schools and their parish churches and clergy should be built on mutual trust and understanding. This should include understanding and respecting the different contexts of school and parish and the particular legal responsibilities which schools exercise towards their students, staff and other stakeholders.

At times a school may need to hold a range of views together including those of clergy, staff and parents and be a role model for good disagreement. The Pastoral Principles developed as part of the Living in Love and Faith process provide a framework for good disagreement. Whilst ultimately the

guidance and the law (referenced above) must take precedence over the range of views that exist locally, school leaders will need to carefully navigate these situations and ensure that their response is proportionate. Where disagreements exist which require mediation or further support, a school should call upon the expertise within its Diocesan Board of Education.

2.4.2 What advice is there for clergy in relating to their local schools' expectations in terms of what is taught and modelled?

Role of clergy in schools

Clergy exercise an enormous privilege when entering a school, particularly if this is the school that is attached to their parish church. They may exercise a pastoral role, serve as a governor, be invited to lead Collective Worship and take part in the teaching of parts of the curriculum as an expert from the local Christian community.

Schools should have a clear written policies for visitors which all visitors, including clergy, should be asked to adhere to. They should also have written policies and plans for Collective Worship, Religious Education (RE) Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Policies for visiting speakers may also be in place. Where policies and plans are written well they can help everyone to feel safe in expressing their opinions and beliefs in ways which are not threatening or discriminatory. These policies will be written in line with up to date legislation and the school's distinctive Christian vision, and will be scrutinised through the inspection process.

For example, the Goodness and Mercy resources for Relationships and Sex Education exemplify how children can learn about different kind of relationships they will encounter in modern Britain, how those relationships can be legally recognised by civil marriage and civil partnership and how the Church of England teaches that holy matrimony is the joining together of one man and one woman.

When discussing differences that exist within the Church, careful use of language such as "some Christians believe", "other Christians believe" is more helpful to holding a range of views together than absolute language. Clergy should be also mindful that there may be a range of family groupings and relationships represented within the school community who should not be made to feel alienated, different or wrong.

2.4.3 What should be done in case of conflict over an ex-officio (clergy) member of the governors over sexuality?

In maintained church schools the incumbent is usually an ex-officio member of the governing body and the PCC, deanery and diocese may appoint Foundation Governors. Many academies have representation from the local clergy on local governing committees in order to retain the historic local relationship between church and school.

Governing bodies may wish to consider a working agreement in place with an ex-officio governors. This good practice is recommended by some dioceses and could cover the postholder being:

- willing to promote the views and policies of the parish and Diocese (and indeed of the Church of England as a whole in terms of its published Vision for Education) as appropriate at meetings of the Governing Board and at other meetings concerning, for example, any change in the future status of the school;
- a link to ensure the school features regularly on PCC and other local church leadership team agenda and vice versa;

- a visible presence in church and in school;
- prepared both to represent the parish during a SIAMS Inspection and to explain to the Inspection Team how parish and school work together;
- prepared to undertake ongoing training as required;
- prepared to set aside time to meet and to pray regularly with the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher about both parish and school.

All governors, regardless of how they hold office, should understand their duties under the relevant legislation. Many organisations have role descriptions in place for all governors and trustees and will ask office holders to subscribe to a code of conduct which will often be linked to the Seven Principles of Public Life (The Nolan Principles) and may contain explicit reference to the Equality Act. These role descriptors and codes of conduct are useful to revisit at times of disagreement and tension. Many dioceses will have a governance support officer who can provide further assistance in navigating disagreements. Further information on the roles and duties of governors and trustees can be obtained from organisations such as the National Governance Association www.nga.org.uk and the Confederation of School Trusts www.cstuk.org.uk.

GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

Annex F

Executive Summary

1. This Annex reports the progress of the House of Bishops' work on what has come to be called "Pastoral Reassurance". It comprises:
 - A definition of Pastoral Reassurance, and an explanation of its relevance alongside the Prayers of Love and Faith and the Pastoral Guidance (section A);
 - An account of various elements of Pastoral Reassurance which have been agreed by the House of Bishops. Some of these elements are already incorporated into the overall package being reported to the Synod, for example in the Pastoral Guidance and in the routes for approval of various aspects of the Prayers of Love and Faith. Other elements have been agreed in principle by the House of Bishops, but require further work – including with other stakeholders in the Church – before they can be finalised. At least one element will require primary legislation in the form of an Amending Canon, which would require Synodical approval (section B);
 - An account of some further elements on which the House of Bishops has approved further work, with a view to their being discussed by the House in final form as soon as possible. These elements include the need for exploring Formal Structural Pastoral Provision (section C).

A. Definition of Pastoral Reassurance

2. As we live in this time of collective uncertainty, where the Church is not of one mind on these matters, the bishops remain committed to the unity of the Church and to providing for as many people as possible to live together within that unity by offering pastoral reassurances. What is meant by “Pastoral Reassurance”? The House of Bishops has developed this concept to represent a wide set of ideas, to provide pastoral reassurance for as great a group as possible. It has discussed it using the following provisional definition:

Arrangements for Pastoral Reassurance are those elements of the Living in Love and Faith package which meet pastoral needs as far as possible, reduce legal and other risks that may be faced, and try to ensure the greatest number of people can live with the LLF package.

Elements of pastoral reassurance are potentially relevant for different groups within the Church: those who joyfully wish to use the Prayers of Love and Faith, those who do not or who might be opposed to their use, and those who are unsure.

The purpose of Pastoral Reassurance is thus to preserve unity as far as possible; to enable as many people as possible to remain within the Church of England; and to protect the Church’s mission to the nation.

3. The need for pastoral reassurance reflects the deeply held differences of views within our Church at every level: in individual parishes, between neighbouring parishes, in the General Synod, and in the House of Bishops. The proposals for the Prayers of Love and Faith, as a pastoral provision in a time of uncertainty, enable the Church to joyfully recognise and celebrate LGBT couples. For some, this creates specific uncertainties and fears: pastoral reassurance is intended to address these concerns, as well as those concerns felt by those who want to use the Prayers.
4. Pastoral Reassurance may thus be relevant for a wide range of groups within the Church. Different elements of reassurance may be relevant for:
 - Same-sex couples who are requesting the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF), being sure that their pastoral needs are met, and protecting them as far as possible from hostility and homophobia, and from legal risks in participating in services using the Prayers;
 - Proponents of the Prayers of Love and Faith, both clergy and lay, who would want to endorse the use of the Prayers in their churches;
 - Opponents of the Prayers of Love and Faith, who do not want them to be used in their churches, and are troubled by their use in other churches in the Church of England;
 - People in the middle, with a range of views, but not such a clear view as either of the two groups mentioned above. This may include people who are not sure whether they would want the PLF used in their churches, or who at present might not want to discuss in their churches whether or not

to use the PLF. This may also include those who wish to use some, but not all, of the PLF resources.

- Employers in the Church (including parishes) who will want to know whether their employment decisions will be supported.
5. Some elements of reassurance may be particularly relevant for clergy and lay ministers: some elements may be more relevant for those who wish to use the prayers and some more relevant for those who do not wish to. Some elements may also be particularly relevant for ordinands. Other elements of reassurance may be more relevant for laypeople, including for churchwardens and other church officers, and those in lay ministries.

B. Elements of pastoral reassurance agreed by the House of Bishops

6. At its October 2023 meeting, the House of Bishops noted and approved a number of elements of pastoral reassurance, as set out in this section. The House is offering these to the Synod, and to the Church, as part of the overall package around the Prayers of Love and Faith being reported to the Synod at this group of sessions.
7. Some of these are already included in the Prayers of Love and Faith, the proposals for their approval through various routes, and in the draft Pastoral Guidance. These include:
- a. Commendation of the Prayers of Love and Faith resource section. The use of commendation by the House of Bishops, permitting ministers to draw on the commended resources using their discretion under Canon B5, makes clear that there is no obligation to use the PLF. No minister can be obliged to use the Prayers. By commending the PLF, ministers are able to choose to use some (or none) of the resources, even when they would not wish to use the full suite;
 - b. Ministers are encouraged to consult and agree with their PCCs (or equivalent) on the use of the Prayers. Though under Canon B5 the decision on the use of the Prayers is, in law, for the minister with cure of souls alone, the draft Pastoral Guidance prepared by the House makes clear that the House expects ministers to consult their Parochial Church Councils (or equivalent body) to ascertain that use of the Prayers will be supported generally in the church concerned;
 - c. There is no requirement that parishes must decide one way or the other on whether to use the Prayers. The decision to commend the PLF resources leaves it to the discretion of ministers whether to use the Prayers. Churches may thus choose to say that they will in general use the Prayers, or choose to say that in conscience they will not use the Prayers, or need not take a decision on this at all if the church does not feel it appropriate to engage with these matters at this point;

- d. The House has determined that the forms of service for standalone services of PLF should be subject to the full process of Synodical authorization under Canon B2. This should give some assurance to those opposed to the PLF that the full process for liturgical business, including consideration of doctrinal matters, will be followed in due course. It should also give some assurance to those wanting to use the PLF that, if approved, these forms of service will become fully embedded in liturgy – subject of course to the usual discretion of any particular minister on whether and when to offer them. Authorisation would provide an opt-in system to be used for the PLF, which would both enable greater transparency about where the standalone services are offered, and protection for those who do not wish to offer these;
 - e. The House has also decided that there should be an informal process of consulting the wider Church, through consultation of diocesan synods, alongside the B2 process. This is not required by law. The B2 process for authorization does not come under Article 8 of the General Synod constitution, which would require a formal consultation of all diocesan synods. But the House proposes that a similar process of consultation should be done, even though not required by law;
 - f. The material on Covenanted Friendships has been put into a separate document for commendation separately, as they celebrate relationships that by their nature are different from those celebrated in the rest of the PLF. This means that some churches which might on occasion want to use only the Covenanted Friendships material will be able to do so.
 - g. The offer of support from dioceses for churches where there are differences of view. Clergy and lay leaders ministering in churches where there is a diversity of views should benefit from support from bishops and archdeacons in working through any difficult discussions about whether or not the minister should make use of the discretion under Canon B5 to use the PLF resources.
8. The Pastoral Guidance encourages transparency and honesty by all churches in communicating their decision to use, or not to use, the prayers. Ensuring this clarity in communication will help signpost the decisions of churches in a way that is helpful to those who are seeking to use the prayers, as well as those who are seeking a church that has chosen not to.
9. The House of Bishops has also agreed in principle to a number of other elements of pastoral reassurance, which are not yet fully developed and require further work for implementation. Though they require further work, the House is also offering these to the Synod and the Church as part of the overall package. Some are within the remit of the House; some require legislation. All will require discussion with stakeholders across the Church, and the House would welcome views on them from members of Synod.

