



LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

NEXT STEPS UPDATE AUTUMN 2024

A new selection of readings and prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples known as [Prayers of Love and Faith](#) are available for use in public worship during regular Church of England services. They were introduced in December 2023 as part of the outcome of a seven-year period of listening, learning and discernment known as [Living in Love and Faith](#).

This leaflet explains the next steps in the implementation of these prayers following recent proposals brought to the General Synod in July 2024 (see [GS 2358](#)). Further information on the details of this proposal will be available for discussion and feedback early in 2025.

What is Living in Love and Faith?

Living in Love and Faith (LLF) is a process that has been under way for some years now to help the Church in its discernment on matters of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage.

This has involved various phases of learning and listening across the country and across traditions. As a result, in 2023, the House of Bishops issued an apology for a failure to welcome LGBTQI+ people and committed itself to address this lack of welcome and inclusion. Part of this response has been to commend a suite of resources and prayers called the *Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF)*.

The [LLF hub](https://llf.churchofengland.org) carries a range of resources for individuals, groups and churches. These seek to inspire people to think more deeply about what it means to be human and to live in love and faith with one another. See:

<https://llf.churchofengland.org>

What are the Prayers of Love and Faith?

The *Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF)* are resources and prayers provided for same-sex couples, because no provision was previously made for them through existing 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. They do seek to celebrate God's gifts and grace in other forms of committed, faithful relationships, and to ask for God's guidance and blessing as they seek to grow in love and faith.

The PLF 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 their discerning pastoral ministry. There are different forms of prayers that can also be used in public worship. This also provides for a range of pastoral responses for couples, individuals and the church communities they are part of. Guidance on the use of the PLF in public contexts stresses that the option to use or not use the PLF in this way should be part of a wider process of discernment involving the PCC (or other governing body). The guidance for the PLF also outlines how churches might prepare well for such a conversation and stresses the need to consider the variety of views and experiences that people may have.

The *Prayers of Love and Faith* and the current guidance for their use can be found at: www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/prayers-love-and-faith

What are standalone services...and when will they be able to be held?

At present the guidance for the PLF does not allow services that are specifically designed for same-sex couples and held separately from regular worship (generally referred to as 'standalone' services). Instead, ministers can draw on the material in the *Prayers of Love and Faith* and insert those prayers into any existing authorised service of worship (for example a Sunday parish communion service).

However, in July 2024, the Church of England's General Synod decided that at some point in the future, alongside the introduction of Pastoral Reassurance (see below), standalone services of blessing for same-sex couples could be used for a period of discernment of three years.

Some churches will want to offer such services, while others will choose not to do so. Because of this disagreement, such standalone services will not happen until the Church of England has also agreed to put in place further Pastoral Reassurance, including some specific and defined delegation of episcopal ministry.

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, churches that wish to offer them will need to agree to the authorised form by writing to their bishop.

These arrangements are being developed over the coming months along with updated guidance. An update on this work is expected in early 2025.

What is the current proposal and how does it suggest the Prayers of Love and Faith are authorised?

The proposal brought to the July 2024 General Synod is for a period of discernment for use of the PLF including standalone services alongside Pastoral Reassurance to uphold and support theological conscience.

The initial expectation following the commendation of the Prayers of Love and Faith by the House of Bishops in October 2023, was that their use in standalone services would need to go through a Canon B2 authorisation process or a trial period under Canon B5A. However, as this was considered in detail, it was recommended to General Synod that their use in standalone services should be allowed for a three-year period of discernment under Canon B5. At the end of this period, these services may indeed go through a B2 authorisation process.

What is Pastoral Reassurance...and why is this needed?

Using the PLF is optional. No one will be compelled to use the prayers. The guidance for the PLF includes advice on consultation with a PCC and more widely in congregations (if this is felt to be appropriate).

The bishops recognise that the use of the PLF is a matter of theological conscience and there is a deep and public commitment that this will be respected by the bishops and wider Church.

Arrangements for Pastoral Reassurance are additional measures that seek to uphold the vital principle of conscience, provide for the pastoral needs of ministers themselves as they navigate the introduction of the PLF, and offer reassurance that, in spite of differences on the PLF, there is a valued place for those of all theological convictions within the Church of England.

Elements of pastoral reassurance are potentially relevant for different groups within the Church: those who 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 proposals for reassurance being developed include the ability to request episcopal care and ministry from another bishop. Thus, a church that does not wish the PLF to be used could request episcopal ministry from a bishop who does not use them if their own diocesan bishop has committed to using the prayers—and *vice versa*. In most places, the anticipation is that the principle of opting into the use of the PLF will prove to be sufficient reassurance.

At the heart of this lies the commitment to respecting people's integrity, and space for those of differing theological convictions to continue to work, minister and worship together in the body of Christ.

The exact details of this pastoral and spiritual care, and the responsibilities that would be delegated, are still being worked out and will be outlined in a *Bishops' Statement and Code of Practice*.

What is happening to help find agreement on these issues?

Over the coming months several working groups have been brought together to develop the further detail needed around a registration process for those who might wish to use the PLF in standalone services and/or the additional Pastoral Reassurance measures.

The aim is to be able to present a fuller outline on registration and reassurance to the General Synod by February 2025. This would be followed by a further period of consultation with dioceses and other stakeholders to test the 'workability' of these proposals in practice.

The proposal brought to the General Synod in July 2024 recognised that the church remains in a period of discernment around the introduction of the PLF – particularly in standalone services – and in the provision of additional pastoral reassurance. As such, the final proposals will also outline how these arrangements will be monitored over the coming years, and what formal and legal mechanisms might follow this period to help secure this overall provision in the longer term.

What about the question of whether clergy will be allowed to enter same-sex marriages?

The bishops are proposing that further theological work is carried out in the coming months on this matter, for decision by the House of Bishops in early January 2025. This will then be presented at the February 2025 General Synod.

Any accompanying timetable should include clarity on what actions are immediately possible, as well as what might require further work or guidance.

When will all this happen?

Autumn 2024:

LLF Working Groups and the House of Bishops consider detailed proposals that provide further information on the principles and practicalities around the ability to register to use standalone services and request additional pastoral reassurance.

Throughout this period, Diocesan Synods (including newly-elected bodies) will have the opportunity to discuss LLF, the introduction of the PLF and how this has been received in their context.

Spring 2025:

A progress update will be made to the February 2025 General Synod. It is hoped that this will include detailed – but draft – outlines of a Bishops' Statement on the principles and commitments being made; the Code of Practice for Pastoral Reassurance and how this can be requested; updated Pastoral Guidance on the use of the PLF and an outline of the registration process for opting-in to using standalone services.

Diocesan Synods and other networks will be invited to discuss and provide feedback on these fuller proposals for moving forward with the PLF and Pastoral Reassurance.

Summer 2025:

After considering this feedback, the proposals will be brought to the General Synod for final consideration prior to implementation.