

UPDATE OF THEOLOGICAL WORK

ON LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH AND
THE PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH



LIVING
IN LOVE
& FAITH



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

UPDATE ON THEOLOGICAL WORK FOR THE LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH PROGRAMME

This leaflet provides an update on recent theological advice and ongoing theological work on Living in Love and Faith (LLF) and the **Prayers of Love and Faith**. For a more general update on the LLF Programme and proposed next steps, please refer to **this leaflet**. For more (theological) resources on LLF, please follow the links below, or visit the **LLF hub**.

This update aims to be as concise and clear as possible. However, the theological detail of the advice is rather technical. As a result some of the terms used might be unfamiliar and using the glossary at the end of the leaflet might be helpful.

The Faith and Order Commission

The **House of Bishops** and General Synod have received theological advice on elements of the work of LLF and the Prayers of Love and Faith, following previous motions passed by General Synod. The advice was prepared by the **Faith and Order Commission** (FAOC). This commission is made up of 7 bishops and 10 non-episcopal members nominated by the Archbishops after consultation with the General Synod appointments committee and (in the case of bishops) the House of Bishops Standing Committee. The bishops on the Commission comprise the Episcopal Reference Group (ERG). Together FAOC and the ERG advise the House of Bishops and the wider Church on theology and doctrine (official teaching). This includes theological questions across a wide range of questions about the Christian faith.

Recent advice to General Synod

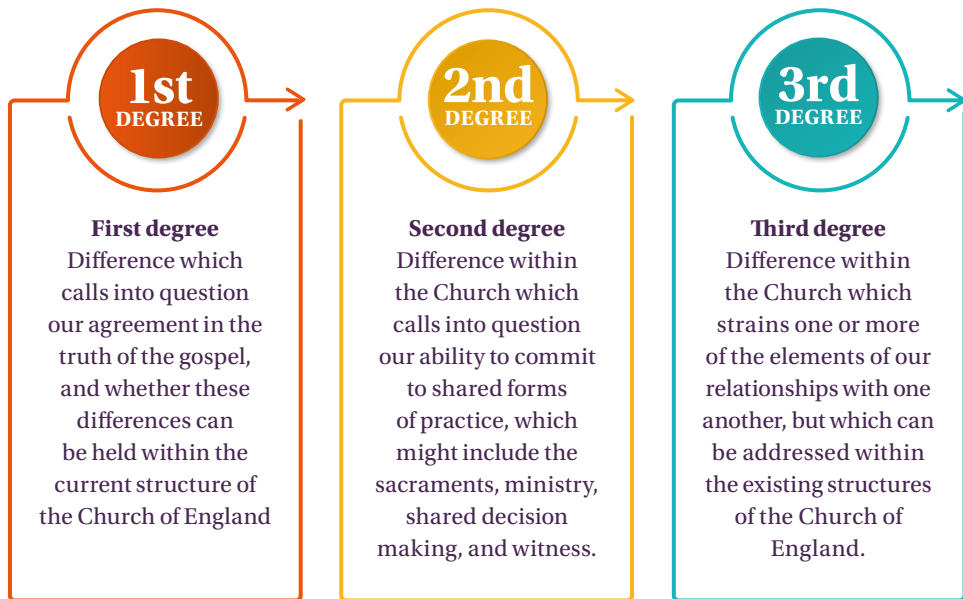
At General Synod in February 2025, two papers were presented with theological advice relating to LLF. The first paper, from the whole Commission, is **GS Misc 1406**. This includes three sections: one on unity and ecclesiology, another on the role of conscience in bishops' work, and a final one on the relationship between holy matrimony, civil marriage, and same-sex marriage. For more detail, the introduction and the executive summaries of the three sections at the beginning of GS Misc 1406 are a good start.

The second paper is **GS Misc 1407**. This is a part report from the Episcopal Reference Group and contains theological advice on whether the Prayers of Love and Faith as written affect the Church's doctrine of marriage. You might find the executive summary of **GS Misc 1407** helpful. In addition, the LLF Book, course and learning hub offer a range of (theological) resources, wider learning and personal reflections to help understanding on pastoral concerns.

WHAT IS IT THE CHURCH DISAGREES ON?

The first part of GS Misc 1406 talks about ecclesiology, unity and differentiation. The paper sets out why unity is so important for the Church, both theologically and in practice. It shows that the disagreement on LLF is not just about theology, but also about the type of disagreement the Church is experiencing.