10. These include:

- a. The idea of a statement by the bishops, or perhaps a House of Bishops' Declaration. This would include some principles about how the bishops intend to behave during the period following the commendation of the PLF resources and the issuing of the Pastoral Guidance. It might also include principles on how parishes and ministers should behave, taking into account the "Pastoral Principles" agreed earlier in the LLF process. The statement or declaration may include items such as:
 - i. The principle of no-one being disadvantaged for using or not using the PLF;
 - ii. The principle of public support from the bishops for clergy and laity taking either position;
 - iii. Some guidelines on access to resources, appointments, senior appointments etc.
- b. Establishing a Pastoral Consultative Group, to draw together multiple perspectives on the pastoral issues raised by LLF, and to provide pastoral advice to bishops and others on how to handle particular issues – as well as to oversee the exploration of related but new pastoral questions;
- c. The idea of an Independent Reviewer, to oversee the workings of the arrangements in the bishops' statement or declaration. This is discussed further below.

Bishops' Declaration or Statement

11. The House will wish to do further work on what might be included in a bishops' statement or declaration.

Independent Reviewer

12. The idea of an Independent Reviewer (IR) draws from the experience of the Independent Reviewer appointed to review complaints and grievances relating to the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests. The Reviewer could be appealed to by both proponents and opponents of the PLF, i.e. those who felt they had been unfairly treated due to their decision to use the PLF, as well as those who felt they had been unfairly treated due to their decision not to use them. Drawing on the example of the existing IR, but learning lessons from it, the House proposes that:

- As with the other IR, the IR for this purpose would be given a legal foundation in statute through the passage of an Amending Canon (subject to Synod's approval) requiring the House to make rules about the appointment of a Reviewer, requiring the House or the Archbishops to appoint a Reviewer, and giving the Reviewer certain duties and authority;

- The Reviewer would be empowered to investigate complaints and grievances relating to two things:
 - The provisions and principles of the bishops' statement or declaration;
 - The Pastoral Guidance prevailing at the time. As with other forms of guidance, this may well alter over time. But the Reviewer can be asked to judge whether in a particular case the guidance then prevailing has been adhered to.
- It will not be necessary to set out in legislation either the principles in the declaration or statement, nor the substance of the Pastoral Guidance;
- Learning from past experience, the remit of the Reviewer will be written in such a way as to enable access to his or her work by people from all different positions in the Church, rather than being limited to one or other party to a given debate;
- It will be necessary to specify in Canon or in the rules the extent of the Reviewer's authority. This will require further consideration. For example, it could be made a legal requirement on clergy and churches to cooperate with the Reviewer's investigations, but without requiring them to abide by his or her recommendations. Or it could be made a requirement in law to accept and act on the Reviewer's recommendations.

Legal protection for clergy

13. There has been some discussion, notably in the House of Clergy, over how far clergy making use of the commended Prayers of Love and Faith would be protected against possible legal challenges. The commendation of the PLF resources by the House, under their discretion using Canon B5, does not give the Prayers authorized status. Therefore, it is possible that someone objecting to the use of the Prayers in a particular circumstance could bring a legal action – most likely under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure (EJM) 1963 – against a minister for using the Prayers. This might be on the basis of a claim that the PLF themselves are unlawful because (it might be claimed) they are contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England, or indicative of a departure from doctrine in an essential matter. The House has considered this question, and its views are set out in Annex A.
14. However, it should be noted that the views of the House, expressed in this paper and implied in its act of commending the PLF resources, do not provide an absolute defence against proceedings. Provided the minister had used the PLF resources in accordance with the Pastoral Guidance relevant at that time, any minister subject to such a complaint could cite the House's view in his or her defence; but it would be for a tribunal or court to make a final decision.
15. Were the General Synod to authorize the use of the PLF forms of service through the Canon B2 authorization process, then it would be established that

the standalone prayers and forms of service are lawful, and there would be an automatic defence to any legal case brought against clergy for using them, although this would not apply to the commended material.

C. Other elements of reassurance, including exploring formal structural pastoral provision

16. The House has also decided that further work should be done, and brought back to the House as soon as possible for discussion, on some other possible elements of pastoral reassurance. It has not yet decided on these elements in principle, only asked for further work.

17. These comprise two main issues:

- An expansion and elaboration of the principles to be included in the bishops' statement or declaration; and
- Exploring arrangements for "formal structural pastoral provision" for churches who believe they need some degree of differentiation from churches, bishops or other church structures who favour the use of the Prayers.

Some principles for the bishops' declaration or statement

18. The bishops' declaration or statement might include principles such as these:

- *We affirm that all clergy and licensed lay ministers, whatever choice they make about using the Prayers of Love and Faith, will have the support of the serving bishops in their diocese in that choice. Their decision will be honoured and respected.*
- *We are committed to ensuring the Church of England is a church which lives humbly with difference, creating a welcoming, generous and hospitable space across a variety of theological traditions and pastoral practice. We seek the flourishing of all.*
- *We will strive to ensure honesty, integrity and authenticity in our communications locally and nationally. We will speak well of those with whom we disagree. As part of this, we are committed to encouraging and supporting all our churches and ministers to be clear and transparent in sharing their position on using the PLF, ensuring this is done with kindness and generosity.*
- *We will appoint a statutory Independent Reviewer to which we will defer when there is irreconcilable local disagreement about decisions concerning the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith, and/or the practical outworkings of the Pastoral Guidance. In these circumstances we will respect the outcome of any independent review.*

19. These principles will need further development to have sufficient clarity for churches, clergy and laity to rely on them, and for the Independent Reviewer to be able to use them to guide their investigations and rulings.
20. Further work is required in order to specify in more detail what support offered by the bishops to clergy and laity looks like practically.
21. In general the protection of religious freedom requires two apparently paradoxical conditions:
 - Protecting legitimate discrimination at local level; and
 - Ensuring no illegitimate discrimination at an above-local level.
22. What is the “local level”, and what is “above-local” will vary according to specifics. To ensure religious freedom at the local level, a religious body or religious employer needs to ensure that its religious beliefs are protected and upheld. This means that it must be able to take steps to ensure that practice – including employment practice – is consistent with those beliefs. That is the basis for the law’s provision for genuine “Occupational Requirements”, which is a form of “discrimination” – but entirely legitimate discrimination. This is a necessary part of the Equality Act, otherwise there would be no way to protect freedom and belief locally. The Equality Act does not regulate religious worship and so is not applicable to the use of the PLF.
23. The other aspect needed to protect freedom of religion and belief is ensuring that there is no illegitimate discrimination at the above-local level. This is the general non-discrimination principle that the Equality Act requires: that people should not be discriminated against because of their religious beliefs, or because of other factors that are protected characteristics.
24. It is important to note that, while it is appropriate that religious beliefs are protected locally, they cannot be put forward in ways that will be experienced as harmful and distressing. Irrespective of theological beliefs it is paramount that a church’s behaviour is not experienced as homophobic by those with whom they engage.
25. The House recognises that details will need to be discussed and agreed but the principle would be that there would be no illegitimate discrimination at national and/or diocesan level between different legitimate theological positions taken across the diversity of the Church of England. The areas which might be subject to this non-discrimination principle could include:
 - access to diocesan support and resources;
 - access, directly or via dioceses, to national resources;
 - being considered in the national discernment process for ordained ministry;
 - eligibility for senior appointments.
26. Further work on developing a bishops’ statement or declaration might be based on these two principles:

- establishing clearly what legitimate local discrimination means; and
 - establishing what above-local non-discrimination means.
27. This would need to cover some rules on particular areas – e.g. access to national resources and grants, and principles to apply to senior appointments. Any such rules would need to give guidance on behaviours and on the conditions that apply to such behaviours. They would need to be symmetric: applying to both proponents and opponents of the Prayers.
28. This would involve addressing some complex issues. For example, it may be argued that the promise to “support” clergy and laity from a particular church tradition should be made conditional on those people “behaving well”, including speaking well of others from other church traditions. But some might say that making the support “conditional on good behaviour” means that support is, in practice, at the discretion of the bishop and can be given or withheld according to their preference. On the other hand, certain rules of “good behaviour” may need to be established in advance as part of any overall settlement. For example, it might be a rule that churches which are deliberately withholding their parish share should not expect to benefit from the full level of support normally expected to be offered to them.
29. Another complex issue to address would be the position of bishops themselves. Bishops, as clergy, will have the same individual freedom to decide whether they themselves will offer the PLF. The House will need to reflect further on how far the freedom of conscience of individual bishops on these issues, in a time of uncertainty and when the House itself is not of one mind, can go. These are difficult questions: we must take seriously both the conscience of individual bishops, their role as focus of unity, and that they all belong to a specific church, the Church of England, and are committed to its life and procedures. Episcopacy has always had a collective, as well as an individual, aspect. Work would be required to explore how bishops may lead together, yet differentially, at a time of uncertainty and disagreement.
30. The House has agreed that further work should be done on these issues as soon as possible.

Reassurance for laypeople

31. A further issue to consider is the position of Christian laypeople outside the Church, and how they might be affected by the Church’s stance on LLF. Some discussions on pastoral reassurance have raised questions about protecting the religious freedom of Christians in their positions in civil society, beyond the Church. A specific concern that has been mentioned is whether lay Christians may find themselves discriminated against, on the grounds of their beliefs, by their employer or in other non-church contexts – for example, an employer arguing that an employee who is a church officer in a church that takes a conservative view on LLF is behaving in a way that conflicts with the employer’s values or expectations, and either disciplining or even dismissing

the employee. Though there do not appear to have been cases of this arising from laypeople being church officers, there are well known cases of discipline or dismissal resulting from employees expressing conservative views on social media. The Archbishops' Council has intervened in one such case, *Higgs vs Farmors School*, in order to encourage courts to take a nuanced approach to protecting religious freedom in such cases.

32. The Church of England could not of course prevent employers from taking action in this way. An employee so affected would have a case for defence under the Equality Act; though for the employee, having to sue their ex-employer for unfair dismissal and discrimination is much less satisfactory than the employer not seeking to dismiss them in the first place. The Church cannot prevent such discrimination happening, nor can it undertake to stand behind everyone who claims such discrimination.
33. But the Church could choose – as part of its pastoral reassurance package – to seek to shape discussions about these issues, and to discourage any such discrimination. Actions in support of this might include:
- the Church setting out a public statement of its understanding of how the Equality Act protects individuals from discrimination on grounds of religion;
 - that statement could set out explicitly the full range of legitimate views which form part of the diversity of religious belief within the Church of England, which we expect to be respected in civil society generally, being clear on the boundaries of this range and condemning any homophobic behaviour which oversteps it;
 - engagement with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to see if the EHRC will also publicly support this understanding of non-discrimination;
 - a promise that pastoral and moral support will be provided to individuals who face prima facie religious discrimination from their employer or in another non-Church context. For this to be reassuring, the promise would need to be reasonably open-ended, and not subject to individual bishops or dioceses being able to decide subjectively whether they felt the layperson merited support or not.

The House has agreed that further work should be done on this point.

