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14<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers

## Prayers of Love and Faith

The Bishops wrote to you on 21 November with a factual note on *Living in Love and Faith* following the meeting of General Synod. We promised to write again when the House of Bishops of the Church of England had met to consider Commending and publishing *Prayers of Love and Faith* for use.

So, I am writing to you now briefly, to let you know that the House of Bishops met on 12 December and resolved to commend a selection of readings and prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples, as well as for those in covenanted friendships. The formal commendation takes effect from this coming Sunday, 17 December.

These *Prayers of Love and Faith* may be used in regular public worship (that is, services that would be taking place anyway) or private prayer, at the discretion of the minister who has the cure of souls in the parish. This means no member of the clergy can be compelled to use the prayers, nor should anyone feel under such compunction. This is a pastoral provision which does not change the Church of England's canonical understanding of marriage. The texts have been published, together with pastoral guidance which sets out how, and in what situations, they may be used. The material and further information can be found at [www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/prayers-love-and-faith-be-made-available-use-sunday](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/prayers-love-and-faith-be-made-available-use-sunday). Please read this carefully. In addition, your Archdeacons and Bishops will be happy to offer guidance to clergy and Churchwardens should questions arise.

Please note that the House of Bishops is continuing to discuss separate proposals for special stand-alone services for same-sex couples. In other words, the House has not authorized or commended services where prayer for such a couple is the principal focus of the event. Alongside this, the House is undertaking further work to discern what pastoral reassurance will be required to ensure freedom of conscience for clergy and laity on matters that are relevant to *Living in Love and Faith*.

I know many in the diocese have looked forward to this moment and will want to use the material carefully and sensitively to celebrate with joy those living faithfully in such relationships. You do so with my support.

Others remain deeply concerned about these prayers and continue to wait for the pastoral reassurance to be developed. I remain committed to this, so please be assured of my continuing support for you in your ministry too.

*Living in Love and Faith* has been a long, arduous process, involving much discussion and theological and biblical reflection. But we are not agreed. There is no consensus for radical change. And there is no consensus to remain as we are. Therefore, navigating how we live with conscientiously held disagreement is the challenge we face. I believe we can do this and I would recommend all clergy who are thinking about using the prayers that are now commended to discuss this with their PCC so as we can be sensitive to these differences of view within our congregations as well as between parishes.

In this season of Advent, we contemplate the last things: judgement, death and eternal life; and we look forward to that day when we will see the Lord face to face. We are reminded that each of us carries responsibility for our care for the people God entrusts to us, and that we will all be held to account, not just for what we have done but how we have done it.

The ongoing wrestling with questions of human identity reminds us of the weight and complexity of that responsibility. But also, as Advent gives way to Christmas we look to the Christ-child born again in our midst, to be light and hope for us, the church and the world.

In the child of Bethlehem, we are called to live for one another, to love and to seek peace with justice. In Jesus we find a common identity and a unity that transcends our disagreements. As you lead your communities through this great season I pray that you once again know the joy and wonder of the Holy Family contemplating the great mystery of Jesus' birth.

Please continue to pray for me and the Bishops in their responsibilities as we pray for you.

With my prayers, and gratitude for our fellowship in the Gospel

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Stephen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Most Revd & Rt Hon Stephen Cottrell  
Archbishop of York