It outlines possible levels of disagreement within the life of the Church over LLF:



The LLF process has not only contained disagreement about theology and doctrine, but also about what level of disagreement the Church has at present. To put it simply, different people think differently about whether disagreeing over the matters of LLF and the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith are fundamental to our faith or whether

they are second- or third-degree issues. Being more precise about where disagreements lie, how to refer to them, and where disagreements have occurred previously in the Church of England could help the conversations among people with different views on sexuality and relationships.

The theological advice argues that it would be a failure of Christian love for one side to declare what kind of disagreement is being experienced by the other. It asks all to consider implementing temporary, reversible solutions that allow for ongoing discernment. This could provide a way through our current disagreement. This idea of ‘provisionality’—something that is not permanent, but all agree to review in the future — could be a strategy for the Church of England to maintain as much unity as possible while acknowledging significant differences. One might call this an ‘ecclesiological anomaly’, that is, a creative solution that is different from the usual structures. An example of this approach could be **Pastoral Reassurance via delegated episcopal ministry**, which is unconventional, but might be a way to preserve unity in the Church.

The role of conscience

Some of the advice is addressed particularly to bishops (GS Misc 1406, part 2, *Episcopacy & Conscience*). It explores the idea of individual and collegiate conscience. Is there such a thing as a ‘collegiate conscience’ (the conscience of all the Bishops together)? If there is, what does it mean when some bishops disagree as individuals with the ‘collegiate conscience’ and what is the impact of this disagreement? This paper suggests these differences can be mitigated by mutual prayer, collegiality, generosity, processes of discernment and charity. This advice could help the bishops come to a collective agreement in a so called ‘Bishops’ Statement’ about LLF and the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith.

The relationship between holy matrimony, civil marriage, and same-sex marriage

The third part of GS Misc 1406 looks at the theological dimensions of *holy matrimony, civil marriage and same-sex marriage*. It sets these within the context of Christian tradition, law and teaching, addressing the relationship between Church doctrine and civil marriage. It shows there is a complex interplay between law and theology in relation to marriage through history rather than there being a clear distinction between holy matrimony and civil marriage.

Given this complex interplay, it argues it would be doctrinally unsound to say that civil marriage and holy matrimony are two separate, unconnected institutions. As a result, some options that had been previously suggested about how to proceed with LLF cannot be pursued. The paper discusses different ways of theological thinking about the goods of marriage, the goods of other kinds of relationships, and how they might relate to one another. This discussion might help people say more clearly what matters we disagree on at present. The Faith and Order Commission is now reflecting on whether the findings of this paper might help define whether and how discipline could be relaxed for clergy in a same-sex civil marriage, allowing them to enter ordained ministry and be put forward for appointments.

THE NATURE OF DOCTRINE

The Faith and Order Commission was also asked to offer theological advice 'on the nature, role, and creation of doctrine' as it relates to the Living in Love and Faith programme and specifically to the further commendation of the Prayers of Love and Faith for bespoke services. This work is still ongoing. Some initial findings from the Episcopal Reference Group – the bishops who are members of the Faith and Order Commission – are shared in **GS Misc 1407**.

The document contains a link to an **extensive catalogue** of relevant resources on the Church of England's Doctrine of Marriage, from the Reformation to the present day. It also presents 'Nine Theses about the Doctrine of Marriage'.

A main finding is that 'from the first Prayer Books through to the current LLF process, there is a stable core to the doctrine of marriage'. This 'stable core' can be summed up in nine statements or theses:

1

Marriage is the formation of a new unit, the 'one flesh' union of a woman and a man.

4

Marriage is a sign of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

7

Marriage is founded on friendship.

2

Marriage is God's gift in creation.

5

Marriage is for bearing and raising children.

8

Marriage is permanent and lifelong.

3

Marriage is 'an honourable estate.'

6

Marriage is the proper context for sexual intimacy.

9

Marriage is made (a) by the couple's free consent, (b) by contracting words of promise.

Reflecting on what can be said about the Prayers of Love and Faith, the Episcopal Reference Group wrote:

“In coming to a judgment on whether the Prayers are contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church, the ERG is of the view that both text and context are relevant and belong together. The ERG recognises that the Prayers in themselves (considered in the light of the Nine Theses), do not characterise the relationship of any given couple as marriage and do not, therefore, impinge directly upon the doctrine of marriage. Nonetheless, the contexts in which the prayers might be used could impinge upon this doctrine. This contextual risk is likely to be higher in a bespoke service than in any use of the Prayers within existing services. More time and reflection to consider different contexts and liturgical aesthetics would be needed, in consultation with the Liturgical Commission

and the whole of FAOC, before the ERG would feel confident to advise on the congruence (or otherwise) of the Prayers in bespoke services with the Church’s doctrine of marriage.”