Formal Structural Pastoral Provision

34. The House has recognised that for many in our Church the introduction of the Prayers of Love and Faith is a matter of rejoicing, although there is a strong desire from some that the Church should go further. For others in our Church, the introduction of the PLF is a matter of serious concern, requiring legal protection against being forced to use the PLF and a clear way of distinguishing their differing views.
35. Recognising this, the House has agreed to further urgent work exploring “formal structural pastoral provision” for churches and individuals who take

that view. This work on formal structural pastoral provision will also look at exploring what can be provided so that users of the PLF materials can do so fully and confidently. It has not yet made any decision on the details of this formal structural pastoral provision but in listening attentively to those who have raised concerns has authorised work exploring ideas such as the following:

- Each large diocese, or each group of smaller dioceses acting as a region, to decide a suitable approach;
- A commitment to ensure the provision in each such area of at least one bishop publicly identified as supporting the use of the PLF and one unable to endorse or use the PLF on principle;
- All bishops, whether “opposing” or in support of using the PLF, to be full members of the relevant diocesan or regional college of bishops for practical matters, though some might choose to recuse themselves from some spiritual matters;
- The grouping of “opposing” bishops across the Church of England could, if they chose, form a “Society model” college for mutual spiritual support, along the lines of the Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda;
- Parishes and other churches not wishing to use the PLF, where the incumbent and PCC agree, are free to “opt out” and request delegated episcopal care from a relevant bishop (one who does not endorse or use the PLF);
- In dioceses where all the bishops do not endorse or use the Prayers, a symmetric option for parishes who wish to use the PLF to be able to request delegated episcopal care from a bishop who does endorse the PLF;
- The degree of delegation of functions able to be delegated to another bishop, and whether this was ‘delegated care’ or ‘delegated oversight’ to be discussed and agreed, either nationally or locally, or case by case;
- In each diocese or group of dioceses a written plan or protocol for these arrangements, so that they can be adhered to, and if necessary referred to the Independent Reviewer;
- Consideration of whether any non-episcopal functions should also be provided on a parallel basis (e.g. DDOs, directors of ministry etc); or whether all such functions should be applied on a common basis, but with clear guidance on no illegitimate discrimination between church traditions;
- A supply of such bishops to be guaranteed, through regional or national mechanisms to be determined;
- Though these arrangements are provisional, during the period of uncertainty, their operation would be subject to rulings by the

Independent Reviewer, with whatever powers the House and Synod have allocated to that post.

36. This list of areas for further consideration around formal structural pastoral provision reflects concerns raised by those who feel, in the strongest possible way, opposed to the PLF. In committing to carefully explore and consider how such provision might be taken forward, the House is not at this stage advocating for formal structural pastoral provision.
37. Many key policy questions remain to be considered and answered in this further work, including: how much, if any, delegation of functions, and whether that is a national policy or a policy which could vary across dioceses or regions.
38. The House recognised that these issues are contentious; that many would be opposed to such delegated oversight; and that for others they would not appear sufficient, falling short of more radical proposals put forward by some. They would, in any case, pose questions of ecclesiology and about the underlying theology of Church – or of being one Church. In considering these questions, the House will need to reflect on the theology of unity and how far that must condition this work. Nonetheless the House has asked for further work to be done on these issues.
39. All the further work described in this section will need to involve engagement with those directly affected, from a range of church traditions.

D. Conclusion

40. The House commends to the Synod the elements of pastoral reassurance described in this paper:
 - The agreed elements set out in section B above, recognising that some elements require further work and development; and
 - The further work proposed on ideas not yet agreed, in principle, described in section C above.

GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

Annex G

Workstreams

1. Following the November 2023 meeting of the General Synod, the House of Bishops will have a substantial operational, policy, legal and stakeholder management task to implement the changes. The principal workstreams look as follows:
 - a. Implementing the commended Prayers of Love and Faith resources and associated guidance. This will involve:
 - i. ensuring the commended prayers and resources are publicly available, and supporting the Liturgical Commission on any future work connected with them;
 - ii. managing the process of Synodical authorization for the *Prayers of Love and Faith: forms of service*. This entails preparing the material for authorization through the stages of liturgical business required under Canon B2, including any theological report, through Synod. It will incorporate a process of allowing diocesan synods a voice before the General Synod's final approval stage. It has been some time since Synod has considered liturgical business under Canon B2 and there will need to be some work to help new members in particular understand how the process works.
 - b. Managing practical implementation of the prayers and pastoral guidance. This will include two elements:
 - i. the establishment of a Pastoral Consultative Group to “support and advise bishops and dioceses on pastoral responses to circumstances that arise concerning identity, relationships, sexuality and marriage among clergy, ordinands, lay leaders and the lay people in their care”¹;
 - ii. managing any policy and legal concerns arising from questions raised throughout the Church (identifying which areas require further legal, theological or policy thinking and either referring them to the Pastoral Consultative Group or adding relevant information to the guidance, dealing with correspondence and questions), managing any national aspect of any litigation brought concerning the Prayers and/or guidance;

¹ GS2289 page 12

- c. Policy development and implementation of part 3 of the Pastoral Guidance (Ministry). As described in paragraph 14 of the covering paper this will involve further work to develop a policy position, including a theological rationale (working with the Faith and Order Commission) and communicating that, including working with the Clergy Discipline Commission where necessary;
 - d. Implementing the pastoral reassurance measures in Annex F Section B. In the first instance this will involve overseeing the steps described in paragraphs 6-8 and then finalising the statement to be made by the bishops. It will also involve designing and taking through the legislation on the Independent Reviewer, then recruiting and making operational the Independent Reviewer, and subsequently supporting their work;
 - e. Policy development on other pastoral reassurance measures including formal structural pastoral provision (see Annex F paragraphs 34-39). This will involve working out what steps are desirable, seeking to agree them with stakeholders across the Church, bringing them back to the House of Bishops for agreement, reporting them to Synod, and then implementing those measures (including, if necessary, through any legislation which might be required);
 - f. Other Living in Love and Faith workstreams. The paper to Synod in February 2023 set out four areas for further work (singleness, celibacy/ chastity, friendship, human identity²). There will need to be policy and theological development work alongside broad and deep engagement with the Church on each of these;
 - g. Communications. Clear and transparent communication will be central to the implementation process, both within the Church to parishes, cathedrals, dioceses etc and external to the wider public to explain what we are, and are not doing, and to make sure that errors are corrected and misunderstandings avoided. We will also need to consider communications with the Anglican Communion and with ecumenical partners.
 - h. Stakeholder engagement and liaison. One of the successful features of the Living in Love and Faith process so far has been the broad and deep engagement with stakeholders across the Church and beyond, both to listen to what their concerns and hopes are, and to manage those concerns actively. That engagement will become even more important as we move into the implementation period.
2. Each individual workstream is likely to need to involve different groups across the Church. Given the breadth of this work it would be sensible to have some oversight and coordination. Precise details will be subject to further work but this could involve a Programme Board to provide oversight, as well as a Programme

² GS2289 annex A

Executive to provide day-to-day coordination. In addition to this programme structure, particular workstreams will require substantial engagement with stakeholders to seek agreement.

3. An illustrative plan for the purpose of explaining to Synod how this process might work is set out below, focusing in particular on the stages that are likely to involve Synodical engagement. This is illustrative and highly preliminary and will need substantially more detailed planning work with individual workstreams.

GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

Annex H

Living in Love and Faith: Theological Rationale

1 Introduction

1. This paper explores a theological rationale for a pastoral provision with regards to the Prayers of Love and Faith, within the boundaries of the 2023 February Synod motion as amended. It was shared with the House and College of Bishops ahead of the meeting of the House of Bishops on 9 October 2023.

2 Action Points

2. The paper is for the information of the General Synod.

Detail

3. This paper was prepared by NCI staff and the chairs of the Steering Group, and has been run past a small group of readers from different theological traditions, whose comments were taken into account.
4. The paper only covers the Prayers of Love and Faith and does not address questions around the lives of clergy and whether pastoral provision can be extended to clergy, as work is continuing on this matter.
5. The paper makes an argument for a theological rationale based on the trajectory of pastoral provision already existing in our church and tradition, which does not change doctrine in any essential matter but changes our practical pastoral response and the way we relate within the Church.
6. This paper is realistic about the reach of the theological argument it is making. It recognises that, for some, pastoral provision for the PLF represents far too little and may be considered deeply disappointing and hurtful. It also recognises that others may dispute the claim that appropriate provision does not represent a change in doctrine if it is enshrined in commended or authorised prayers for public worship, rather than an ad hoc, private response. Both of these questions are referred to in the text itself.

Revd Dr Mark Betson

LLF Project Director

October 2023

Living in Love and Faith

A theological and pastoral introduction to the PLF and accompanying pastoral guidance

1 THE POSSIBILITY OF PASTORAL PROVISION

After six years of exploration of matters of sexuality through the Living in Love and Faith project, in February 2023, the General Synod of the Church of England voted in all three Houses in favour of the following motion:

That this Synod, recognising the commitment to learning and deep listening to God and to each other of the Living in Love and Faith process, and desiring with God's help to journey together while acknowledging the different deeply held convictions within the Church:

- a) lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people and the harm that LGBTQI+ people have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church;
- b) recommit to our shared witness to God's love for and acceptance of every person by continuing to embed the Pastoral Principles in our life together locally and nationally;
- c) commend the continued learning together enabled by the Living in Love and Faith process and resources in relation to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage;
- d) welcome the decision of the House of Bishops to replace Issues in Human Sexuality with new pastoral guidance;
- e) welcome the response from the College of Bishops and look forward to the House of Bishops further refining, commending and issuing the Prayers of Love and Faith described in GS 2289 and its Annexes;
- f) invite the House of Bishops to monitor the Church's use of and response to the Prayers of Love and Faith, once they have been commended and published, and to report back to Synod in five years' time;
- g) endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage, and their intention that the final version of the Prayers of Love and

Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England.

The motion as amended (clause g) reveals where the Church of England is: there is a small majority in favour of some change, but there is only fragile agreement for the possibility of change and about what this change needs to be. There would not be the two-thirds majority in the Synod required for unequivocal, resounding change. The Living in Love and Faith project was always billed as 'discernment': it was an exploration of where we are, an exploration of the lives and beliefs of the people of God, of Scripture and tradition, and of the insights that reason can give through science, social sciences, listening to changing culture, and the scrutiny of lived experience. Consultation was wide-ranging, and many voices were heard.

That exploration was not in vain: the whole people of God in the Church of England were invited to draw together in a new way, to explore theology in depth, to share in discernment throughout the whole church, and to meet one another in honesty about subjects many found difficult to discuss openly. This was a change in that the whole church was invited to take part in discernment, at the level of the parish through the LLF course, while the LLF material was the result of a new type of wide-ranging interdisciplinary collaboration across theology, history, science and social sciences, between lay and ordained, academics, clergy, bishops and representatives with lived experience. Many churches took this opportunity to engage and feedback, though not all did. Nevertheless, whatever else LLF may yield, it has changed us as a Church, and has made us more aware of one another, and of the challenges that many among us face on a daily basis as they seek to live faithfully under God.

Yet we have to be honest, and acknowledge that this long period of discernment has not taken us to a consensus. There are those among us who continue to hold to the teaching of the Church on marriage, sexual intimacy and sexuality that we share with many other churches ecumenically and across the world, and would not want to see change; there are those who long for change, because they have prayerfully come to the conclusion, following study of Scripture and tradition, that it would be right to change our teaching on marriage and sexuality to include same-sex couples; and there are many who are not entirely sure, and would locate themselves on different parts of the spectrum. For some, it is a disagreement that seriously impairs communion; for others, it is a secondary matter, because it does not touch essential beliefs as reflected in the creeds. As individuals, and as sub-groups within the Church, we disagree.

