

## Living in Love and Faith – An update before Synod

As you will probably have heard, the Church of England's General Synod will be meeting from 13 to 15 November, and the main item of business will be the next consideration of *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF). There has been some uncertainty as to the current position regarding LLF, so we offer this short note as a guide.

### What has happened so far?

General Synod voted to approve the motion that is copied at the end of this note. Paragraph g) was added by way of an amendment. You will see that Synod welcomed the decision of the House of Bishops to bring in new pastoral guidance to replace *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1991), and 'looked forward' to the House of Bishops 'refining, commending and issuing' *Prayers of Love and Faith* for use with same-sex couples. 'Commending' material means that the House publishes it as being suitable for use by ministers at their own discretion, without it needing detailed approval by General Synod.

Drafts of *Prayers of Love and Faith* have been made public, but it needs to be clearly understood that the House has not yet Commended them for use.

### What has been happening since February?

The House of Bishops, with its advisory teams, has been doing the work that Synod asked for in February. It recognises the range of conscientious positions that people across the Church hold. It has been shaping new Pastoral Guidance, and considering how to provide reassurance for those who choose either to use, or not to use, *Prayers of Love and Faith* in their own local contexts.

The text and structure of *Prayers of Love and Faith* have been refined into three parts:

1. *Prayers for Covenanted Friendships*;
2. a suite of resources for use in private pastoral prayer or within existing regular worship in parishes; and
3. forms of separate stand-alone services.

At a future date, the first two of these will be Commended by the House of Bishops, with the proviso that the suite of resources should only be used publicly to pray with and for same-sex couples in acts of worship where *Prayers of Love and Faith* are not the principal focus.

The House of Bishops has decided that the third part of *Prayers of Love and Faith* – the stand-alone services – will follow the full process for authorizing public worship, including detailed consideration by General Synod and consultation with dioceses. This longer process is set out in a piece of church law called Canon B2, and so you may hear it described as the 'B2 route'.

New Pastoral Guidance was produced with the help of a diverse working group. It has three sections: Use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith*; Church life in local contexts; and Ministry. This is a still-evolving document. There is further work to do considering whether the rationale of 'pastoral provision' might provide a basis for allowing clergy to be in same-sex marriages.

### What will happen at the November Synod?

There will be a debate on the work that the Bishops and their advisory teams have been leading since February. This will be based on a motion, to be moved by the Bishop of London, that refers to a briefing paper:

‘That this Synod, conscious that the Church is not of one mind on the issues raised by *Living in Love and Faith*, that we are in a period of uncertainty, and that many in the Church on all sides feel pain at this time, recognise the progress made by the House of Bishops towards implementing the motion on *Living in Love and Faith* passed by this Synod in February 2023, as reported in GS 2328, and encourage the House to continue its work of implementation.’

The material recognises frankly that there is disagreement about the way forward, in the Church at large, including among the College of Bishops (i.e. all serving bishops) and the House of Bishops (those, about half the number, who are members of General Synod). There is a long section in the briefing paper addressing one of the points of disagreement, namely what form Pastoral Reassurance should take, i.e. means by which the consciences of all, whatever their position, can be provided for.

The briefing paper (GS 2328) includes all the current material under consideration, including all three sections of *Prayers of Love and Faith*, Pastoral Guidance and Pastoral Reassurance; and a paper on the theological and pastoral issues that are particularly relevant to this stage of the debate. It is available online at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/gs-2328-llf-nov-2023.pdf>

### What changes have been approved so far?

The short answer is, not much: we are aware that for some people that will be reassuring, and for others frustrating. The discipline concerning ministry and the marriage of clergy remains unchanged. *Prayers of Love and Faith* have not yet been Commended by the House of Bishops, and even when they are, that does not authorize them being the principal focus of a public act of worship — that would only be permissible when and if stand-alone services are authorized by the Canon B2 route. So ‘services of blessing for a same-sex couple’ are not permitted at present. Prayers for people in a same-sex relationship within an existing public service need to wait until *Prayers of Love and Faith* have been Commended by the House of Bishops, and then must only be used in accord with the Notes to the resource material.

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The debate at the November Synod is very much on the lines of an update, gauging the mind of Synod about the work that the House of Bishops has been doing. It is not a major decision-making stage. Nevertheless, this will be an important meeting. Please keep in your prayers: Our whole Church as we seek to be faithful to God’s call; the General Synod, especially the members who represent the Diocese of York; and those for whom *Living in Love and Faith* has a particular personal significance.

## The February 2023 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.