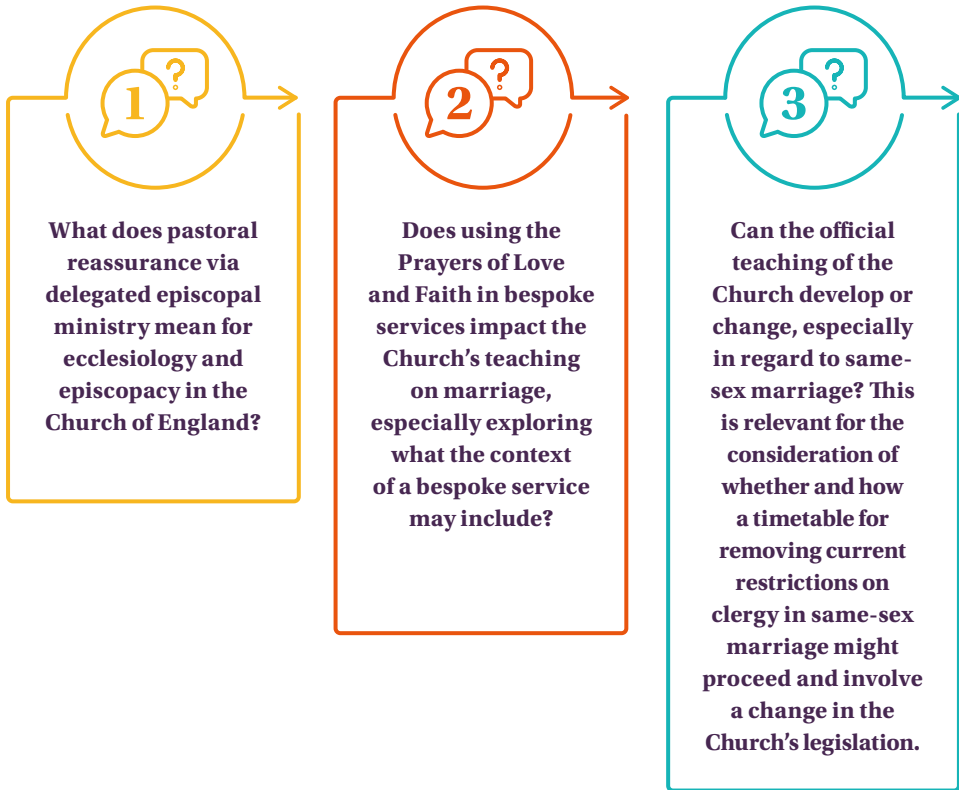
One insight from the ERG’s work is that it would be unfair to characterise the current debate as simply a contest between those who wish to preserve the Church’s current understanding of the doctrine of marriage and those who wish to expand or modify it. Rather, our disagreements explore whether the Church’s doctrine of marriage is already, or may legitimately become, spacious enough to include same-sex couples within it. Some believe the necessary adjustment to be modest. Others believe such an adjustment would irreparably damage a God-given institution. Clarifying the nature and extent of disagreement may help people find ways in which to live together in unity despite deeply held differences.

If you want to learn more about the range of materials outlining the Church of England’s doctrine of marriage, you might find the **Compendium of Sources** useful. This was brought together by the Episcopal Reference Group to support their ongoing theological work on the Prayers of Love and Faith.



OTHER AREAS OF ONGOING THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Further theological advice is being prepared, focusing on the following three questions:



The aim is for this work to be presented to the House of Bishops (and General Synod) in the course of 2025.

GLOSSARY

Bespoke

A service that is organised specifically to say the PLF with a couple, not as part of a regular service'. Previously called 'stand alone' services.

Collegiality

When a group of people function together as a single body, considering issues and making decisions as a collective group.

Collegial conscience

This collective group (see 'collegiality') can express a viewpoint, even if all its individual members may not agree or hold this same view.

Discernment

Discernment in a Christian context means listening carefully to God in order to make nuanced judgments about whether or not something is a faithful way to think, feel, and act.

Doctrine

The official teaching of the Church.

Ecclesiology

The study of the nature of the Church and its relationship to Scripture, history, and tradition.

Episcopacy

Church governance under the leadership of Bishops. The Church of England is episcopally led.

Provisionality

Something that is defined as temporary and may be reversed in the future. In this context, a temporary and reversible solution that allows for ongoing discernment.

Want to know more about LLF? Visit the **LLF learning hub**, which has resources for both groups and individuals.