But as a *whole* Church, as a body, we simply have not come to a conclusion as a result of our disagreement. We are not certain of what the right way to go may be; there is tentative agreement that some form of change is needed, but that we are not yet certain enough of what the right way forward may be.

The question that faces the church therefore is, what do we do in a time of uncertainty about the way we should take? How do we enable everyone of us, the whole people of God, to live as faithfully as they can, given their diversity and the different challenges they face? How do we demonstrate God's grace and gentleness towards one another, because these are areas of deep significance, where the weight of judgement and expectation can easily crush and maim? Or, to put it differently, what is the shape of the space we can inhabit at this time, in faithfulness to our inherited teaching, and with honesty, creativity and grace in response to the challenges of life in the 21st century?

There are many different possible responses to living in a time of collective uncertainty. We could do nothing, because that keeps us in the place we have inhabited for many years, and a place that some

identify as a place of certainty. Not to change is not a neutral option, because it would be deeply hurtful for those who have hoped, and prayed, and shared their story over many years, while they seek to live faithfully. It would also risk being seen as ignoring the commitment we have made as a church to repent from homophobia and the way LGBTQI+ Christians have been treated in the past, and to seek better ways of relating to one another, regardless of which theological and ecclesial tradition we belong to. We could, equally, try to force change through, but that would not respect the strong misgivings of large parts of the Body, or the reality of our collective uncertainty as to the way ahead. This place of an absence of consensus is deeply painful for all in the Church, though not in the same way, or to the same depth. This space is one that inevitably generates fear, anxiety, grief, and other strong emotions.

Yet the space within which the Synod has agreed to move is that of a motion for change, but without changing doctrine. The question before us therefore is, what is the most generous, compassionate and gracious space we can create at this point, within which as many people in the church can find ways of growing in love, in faith and in relationships with one another? This place would be one of continuing discernment and conversation, of continuing to seek the mind of Christ together, rather than a place of frozen conflict and disagreement.

This kind of space would have to be marked by provisionality and humility, recognising that we are in a time of corporate not-knowing, where mystery remains as to our humanity and how we are to live our lives in a world that we do not always understand, and where God often acts in surprising ways. It would also be a space within which the goodness of our traditional teaching on the importance of intimate relationships and respect for our own and others' bodies, and the call to live lives of holiness, is acknowledged and drawn upon. It would need to be a space that is honest about the reality of our humanity, the struggles we face, the harm that we have caused, and the depth of our disagreement.

If we are not changing the doctrine of the Church regarding marriage, then the space we are exploring is the space for a genuine, careful pastoral response: the kind of response that genuinely rejoices at the goods that we can see in same-sex relationships – faithfulness, stability, fruitfulness, love, faith, grace – and keeps looking for where God is at work, and how we may respond faithfully to God's call to holiness in the fashioning of our lives, rather than focus primarily on identifying the absence of virtue, or good, in others. Such a response would express itself differently in different parts of the Church, and would be a possibility, not a requirement; it would leave space for discernment and the exercise of conscience for individuals and communities. This space would also rest on the recognition that the entire Body is trying to find ways of living faithfully to the Gospel, and where disagreement does not lead to disrespect or accusations of not being fellow Christians.

It is not a new challenge for the Church to have to find ways to respond to profound and painful questions in the face of change. In its pilgrimage through history, the Church is always caught up in wider changes and its doctrine and teaching have always needed to be thought through and articulated in fresh ways in new times and places. At times, new circumstances have forced new questions; some of these have led to a restatement of traditional views, others to developments in doctrine or teaching (as with questions around procreation and contraception¹), and yet others to new pastoral practices without changing fundamental doctrine (such as remarriage after divorce², or, for very different example, responses to polygamy in the Anglican Communion which retain the fundamental doctrine of marriage yet make space for practical arrangements that do not visit harm

¹ For more details, see *LLF Book* p.148-149.

² For further exploration, see the *LLF Book* pp.137-140.

on vulnerable women, in particular³). Many of the things LLF discusses have been brought to the surface as burning issues because of wider socio-political changes in an advanced, technological society, where long-held configurations of households and gender roles have shifted, and new possibilities have emerged thanks to modern medicine. They are not necessarily brand new questions, but are sharper because of the pace of change, and because advances in science have helped us understand more about ourselves, our bodies and minds. Yet science often opens up more mystery and questions, and can only tell us what is and what could be, but not what *should* be. Doing theology, defining teaching, restating doctrine in new times, is always an iterative and communal process, and part of the ongoing corporate discernment of the people of God as they seek to live faithfully. As such, the response of the Church at this time is neither the first, nor the final word.

A pastoral response to one another in our present situation is something that is deeply rooted in tradition and Scripture, as will be explored further below. The people of God have always had to live in the world as it is, rather than the world as it should be, holding in balance working towards a vision of perfection that may need to be expressed through lives distinct from prevailing cultural mores, and the need to find ways to enable realistic, staged growth and discipleship in a less-than-perfect world. The Church is called to walk together in the way of Christ by the light of Scripture, tradition and wisdom while bearing one another's burdens. We do this in contexts and institutions graced by the good gifts of God and deeply distorted by sin, which impact our shared life and witness, and often impose unequal burdens on different members of the Body. We do this guided by the Scriptures' witness to God's good creation and wonderful redemption from the realities of sin and brokenness, while we seek deeper understanding of the mystery of redemption, life, faith and grace, whose fullness we only see dimly, 'through a glass darkly'. By the light of Scripture, tradition and wisdom, we seek God's grace for the fuller embodiment of the perfection that lies ahead. As we do so, we need to find ways to support realistic growth and discipleship on that pilgrimage with God.

Pastoral provision recognises that we all fall short of the ideal, of perfect holiness, but that there are things we can do together, in our prayer, in our worship, in our life together to nurture the kind of virtues and goods that reflect more closely the ways of God. This is what the PLF are seeking to do: not to displace or deny the 'ideal', the doctrine of marriage, or the teaching of marriage as the proper place for sexual intimacy between one man and woman. Rather they seek to acknowledge that on our earthly journey, we can develop good practices, virtues, qualities, that can be recognised and ask for God's help and blessing as we seek to grow in love and righteousness and receive the blessings of the kingdom.. The PLF are a sign of hope, and a recognition of where God is at work among us, even if we do not fully understand how that is, or why we are the way we are, and even when we might be concerned about other aspects of a relationship. They are an example of the discipline of discerning God's good gifts, thanking God for them, and seeking to grow them further. They build on what is good and trust that God can enable good to grow further.

The rest of this introduction will seek to explore these matters further, looking at how a theology of practical grace can shape a fuller and richer pastoral response from what has been our practice until now, without changing our fundamental doctrine of marriage. It will also explore the complex relationship between pastoral practice, doctrine and public prayer in a church where much of our doctrine and teaching is shaped by our liturgical texts. Furthermore, grace is needed from all areas of the church, because the reality of disagreement remains, such that 'pastoral provision' is something that the whole church needs: pastoral provision is being made for those who wish to

³ For more details, see the *LLF Book*, pp.346-347.

place same-sex relationships before God in prayer, and pastoral provision is being made for those who struggle so much with this that they need reassurance and a different way of relating within the Body of Christ. This equally important aspect of pastoral provision will be explored separately, as part of proposals for pastoral reassurance for those who cannot accept these proposals, in light of their understanding of Scripture and tradition.

2 THE DOCTRINE OF MARRIAGE, CHANGE AND MAKING A PASTORALLY GENEROUS SPACE

Like all doctrine, the doctrine of marriage is practical, at once declaring testimony to God's ways and providing shape and guidance for life. It enables God's people to offer support for a form of intimate society by which God blesses its participants and wider society and helps shape a way of holy living within the Body of Christ. By living and teaching in accordance with its guidance, the people of God seek to bear witness to the triune God's gracious goodness as our creator, God's transforming grace as our Redeemer and the hope of God's kingdom. The *Book of Common Prayer* attests to Holy Matrimony within the context of this divine economy as a lifelong covenant of a man and a woman, instituted by God in creation, adorned by Jesus Christ and signifying his mystical union with the Church. In particular, it was instituted for the procreation and godly education of children, as a remedy against sin and for the loving mutual society, help and comfort of the couple. It thus teaches that this way of life is the proper context for sexual intercourse, within the bonds of that faithfulness, mutuality and generativity. The Church is called by God to proclaim the Christian faith 'afresh in each generation'. History changes the contexts in which the Church proclaims and lives the Good News. Changed contexts shift the webs of meaning within which the Church's doctrines are put to use, so that faithfulness requires renewed interpretation and attentive pastoral application of the faith as the Church has received it. Such renewal is reflected in the Church's liturgy and teaching in this area as in others.

As part of a rapidly changing society, with new challenges and discoveries, the Church has been renewing its reception of the doctrine of marriage and its teaching about sexuality, both in its liturgy and teaching documents. It is still on that journey today. The introduction of PLF does not change the shape of marriage in the Church's doctrine nor its understanding of the place of sexual intimacy within marriage. However, the PLF are also being introduced as pastoral provision within a period of continued discernment whose scope includes the Church's sexual ethics, and whose matter includes the question of how far its doctrine of marriage may guide recognition of gifts and goods in sexual relationships outside Holy Matrimony. In that context, those with responsibility for teaching the faith should continue to articulate the Church's doctrine while engaging in continued faithful, sensitive and nuanced ways with different understandings of these questions, and coming alongside people whose lives are shaped and affected by their teaching, with grace and compassion. To proclaim afresh wisely, at this time, may serve to frame and guide such conversations without curtailing or controlling them.

2.1 THE DOCTRINE OF MARRIAGE IN THE LAST SIXTY YEARS

A key question facing the Church is how we can make reasonable and generous pastoral provision without implicitly changing the doctrine of marriage in any essential matter. The question risks implying that the doctrine of marriage has not changed, or has only ever changed intentionally or officially. This not entirely accurate if one looks long into history⁴. Nor it is not entirely accurate if we look at history on the smaller canvas of the post-war years: we find that under pressure from wider society, the Church has shifted in its language and expression of marriage, relationships and sexuality, not because the doctrine has changed in an essential matter, but because different circumstances have highlighted different questions, pressures, and the need to reformulate a long-held belief for new contexts.

Divorce and remarriage, as well as contraception, have already been mentioned. These matters are well covered in the LLF book (contraception on pp.148-149 and divorce and remarriage on pp. 137-140), so there is no need to cover this extensively here, but simply note that both represent significant shifts, the first with respect to a fundamental aspect of the doctrine (procreation), the other with respect to possible pastoral provision (marriage was no longer indissoluble, so that divorce was possible as a pastoral accommodation, but marriage was still understood to be 'lifelong', therefore it was deemed that the doctrine was not actually changed). Remarriage after divorce is an example of how a doctrine may remain essentially unchanged, while our pastoral response changes.

Other changes are more subtle, yet significant, and reveal a pattern of gradual evolution that is rooted in successive statements and reports. In particular, teaching on marriage has changed, in ways that do not always or necessarily affect the canons or liturgical texts, but nevertheless significantly affect the outworking of the doctrine in pastoral practice. This points to the complexity of speaking of 'change' in the abstract, and back to the way in which the PLF were clearly designed to effect no change to either the canons or liturgical texts, or, to use the legal phrase, 'in any essential matter'.

The clearest change is the move away from the primacy of procreation and increasingly making room for the expression of sexuality as a good within the relationship which strengthens it and enables mutual pleasure. This is reflected in liturgical change, with the move from the BCP's rather terse perspective on sex, to Common Worship's talk of 'the delight and tenderness of sexual union'. It is matched by changing advice on contraception.

Some Issues in Human Sexuality, 2003, recognises the shift:

the Church of England has moved away from an emphasis on the avoidance of sin and the production of children as reasons for marriage, in favour of an emphasis on marriage being a context for an intimate, pleasurable and mutually supportive relationship. (1.2.23).

The 1999 *Marriage: A Teaching Document*, had said 'We marry not only because we love, but to be helped to love'. The idea of a 'remedy for sin' (BCP) is dropped altogether in *Common Worship*, and children are mentioned only after emphasising the material and relational aspects of marriage. The change has been welcomed by many; and it says something positive and liberating about sexuality. It may also, however, be seen at least partially as a reflection of the wider Western cultural tendency to emphasise personal fulfilment and happiness over social duty, cohesion and stability, or at least

⁴ The LLF resource hub has further material which details a longer historical view than can be explored here, LLF hub>Further Resources>Library>Theology and Ethics>Marriage and Singleness, and LLF Hub>Further Resources>Library>History, Philosophy and Law

the changing balance between these different concepts. Teaching on marriage does not just reflect theology and Scripture, but the interaction of theology and liturgy with wider cultural mores, whether consciously, or not.

This interaction is reflected positively in the increasing acknowledgement that marriage is rarely 'ideal' in practice, even if it is the theologically considered the proper, or fullest, configuration of intimate relationships (see the *Osborne Report*, 1987: 'Those who enter marriages are as much subject to moral responsibility as those who do not. It would be a travesty to give the impression that marriage takes people out of the possibilities of the corrupt abuse of their sexuality', p.166). And so other significant changes that have affected doctrine and teaching over a longer period of time include notions of consent, both *to* the marriage and *within* marriage. Marital rape is now recognised and condemned, in law and in the church, which again marks a significant change in how sexuality, marriage, and gender relationships are conceived of. This is quite striking in its inclusion in Lambeth 1.10d, alongside homophobia and trivialisation and commercialisation of sex. Given the state of gender justice worldwide, this acknowledgement in church contexts is crucial – and likely needs much more attention.

The 1998 Lambeth Conference Report expanded on this:

Clearly some expressions of sexuality are inherently contrary to the Christian way and are sinful. Such unacceptable expression of sexuality include promiscuity, prostitution, incest, pornography, paedophilia, predatory sexual behaviour, and sadomasochism (all of which may be heterosexual and homosexual), adultery, violence against wives, and female circumcision. From a Christian perspective these forms of sexual expression remain sinful in any context. We are particularly concerned about the pressures on young people to engage in sexual activity at an early age, and we urge our Churches to teach the virtue of abstinence.

Finally, the increasing recognition of the goods of same-sex relationships is paralleled by an increasing recognition of the goods of faithful non-married sexual relationships. We see this in two major teaching documents.

The 1999 *Marriage: A Teaching Document* states,

The social and emotional steps by which couples come to enter marriage are often complicated, and some finally think about lifelong commitment only when they are already living together. This route of approaching marriage is exposed to uncertainties and tensions and is not to be recommended. But it was not uncommon in earlier periods of history, and the important thing is simply that the point of commitment should be reached. (p. 3)

Later, it also addresses couples directly:

But it may be, in fact, that you have resolved the question of your future between yourselves already, that you are quite certain of your lasting commitment to each other, and are living naturally together among your friends as husband and wife. Even so, the Church would encourage you to make the public stand that is implied in your way of life, expressing your promises to one another and praying together, as others pray with you, for God's assistance. In any case, the strength of your relationship and its potential for service to the community depend upon your enjoying a full and confident relationship with God and his people. (p.9).

This is a hugely nuanced and careful exposition, which makes space for real life, and for the fact that people are on a journey of discipleship, so that they do not start out embodying an ideal (and,

arguably, even those who marry at the start of their relationships do not embody the ideal either – all couples move and ask for God to help them grow towards holiness and fulness of life).

Men and Women in Marriage, 2013, goes further:

In pastoral responses a degree of flexibility may be called for in finding ways to express the Church's teaching practically. In affirming its belief in marriage as the form the Creator has given us for intimate and permanent relationship of a man and a woman, the Church does not treat questions of what is possible in hard circumstances or exceptional conditions as simply closed. They require pastoral wisdom.

This, again, makes pastoral accommodation or provision possible, or, in other words, makes it possible to respond to and work with, the reality of people's lives, rather than try and operate on an ideal plane only. The ideal is maintained, but it is something to work towards and hold alongside pastoral wisdom, compassion and walking with realities that often defy possibilities of ideals.

These two documents show that the doctrine of marriage in relation to marriage as the fullest and given place for sexual expression is clear, but that its boundaries may be more porous than is sometimes allowed, and can flex to accommodate pastoral realities. How far this response can 'flex', and in what form, is still the subject of disagreement, and underlies the need for pastoral provision for those who cannot in conscience accept that this can be done.

This short overview shows that the current proposal sits within a trajectory of the increasing recognition that pastoral responses to changing circumstances and complicated pastoral realities are possible, and need not represent a fundamental change to our doctrine of marriage, but are grace-based responses that enable the people of God to live in a complex world and find ways to grow in faith, hope and love.

Alongside this account of shifting language and concepts, we nevertheless see, in the same teaching documents, the reaffirmation that bodies matter, that what we do with bodies matters, and therefore a reaffirmation of the traditional teaching that sex properly belongs within lifelong, faithful, exclusive and socially and legally recognised relationships. Current proposals for pastoral provision do not change this formulation of the ideal, nor to the concept of marriage being restricted to one man and one woman, but represent a change in our pastoral responses and how we configure living well and growing in faith in the society we inhabit.

The Pastoral Guidance as a replacement for *Issues in Human Sexuality* does retain much of what has been said and mandated before in terms of sexual ethics, in terms of faithfulness, exclusive relationships, the use of power within intimate relationships, the corrosive nature of abusive relationships and of the commodification of sex, for instance. The PLF were conceived of as a genuine pastoral response to a particular, very focused question regarding long-term, faithful, committed, exclusive same-sex relationships between Christians who are seeking to live as faithfully as then can as Christians and LGBTQI+ people. The PLF fall short of speaking of the entire relationship as a way of life, which makes them very different to marriage. They are more restricted, more modest, and acknowledge what we can unambiguously affirm as good: faithfulness, lifelong commitment, mutual love and flourishing, fruitfulness, stability. They are silent on those things on which church has not found a place of consensus.

For some, this will be far too little. Others, on the other hand, will argue that the presence of sexual activity in these relationships undermines the goods that we see. This disagreement is the reason why it has been decided not to change doctrine, and only a more limited pastoral response is being

offered. It is also why careful consideration is being given to appropriate pastoral reassurance and how we may still belong within one church, and continue to discern together, amidst profound disagreements. It is also why the prayers will only be offered on a limited basis, by those who have prayerfully discerned that such a pastoral response is appropriate in specific circumstances. This pastoral response nevertheless can make a space to affirm joyfully all that is good and of God, and pray for a couple that they may grow in holiness and that God would be present with them as they seek to develop in faith, discipleship and love.

2.2 THE CHANGING SHAPE OF DISAGREEMENT

As we explore the roots of the Church's decision to offer a pastoral provision, it is also important to trace how the shape of our disagreement has evolved and changed, and led to the space we seek to inhabit today.

Whilst the different basic lines of argument around same-sex relationships have not changed, language and concepts in teaching about marriage and in reflecting on same-sex relationships has changed immensely, and this is obvious in the evolution from 1967 to today. Change in language and tone is significant, because language shapes the way we see reality. To change *how* we speak inevitably changes what it is we speak of.

2.2.1 A changing language in speaking of LGBTQI+ Christians

Reports since the 1960s are striking in their language about LGBTQI+ people. Despite attempts at pastoral concern, the language of earlier reports is largely othering of LGBTQI+ people – they are the 'other', rather than 'one of us'; they are spoken of almost entirely in terms of male same-sex relationships, with consistent concern expressed about what was perceived as 'homosexual lifestyles'. They are spoken about as 'homosexuals' or 'homophiles', and the initials LGBTQI+ only really come into full use in LLF. Before that, gay men were the 'other', while lesbians and trans people were only mentioned rarely. The 1967 report still speaks primarily of 'homosexual behaviour' rather than consider sexual orientation as a concept. The shift to LLF's concern for speaking with, rather than about, people, for using people's own preferred self-identification, and to acknowledge orientation as a given, is both gradual and hugely significant, because it changes the Church's understanding of sex and sexual identity in a way that gives a different background for conversations about sex and marriage. It means that when the words 'sex' or 'sexuality' are used in teaching, or referred to (even obliquely in liturgical texts or canons), while on the surface the teaching has not necessarily changed, the deeper meaning has, because what is conveyed by the words has evolved.

Earlier reports are clear about maintaining the position that 'homosexual activity' is sinful, but they nevertheless wrestle with what a pastoral response should look like. The 1987 *Osborne Report* talks of homosexual activity as sin but urges pastoral wisdom and keeping sexual matters private (private not meaning secret, but restricted to pastoral contexts – though this approach risks leading to what the Pastoral Principles have called the 'evil of silence').

Issues in Human Sexuality (1991), despite remaining a highly controversial and painful document, continues the trend of increasing nuance and pastoral provision; it talks about those who say they are called to live in long term faithful active same-sex relationships and says, 'we respect their integrity' – at the same time as saying it goes against what they asked for (5.21). Here and more widely, this goes beyond a description of 'some believe this, others believe that' and actually recognises the integrity of this position, without necessarily approving of it. This in many ways is part of the trajectory towards recognising that it is possible to hold different views on this matter with Christian integrity. It is a move beyond previous talk of 'homosexual activity' as sin only. The

significance of the shift is that it permits a divergence of views that is not categorised or caricatured simply as wilful sin and ignoring teaching. In Biblical terms, wilful sin, particularly on sexual matters, falls under the type of behaviour that Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 5 or Jesus in Matthew 18.15-17, when a 'brother or sister' is confronted yet refuses to change, knowing that their behaviour is wrong. Accepting that another's position has integrity moves the debate to a different plane: we are now talking of people who are seeking to live holy lives, but come to different conclusions in study and prayer. This in some ways is closer (though not identical) to the discussions about disagreement on meat sacrificed to idols, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 8. The teaching of the Church remains unchanged in *Issues*, but the way in which LGBTQI+ people and their life of faith are spoken of is evolving significantly.

Finally, there is a clear thread through all previous reports and statements, apart from the *Higton Motion*, in calling for compassionate pastoral provision. Already, the 1967 *Report to the Board of the Working Party on Homosexuality* states: 'The community has an obligation to meet the needs of homosexual men and women in that they are brothers and sisters in Christ.' This early statement is significant: responding well is the duty of the whole church, and it is based on a fundamental fellowship in Christ. There is no sense in which LGBTQI+ people (and their allies) are considered as not part of the fellowship of Christ's people here, and responses are firmly categorised as a pastoral matter.

Already in this 1967 report, and in all subsequent full reports, there is an increasingly clear condemnation of homophobia, with an ever-widening definition of what homophobia consists of. The 1987 *Osborne Report* goes as far as condemning homophobia as a sin on equal footing with the sin that others describe homosexual activity to be. *Lambeth 1.10d* famously calls the Communion to 'condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex'. This emphasis carries on subsequently, and finds itself expressed most fully in the LLF call to repentance for the way the church has treated LGBTQI+ people.

2.2.2 Acknowledging the goods present in same-sex relationships

Together with a recognition of the integrity of a position alternative to what is seen as the ideal or the 'right' position, we find that successive reports also increasingly make room to recognise the goods in same-sex relationships. 'Goods' that were previously restricted to heterosexual marriage are now recognised in same-sex couples (and, incidentally, also increasingly recognised in non-married opposite-sex couples). This is a significant shift, in that it signals an acceptance that sexual activity outside marriage does not automatically take away all the goods in a relationship (earlier reports do not state this as an unqualified conclusion, but rather include it in a range of ways of thinking that coexist in the church). Instead, a gradation of goods is recognised, which does not displace or diminish marriage as the proper or fuller expression of intimate, sexual relationships, but recognises the reality of living in the world as ambiguous, mixed, and touched by grace as much as – or more than – by sin. This paves the way for talk of pastoral accommodation and provision.

This is how it works in successive reports:

Already in 1967, there is a move to start to recognise the goods in same-sex relationships, though this is initially very tentative. The *Report to the Board of the Working Party on Homosexuality*, acknowledges disagreement then around same-sex couples living a 'settled life' with a 'steady partner'.

By 1979, the *Gloucester Report* goes a little further and wonders whether same-sex relationships may be 'as genuine expressions of love as other human relationships' (5.3-5.5).

The *Osborne Report* in 1987 makes a clear distinction between different types of same-sex activity and talks of 'mature' and 'long-standing' relationships as qualitatively different, and something that must be recognised regardless of one's beliefs (p.53).

Issues in Human Sexuality, in 1991, section 4.6 makes parallels between clearly destructive patterns of sexuality in same and opposite sex relationships, and then contrasts this to 'those who grow in fidelity and mutual caring, understanding and support, whose partnerships are a blessing to the world around them, and who achieve great, even heroic, sacrifice and devotion.' This goes further than simply identifying 'goods' and actually states the value of same-sex relationships as a social blessing to others, beyond a couple.

The *House of Bishops Guidance on Same-Sex Marriage* in 2014 states, 'As we said in our response to the consultation prior to the same sex marriage legislation, "the proposition that same sex relationships can embody crucial social virtues is not in dispute. Same sex relationships often embody genuine mutuality and fidelity...., two of the virtues which the Book of Common Prayer uses to commend marriage. The Church of England seeks to see those virtues maximised in society".' The idea that this is 'not in dispute' represents a significant change in how we speak of same-sex relationships in relation to marriage and to teaching about the rightful place of sexual activity. While it does not quite change the doctrine of marriage, it does change the way the doctrine of marriage shapes a response to other types of relationships.

This 2014 statement also shows how it is possible to speak of other relationships as embodying some of the virtues of marriage, without compromising the doctrine of marriage itself, or arguing for a change in that doctrine. If anything, it is the reaffirmation of the core principles that makes it possible to acknowledge what may be good in other relationships, and commend those goods, and pray that they may grow further.

3 LIVING WITH REALITY

All human beings are made in the image of God and called into the likeness of Christ. While this is the fundamental, joyous reality in which we are invited to dwell, this can only be done by actual human beings living in specific times and places across time: God's fundamental call on humanity does not change, though understandings of what it means to be a flourishing person in community and relationship can and do shift over time. Within the past one hundred years, British society's social mores as well as religious and cultural understandings around sexuality and gender have shifted significantly.

These shifts are reflected, not least, in the extent to which every tradition in the Church acknowledges not only that prejudice against LGBTQI+ people is deeply wrong and sinful, but has sought to repent of the Church's ingrained history of homophobia. Indeed, one of the fruits of the Church's developing understanding of what it means to be seek Christ in our complex modern society is a richer pastoral theology, a greater humility, and an openness to learn from what God is revealing in society. As the church has acknowledged both its own contextual and human richness as well as its own failings, limitations and partiality, a richer understanding of God's full and transforming participation in his world has been revealed.

All human beings and all human relationships fall short of the holiness and goodness of God shown in Jesus Christ. While the Church has discerned that marriage represents one icon of human flourishing, even within such relationships there is only ever an approximation to God's fidelity and holiness. Human beings fall short. It is the nature of being human that conversion to Christ is – for both communities and persons – a work in progress.

As such, any real, substantive and generous pastoral provision for the reality of human relationships – even those most in the church would suggest are closest to modelling the holiness of Christ – requires due humility and graciousness. Pastoral provision is predicated on a recognition that in the face of the glorious grace of Christ, we are all falling short; our human failings and limitations, as well as the Church's history of prejudice and persecution, caution us against over-confident pronouncements about the complex and rich diversity of human identity and relationships. As the Church steps ever deeper into its pilgrimage with the holy, living God, we are called to discern with generosity and love and seek God in what is actually happening.

Just as the Church's recent work on the family, *Love Matters*⁵, has discerned the rich and moving ways in which different households can hold the goods of family, the Prayers of Love and Faith are part of an ongoing work of discernment. The Church is called to be a community seeking to discern God's faithful and holy love in action. God's action in history never fails to surprise – by taking root in unexpected places and among unexpected people. While there remain significant disagreements about the extent to which committed, exclusive and faithful LGBT+ relationships carry within them the goods of holy and faithful relationships, the Prayer of Love and Faith are offered in recognition of the hope, promise and joy those relationships can show forth.

3.1 GRACE

Pastoral provision is based on the ongoing struggle of all human beings with living in the world, growing and learning, but also finding ways to make life liveable in a world that is often harsh and incomprehensible. Pastoral provision is based, first and foremost, on a practical theology of grace.

Jesus Christ bids his disciples to imitate the perfection of their heavenly Father, calls his disciples to follow him, bearing their crosses, and endorses the primacy of the commands to love God with all of ourselves and our neighbours as ourselves. The Gospel takes the form of empowering, liberating law. Christ enjoins us to ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit and sends that same Spirit upon the Church. These commands extend to forms of shared life and to sexual ethics.

Pastoral provision does not weaken the demands of the gospel upon our lives but recognises the grace that precedes and accompanies them and which is their spirit: the grace in which Jesus Christ became poor for our sake, humbling himself to our condition; the grace in which he comes, anointed by the Spirit of God, to proclaim the release of captives, the recovery of sight and the liberation of the oppressed. The purpose of such provision is not to lay impossible burdens nor to cheapen God's grace but to encourage the pursuit of Christ-likeness in the midst of our continuing discernment and to afford the support of Christian community as the setting for that difficult endeavour. It seeks to recognise, honour and build up the members of the body, mindful of our common weaknesses and the failings of the Church, while taking care for others' consciences. It encourages all of us to deepen our life with Christ and our commitment to love of God and neighbour, as we form part of the same church.

⁵ [Love Matters: Final report of the Commission | The Church of England](#)

Grace within the pastoral provision may be first and foremost grace towards one another, in recognition of our common humanity, our common frailty, and our collective not-knowing. It is a choice to care tenderly for one another, by listening to those who say that the traditional discipline of the Church has laid unbearable burdens upon them, which, they, after careful prayer and study, do not think are justified; and it is listening carefully to those who, after equal prayer and study, still think that the traditional teaching and discipline of the Church are right, and life-giving, and cannot be moved away from, even if the change is a change in pastoral practice rather than a formal change of doctrine. Grace is what is leading us towards trying to find ways to enable every member of the Church to live as faithfully as they can at a time when we have not discerned a common way forward. This document seeks to explain primarily the pastoral provision of the PLF; the pastoral provision needed for reassurance for those who cannot accept that the PLF will be used by fellow priests and bishops, and therefore feel that communion is impaired within the Body, will be explored with equal care at a later stage.

To return to the PLF, a well-designed pastoral provision can help us discern where God is at work, and invite us to grow within it. It can help us focus on nurturing habits that will help us grow in holiness. Holiness is formed by being immersed in habits and practices which foster the capacity for repentance and forgiveness, generosity and compassion, fidelity and the pursuit of justice and mercy. The PLF name all of these goods as gifts of God, which couples are called to grow into, to nurture in their common life and seek to display in their relationships with others.

In this sense, the PLF as pastoral provision act as part of the discernment of what needs nurturing in our lives. But they do not function on their own; just like any other prayers or forms of service, they are held within the wider container of the Church's teaching and preaching, its traditions and its engagement with Scripture. The PLF are not an encapsulation of all our doctrine; they are one, particular contribution to our common life, and one that consciously seeks to emphasise what is good and embody a concept of 'contagious holiness': the sense that the walk of discipleship is enhanced by a practice of discerning what is good in our lives. This practice does and should not stand alone. We also need other practices embedded in our liturgies, worship and life together, that help us recognise our erring, such as repentance, teaching or correction. These complement and balance what the PLF do – just like a marriage service on its own does not address all the possible distortions of relationships that may need addressing, but fits into a much more expansive picture of the Christian life. The PLF will find different inflections in different church traditions, they may be used to a greater or lesser degree, and some branches of the church will not use them at all. This is within the nature of pastoral provision: it is about real, specific people, in relationship with their communities. It is about conscience and creating a space within which it is possible to act differently from what has been possible in the past, but without a change in doctrine, which introduces a degree of provisionality and space for difference and disagreement. Pastoral provision can never be compulsory. Yet it is the hope that the PLF can offer nuanced ways for local communities to explore what their response should be in their own contexts.

3.2 PASTORAL ACCOMMODATION AND PASTORAL PROVISION

Pastoral provision is an extension, with some significant differences, of the well-established concept of pastoral accommodation. It is not a brand new idea, or an innovation designed to try and solve a thorny problem. Pastoral provision, a way of enabling life in the word, has been a feature of the life of the people of God since the beginning of times.

The Old Testament chronicles a long history of pastoral provision for a people struggling to live well, sometimes because of their own choices, but just as often, because of the choices of others, or

simply because of the complexity and brokenness of the world. Chapter 9 of the *LLF book* explores this story in some depth. Overall it is difficult to read the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of David and Solomon, of the great figures of the Old Testament, without seeing grace at work alongside judgment, and God's constant blessing and presence despite much that seems to deny or diminish life in all its fullness. Life in the Old Testament is spent in tension between the high demands of covenant and promise, and the reality that it is only by grace and compassion that the people of God can be enabled to sustain life and faith. The New Testament follows in this trajectory, with stories of Jesus holding a vision of life in all its fullness as an outcome of outrageous grace and acceptance. Pastoral provision seeks to embody the same vision.

The history of the Church has also yielded a long practice of pastoral provision. Once again, there is no time to explore this in extensive detail, but a look at the post-war years is helpful in showing how pastoral provision fits within a clear trajectory of recognising the goods of different relationships.

Before highlighting these, it is helpful to note that we have often talked of pastoral *accommodation*; but the language of accommodation is laden with implicit power dynamics; it has a chequered history, and can be used to reinforce the sense that some people's lives are somehow 'second-class'. It is still cast within the theological space of 'remedy for sin'. For some, this framing seems entirely appropriate; for others it is deeply offensive and subverts the Church's affirmation of goods in faithful, permanent, exclusive same-sex relationships. This profound difference over the applicability of pastoral accommodation to the PLF is a symptom of the Church's present disagreements.

Pastoral provision on the other hand seeks to focus firmly on what is good, and encourage growth through the identification of God at work. It is set within the landscape of a lack of corporate agreement. It also seeks to respond to a slightly different question: how do we find ways of living healthily and faithfully when the disciplines and laws of our church make it impossible for some to see a way towards life that is both bearable and holy? It is rooted in the acknowledgement of the deep pain that has been expressed by LGBTQI+ Christians, together with our increasing understanding of social and scientific understandings of sexuality, as explored in the *LLF Book*, chapter 6⁶. It is an attempt to navigate a landscape where we see good we may want to celebrate, pain we may want to acknowledge and remedy, repentance we need to engage in for our collective hardness of heart, the provisionality of what we know and the need to hold one another with care and tenderness, without imposing unbearable burdens on one another, and the continued uncertainty in our common life that prevents us from clear and unanimous decision-making.

Pastoral provision builds on developments in the related concept of pastoral accommodation in the history of the Church in the 20th and 21st centuries, where a growing number of documents over the years have spoken of 'pastoral accommodation' in one form or another. As already highlighted, in these documents, to allow for pastoral accommodation, or pastoral provision, does not change the primary doctrine of the church, or the formulation of the 'ideal', but takes realistically the challenges, pain and messiness of real, particular human lives. Pastoral accommodation draws on the many Biblical examples of God working with – and blessing – people as and where they are, despite their falling short of the ideal in multiple ways – some because of sin, some because of weakness, damage or hurt, some because of the ways that communities and groups behave so that individuals cannot always do as they would prefer to do.

⁶ For more detail, see [LLF Hub>Further Resources>Library>Social and Biological Sciences](#)

Talk of pastoral accommodation is found throughout previous documents, but becomes noticeably more affirmative over the years, away from simply 'grace towards sinners' and towards an understanding of how we may respond to those who want to grow in holiness in ways that are realistic and rooted in the real, non-ideal, lives of real people at specific times and in specific places. Pastoral provisions help bridge the recognition of ideals with the need to respond pastorally with grace, compassion, and a degree of provisionality and humility about what we do or do not know.

The 1987 *Osborne Report* reflects on the pastoral reality that having to enable people to live well with something which may not be considered the ideal is part and parcel of normal Christian life, and that God often works with people 'by way of interim solutions' (p. 54).

Issues in Human Sexuality (1991) expresses the tension between the need for pastoral accommodation as a matter of justice, and the need to preserve a sense of the ideal:

Justice does indeed demand that the Church should be free in its pastoral discretion to accommodate a God-given ideal to human need, so that individuals are not turned away from God and their neighbour but helped to grow in love towards both from within their own situation. But the Church is also bound to take care that the ideal itself is not misrepresented or obscured; and to this end the example of its ordained ministers is of crucial significance.

Some Issues in Human Sexuality (2003) reiterates the principle, and highlights the fact that more room has been made for pastoral accommodation and dialogue on other matters of sexual morality than on homosexuality – often more generously and with less ongoing unease.

What we find is a consistent pattern in the development of an Anglican approach to sexual ethics. This pattern has two key elements. The first of these is a reassertion of Christian principles such as the lifelong nature of marriage, the production of children as one of the purposes of marriage, and the sacredness of human life, including the life of the unborn child. The second is a willingness to allow the outworking of these principles in practice to be shaped by pastoral realities and dilemmas such as realities of marital breakdown and the need and desire for couples to limit the number of their children, and the dilemmas posed by backstreet abortions and the threat that an unborn child could pose to the life of the mother. (1.2.62-65)

Men and Women in Marriage (2013) further explains how pastoral accommodation does not change doctrine, but enables life to proceed in a movement of coming closer to God:

The meaning of such pastoral accommodations can be misunderstood, as though the Church were solving pastoral difficulties by redefining marriage from the ground up, which it cannot do. What it can do is devise accommodations for specific conditions, bearing witness in special ways to the abiding importance of the norm. Well-designed accommodations proclaim the form of life given by God's creative goodness and bring those in difficult positions into closer approximation to it. They mark the point where teaching and pastoral care coincide. (49)

The PLF seek to constitute the type of legitimate pastoral provision described here, where the prayers bear witness to the norm by affirming the goods that can be seen in relationships (such as permanence, fidelity etc) and enable those who receive the prayers to grow in their life with God.

Pastoral provision recognises the uncertainty of our current time (where there is uncertainty about the outcome of the whole church's discernment, even though many individuals on all sides are very

certain that they are right), and does not stigmatise people but acknowledges the provisionality of our knowledge and responses in ways that err on the side of grace rather than judgement.

Some have asked, quite appropriately, whether routine accommodation/provision then becomes a *de facto* change in doctrine. The challenge has some weight: doctrine is not simply produced by official pronouncements but in an iterative process of dialogue between conceptual formulation and embodiment in practice. However, it is quite clear, looking at the history of the church and at Scripture, that pastoral accommodation and the practice of grace and compassion have always been part of the life of the people of God⁷ – what varies is the degree and consistency with which it is offered, and the groups it is extended to (women have traditionally been granted much less grace and accommodation than men in the area of sexuality, for instance). To introduce a consistent way of pastoral provision would be to stand in a long line of the pastoral practice of finding ways to help people move forward in holiness in a world that falls far short of any ideals, without giving up on the idea of a proper or fuller configuration of relationships altogether. This would bring out more explicitly the principle that grace is a central concept in Christian doctrine, which interacts strongly with the pastoral outworkings of doctrines like the doctrine of marriage.

3.3 PASTORAL PROVISION, LAW AND PUBLIC WORSHIP

The Church of England, like all Christian Churches, depends for its life upon God's gracious gifts and mercy. The graced life of the church is an ordered life; law is not opposed to the gospel but serves the way it shapes our life together, receiving and responding to God's grace. These laws state what may, or may not be permissible in worship and what may or may not, constitute an appropriate use of services. It would be easy to oppose law and grace. Yet this is not the way of the Gospel. Jesus himself proclaimed that he has not 'come to abolish the law or the prophets ... not to abolish but to fulfil' (Matthew 5.17). A Pastoral Provision takes the law seriously, and acknowledges that the doctrine of our church with regards to marriage may not be undermined by the provision or the text of new commended or authorised prayers. This is particularly important for Anglican Churches given the role of prayer and worship in shaping and forming doctrine. The question for the PLF therefore is whether grace and provision can be encapsulated within formal prayers, particularly given that, because of the disagreements among us, they will not all be used in the same way across the Church, and some would disagree that public prayers can be used for such purposes. The question applies to both the provision of the PLF, and the extent of reassurance that can be offered to those for whom this represents an impairment of communion, though this specific question will be explored in work on reassurance rather than here.

Here we need to consider what it is the PLF are seeking to do, and not to do. The PLF witness to the enduring message of the doctrine of marriage, by affirming very clear goods that bear a family resemblance to the goods of marriage: stability, faithfulness, exclusive, lifelong commitment, fruitfulness, mutual nurture and work for the flourishing of each partner and all those with whom a couple comes into contact. But the PLF fall short of affirming a couple's entire way of life as 'made holy by God' and 'blessed' as a marriage service would do. This position reflects our uncertainty about how to conclude our discernment. The PLF do not seek to simulate marriage, or pretend that our Church has made a decision to extend marriage to same-sex couples. But they do discern and affirm what is good, and pray for God's presence and blessing over the people within the relationship. They are 'prayers on the way': the way of people seeking to grow in God, but also the

⁷ See the LLF book, chapters 9 and 10, pp. 175-216.

way of a Church seeking to discern how to respond well to the diversity of the Body, and to the complexity of a rapidly changing social context.

The questions the Church of England is facing are questions asked by many other churches and denominations. Recent comments by Pope Francis on 25th September 2023 echo the Church of England's wish to offer suitable pastoral provision. The wrestling within the Roman Catholic Church, where some churches in specific contexts have started offering blessings for same-sex couples, is very similar, attempting to balance law, grace, forms of public worship and blessings.

In reference to a submission from 5 cardinals to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and in response to the second question contesting whether 'the claim that the widespread practice of the blessing of same-sex unions would be in accord with Revelation and the Magisterium,' the pope wrote: 'The Church has a very clear conception of marriage: an exclusive, stable and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the begetting of children. Only this union is called marriage.'

He went on: 'For this reason the Church avoids any kind of rite or sacramental that could contradict this conviction and give the impression that something that is not marriage is recognized as marriage.'

'In dealing with people, however, we must not lose pastoral charity, which must permeate all our decisions and attitudes. The defence of objective truth is not the only expression of this charity, which is also made up of kindness, patience, understanding, tenderness, and encouragement. Therefore, we cannot become judges who only deny, reject, and exclude.'

'Therefore, pastoral prudence must adequately discern whether there are forms of blessing, requested by one or more persons, that would not transmit a mistaken conception of marriage. Because when a blessing is requested, one is expressing a request for help from God, a plea to be able to live better, a trust in a Father who can help us to live better.'⁸

The Pope's words on 'blessings' again echo some of the underpinning for the PLF.

3.4 BLESSING

A particular question associated with the PLF is the role of blessings. A full paper is available on the LLF Hub exploring how we may understand the place of blessing within the PLF.⁹

A shorter account can be given here. First, it is important to highlight that understandings of what blessings represent differ across the Church of England; as often, being a broad church leads us to a place of having different underlying understandings to what looks like a common practice. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that at least in our formal, authorised liturgies, blessing is always conferred on people, and it is something that God confers, and not something that the Church itself confers as a ratification of morality or worth.

This is in line with a Biblical understanding of blessing.

⁸ For an account of the news story, see [Pope suggests Catholic Church could bless same-sex couples - BBC News](#)

⁹ [Bible: Blessing and LLF \(churchofengland.org\)](#)

3.4.1 Biblical forms of blessing

Blessing is a core concept and practice in both the Old and the New Testament, and has a long and rich history in the life of the Church.

First and foremost, blessing is one of the modes in which God relates to the world; indeed, in Scripture it is one of the earliest modes of relationship between God and the physical world (blessing is not exclusive to humans, but it is quasi-exclusive to living beings). In the creation story of Genesis, animate life is systematically blessed by God as it comes into being on the fifth and sixth days. In addition, God also blesses time, the seventh day, when life can rest in imitation of the Creator's own rest. The blessing of animate life therefore relates to life having a particular context which will contribute to the realization of that blessing.

Blessing then forms part of the architecture of the relationship between God and creation. The story of Abraham, in particular focuses on blessing, and on the cascading of blessing to others. Blessing in the story of Abraham is very clearly not tied to perfection or the demonstration of moral worth. It is an act of pure grace, of initiation of relationships, and a sign of God's posture towards his people: a posture that always seeks to bless, and works for the flourishing of the other, even when the other is recalcitrant or works against the grain of the blessing they are invited into. The practice of blessing by human beings develops alongside the story of blessing by God. In the Torah, it becomes the responsibility of Aaron and his sons, the tasks of priests, to speak blessing on God's behalf – always in prayer form, and drawing on God's posture of love towards creation.

The Psalms draw on a different way of framing blessing, and identify what may be needed in order to live a life that generates blessing, or that enters into the fullness of the blessing that is prayed for. The wisdom Psalms repeatedly locate blessing in the Torah and following the ways of the Lord. It is not that following the ways of God is needed *in order to* gain blessing; but rather that blessing is fully realised and augmented when living a godly life.

In the New Testament there is also a generosity of outlook prescribed for those who follow Christ. Paul enjoins Christians to "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Rom. 12:14), thereby prescribing both attitude and action in continuity with the words of Jesus, "bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Lk. 6:28). This is not just a matter of refraining from wanting harm to come to those who are hostile in opposition. Jesus and Paul both envisage Christians actively and prayerfully engaging with God, that what is good for these people should come to them from God (without prescribing what form that should take).

There is an important and constructive tension in the portrayal of blessing as a whole in the Bible. On the one hand, it represents the sovereign and gracious initiative of God towards creation. On the other hand, there are passages which speak of blessing being received in the covenantal context of human obedience to God (Deut. 28:1-14). This tension between "God sovereignly blesses" and "God blesses those who are obedient" is not something to be resolved, but articulates some of the dimensions of love, where love is both unconditionally given and love only thrives when there is mutuality and responsiveness. The tension between grace freely given, and the need for trusting and obedient responsiveness in relation to it, runs through Scripture as a whole. This tension sets blessing as a form of calling: recognising that all things belong to God and come from God, but also that everything is being drawn into God's transforming grace. Blessing both affirms God's initial creative intent and orients us into God's work of redemption and re-creation.

3.4.2 Blessing in the Church

The practice of 'blessing' in the Church is firmly rooted in the patterns of Scripture, with a particular emphasis on the blessing of people.

By around the third century however, we begin to find extensive evidence of various forms of blessing that go beyond early practice, with numerous blessings for objects and places set in liturgical forms and prayers. Whether it is to do with people, objects and ways of living, it is worth reflecting on the distinctions and overlaps between blessing, dedication and consecration. Blessing as rooted in creation and vocation has the widest range. Consecration has the narrowest range as directed primarily towards sacred use or relationship. Dedication sits in between, not setting something, someone or a relationship aside solely for religious purposes, yet setting it very clearly before God for a pattern of holy living. The Church grew to recognise some forms of living as 'consecrated', as in the consecrated singleness of those in religious communities. Marriage became a relationship and configuration of life that was formally 'blessed', as rooted in creation and expressing conditions within which human life flourishes, with a very wide reach.

There is no need here to explore extensively how the notion of 'blessing' has evolved; the habit of blessing both people and certain activities or conditions carried through history, until in the 20th century, liturgical reform pushed back somewhat against widespread use of blessings of objects and refocused liturgical texts on the blessing of people primarily, and occasionally on the context within which life can flourish.

This orientation is clear in Common Worship, where for instance, in the Chrism Mass, the blessing for the oils is not for the oils to be blessed intrinsically, but to be a blessing on those who are anointed. The Marriage Service, in the same way, includes a blessing on the *people* getting married, and for the marriage to be a place of blessing through the presence of Christ. Even the exchange of rings is carefully worded: 'by your blessing let these rings be to *N* and *N* a symbol of unending love and faithfulness, to remind them of the vow and covenant which they have made this day'. The liturgy does not quite say 'bless these rings' but invokes God's blessing for the rings to be a reminder of the conditions within which blessing may flourish.

3.4.3 What does 'blessing' symbolise or express?

At its most basic therefore, the action of blessing represents a reflection of God's intent that another person flourish, and a prayer for them to come into God's life in all its fulness, as defined by God (and therefore 'holy'). As such, blessings relate both to God's creation and to human vocation. One short-hand for blessing might be 'invoking God's power for the good of that which is blessed'. Associated with the direct blessing of people, there may be an acknowledgement that certain conditions or ways of life may be such 'good' that they may in themselves be a blessing or nurture flourishing and blessing – and it is this understanding that shapes the Marriage Service.

In common parlance however, the expression 'give your blessing to' has often come to take on a conditional inflection not always present in biblical theology or more formal theologies¹⁰. More generally, we often 'bless' what we judge good enough rather than bless the person (i.e. pray for

¹⁰ See the Roman Ritual general introduction s.12: 'The celebration of blessings becomes the means for us to profess that as we make use of what God has created we wish to find him and to love and serve him with all fidelity.' This is a prayer, rather than a statement of approval for what already is.

their flourishing) and as part of this blessing hope and pray that they will come into fullness of life according to divine principles.

The distinction is core to the PLF; when we offer a blessing in the context of a relationship, what is it that is being 'blessed'? Is it the relationship, or the persons? Blessing the relationship itself propels us inevitably into the realm of conditional blessing, where blessing is a recognition of something that is already good (or blessed) or at least has the potential to be good and holy, and praying that it would remain good and extend in depth and fruitfulness, rather than a simple blessing of the persons before us. However, a Christian understanding of the human person is never reduced to individuals: human beings are always people-in-relation, and to bless two people together necessarily involves praying for the shape of their relationship. It does, however, remain the case that a prayer for blessing is a prayer for God to act in accordance with God's posture towards the world – one that consistently seeks to draw people closer to himself and enable them to flourish.

3.4.4 The Marriage Service and the PLF

When it comes to marriage, we can make an analogy with the blessing of the Sabbath as a distinctive way of life which promotes blessing. The relationship between the two people entering marriage is never going to be perfect; however, a relationship defined in certain ways – promoting faithfulness, stability, permanency and fruitfulness – can be a context within which human beings flourish and experience blessing. This degree of recognition of certain shapes of life is uncommon in Scripture, and in the life of the Church. Many people seek blessing, for themselves and their endeavours, and can even be dedicated before God. Holy Matrimony however goes a step further.

Holy Matrimony effects a social change in the position of the people taking part, recognised in the church as one of these special ways of living that enables flourishing. Marriage has been seen as highly distinctive among other relationships— for many Christians (including many Anglicans) a sacrament; for all an ordinance hallowed by Christ himself at Cana of Galilee; given a theological / ecclesiological depth of interpretation lacking to other relationships. This is close to the wisdom literature's understanding of holy ways of living being experienced as 'blessing'. The marriage service therefore blesses an individual couple, and affirms marriage as a 'good' within which blessing is more likely to be experienced in its fullness. This understanding of marriage does not preclude the possibility of other relationships being good, or warranting some form of blessing, but it does set aside marriage as a distinctive form of life. The Book of Common Prayer refers to this way of life as 'the estate of marriage'.

The PLF, in contrast, identify goods that bear a family resemblance to marriage, but do not define a specific way of life in its entirety as a way of blessing – there is no definition of a specific 'estate'. As such, it gives a different context to the PLF and its optional prayer of blessing. The blessing of the PLF is a blessing on people, as with all other blessings. It is a prayer for God's action to bring flourishing and fruitfulness, and enables the Church to stand alongside a couple to affirm their desire to walk more closely into the ways of God, and receive the blessings of the Kingdom.

4 THE OFFER OF THE PLF

There, then, are clear differences between what may be done using the PLF resources and what is enacted in the marriage services of the Church of England but it is also important to explain what their use may enact, positively. The marriage liturgy culminates in the proclamation that the couple

are now husband and wife - consent having been given, declarations and vows made, rings exchanged and received. There are essential elements which constitute being married according to the rites and ceremonies of the church of England. The liturgy, like all liturgy, also expresses the need for grace, the support of the community, the teachings of the church and the ongoing work of the Spirit. There is space for forgiveness and fruitfulness. It sets out hopes for life in the world and the hope of the world to come.

In that breadth of liturgical context, it becomes clear what the PLF are not, as already indicated. But it is also possible, in that context, to say more about what they provide. For they create space for the reality of God's presence to be named in human lives. Such a spiritual imagination allows for the expression of human faithfulness and commitment in response to God's faithfulness to us. It extends the invitation for hearts to be turned outwards towards the other, reflecting the goods of a household. Those goods include not only permanence and faithfulness as the hopes of life together but also encompass hospitality, generosity, stability, compassion, mutual support, flourishing and security. All these goods are held within a wider vision of living out of the sacrificial love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Through the power of the Spirit, Christian disciples are called to walk in that way.

The PLF thus name the expectation that the Spirit is at work in human lives, bringing forth such fruit. They express the intention that the relationships of those blessed and prayed for are not only good for those individuals - by way of comfort and strength - but also that wider society benefits through a commitment to mercy, justice, compassion and hospitality.

We have already named, extensively, the difference between the PLF and marriage, as well as the family likeness, and the way in which the PLF are a way of naming goods that our doctrine helps us identify as worth pursuing. They are prayers that enable us to be present in solidarity with a couple; to honour before God the self-giving love and faithfulness they have for one another; to name the virtues they are exhibiting and pray that these may be deepened; to pray for their needs and the whole of their earthly pilgrimage, and pray that God would bring them into flourishing. This is the vision that underlies the opening bidding from the PLF:

Dear friends in Christ,
we gather with *N* and *N* to celebrate with them
their love, faithfulness, and commitment.
We come to hear God's holy word,
and to surround *N* and *N* with our love and prayer
as they seek the blessings of God's kingdom
in their life together.

GENERAL SYNOD

Living in Love and Faith

Annex I

Living in Love and Faith motion, February 2023

11 The motion (as amended):

‘That this Synod, recognising the commitment to learning and deep listening to God and to each other of the Living in Love and Faith process, and desiring with God’s help to journey together while acknowledging the different deeply held convictions within the Church:

- a) lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people and the harm that LGBTQI+ people have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church;
- b) recommit to our shared witness to God’s love for and acceptance of every person by continuing to embed the Pastoral Principles in our life together locally and nationally;
- c) commend the continued learning together enabled by the Living in Love and Faith process and resources in relation to identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage;
- d) welcome the decision of the House of Bishops to replace Issues in Human Sexuality with new pastoral guidance;
- e) welcome the response from the College of Bishops and look forward to the House of Bishops further refining, commending and issuing the Prayers of Love and Faith described in GS 2289 and its Annexes;
- f) invite the House of Bishops to monitor the Church’s use of and response to the Prayers of Love and Faith, once they have been commended and published, and to report back to Synod in five years’ time.’
- g) endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage, and their intention that the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England.’