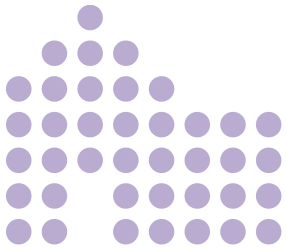


Church Society



A Submission to the

**Prayers of Love and Faith
Working Parties**



Why this document?

It has recently been announced that three Working Groups have been established to help draft pastoral guidance for the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF), refine the texts of the prayers themselves and also to establish what pastoral reassurance will be needed to ensure freedom of conscience is protected. Church Society sponsors a number of networks of evangelical laity, ordinands and clergy, and through the work of their regional directors is in contact with a large number of incumbents. The Church Society Trust is patron of well over one hundred parishes, and our journal is globally Anglican in reach and authorship.

Given all of this, we felt that it would be helpful if we were to provide a summary of the issues and fears which have been discussed with us following the decision of the February 2023 Synod. The aim is to be of service to the three groups and to give a voice to some who are fearful of raising these issues themselves.

This is not to rehearse any of the arguments surrounding the blessings of those in same-sex relationships, but simply an attempt to help the three working parties gain a good understanding of the mood of the Evangelical constituency as they complete their work. The hope is that the fuller the engagement, the more trust clergy and laity can have in the outcome.

This, then, is a simple listing of questions we commonly hear which we have grouped into a number of sections. We suggest no answers – that would be to tread on the toes of the working groups – but do hope our contribution might be of use to them as they undertake their task.

Work on this paper was begun on the day we mark the English Saints and Martyrs of the Reformation Era (4th May). The collect for that day contains the prayer: “grant that those who have been divided on earth may be reconciled in heaven”. As we regretfully recognise our division, we continue to pray for reconciliation in the Church of England. In particular, those serving on the three Working Groups remain in our prayers.

Church Society
9th May 2023



Pastoral Guidance

The work of the group drawing up pastoral guidance is described in the following manner:

The Pastoral Guidance group will be responsible for drafting the Pastoral Guidance. It will need to translate the mind of the College into more detailed, practical outworking as well as articulating in summary form the biblical, theological and legal basis for the guidance.

Much of the Pastoral Guidance will relate directly to clergy and lay leaders, and those involved in vocational discernment processes. However, it will also offer a pastoral framework for the ministry of clergy and lay leaders in the wider church.

The task of this group is:

- To identify what the Pastoral Guidance needs to contain in the light of the College of Bishops' work and the feedback from General Synod;*
- To structure and present the Guidance in an appropriately accessible way;*
- To identify in which order the different elements of the Guidance need to be developed – taking account of the urgency of some aspects in relation to the ministerial vocations discernment cycle;*
- To develop the different components, taking into account consultants' feedback;*
- To identify past statements and guidance produced by the Church and consider their status once the new Pastoral Guidance has been approved.*

1. Holy Matrimony and Civil Marriage

- 1.1. Could a fuller explanation of the precise difference between civil marriage and Holy Matrimony be given, showing how these differences are grounded in Canon A5?
- 1.2. What are the pastoral implications for those couples in a civil marriage, whose marriage at the time could not have taken place within the Church of England (e.g. divorcees prior to remarriage being allowed in the CoE)?
- 1.3. Are those couples married in Roman Catholic churches in Holy Matrimony, or only those married within the Church of England?

2. Theological Rationale

- 2.1. Could a Theological Rationale be produced for same-sex blessings, clearly demonstrating how this would be in accordance with the various authorities set out in Canon A5 of the Church of England Canons?
- 2.2. Will a paper be produced to demonstrate how the PLF may be used in a manner which is not contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England?

- 2.3. How do the current proposals relate to the doctrine of the Church of England as stated by the House of Bishops on 13th February 2014 (Pastoral Guidance on Same Sex Marriage)?¹
- 2.4. How do the current proposals relate to the doctrine of the Church of England as set out by the House of Bishops in their statement of 25th July 2005 (Civil Partnerships - A pastoral statement from the House of Bishops of the Church of England).²
- 2.5. What is the Church of England's theology of "blessing"?
- 2.6. How might two contradictory views concerning same-sex blessings be correct? Are there limits to what constitutes an acceptable diversity of views?

3. The Anglican Communion

- 3.1. Will clergy from the Anglican Communion, who are themselves in same-sex marriages, be able to minister within the Church of England?

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/news-and-media/news-and-statements/house-bishops-pastoral-guidance-same-sex-marriage>

² <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/House%20of%20Bishops%20Statement%20on%20Civil%20Partnerships%202005.pdf>



Prayers of Love & Faith

The Prayers of Love and Faith group has the following remit:

- *to refine the current form of the Prayers of Love and Faith, with reference to the discussions of the College of Bishops and the feedback from the General Synod;*
- *to recommend the means by which the Prayers will be ratified and made available for use;*
- *to produce rubrics and introductory material which will give advice for good practice in a variety of situations, and to work closely with the Pastoral Guidance Working Group to identify contexts in which the Prayers may be used.*

4. Status of the couple

- 4.1. What safeguarding implications are there if one party is under eighteen?
- 4.2. What is the age of consent for these prayers?
- 4.3. May the prayers be used if one of the couple is married to, or in a civil partnership with, a third party?

5. Services

Clause (g) of the passed motion requires "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".

- 5.1. May the prayers be used for a couple who are sexually active, but are not married (either in church or in a civil marriage)?
- 5.2. Might the prayers be used for a couple embarking on cohabitation with no desire to get married?
- 5.3. May the prayers be used for a sexually active same-sex couple?
- 5.4. How might clergy reasonably enquire as to the sexual activity of the couple?
- 5.5. Is the blessing, exchange or wearing of rings indicative of marriage?
- 5.6. Is the wearing of wedding dresses at a service indicative of marriage?
- 5.7. Is the use of prayers from either the Common Worship or Book of Common Prayer marriage services indicative of marriage?
- 5.8. May the prayers be used outside of a "service of the word" or Communion service for couples who do not attend church but who want a blessing?



Pastoral Reassurance

The task of this group is described in the following manner:

The purpose of this group is to provide options for the House and College of Bishops for pastoral reassurance relating specifically to the Prayers of Love and Faith.

The work of this group is focused on

- *what will be required in order to ensure freedom of conscience for clergy (including archdeacons);*
- *considering the implications of freedom of conscience for bishops;*
- *considering the implications for laity, including those who are licensed or in positions of leadership;*
- *guidance for deaneries, multi-parish benefices, cathedrals and churches about a) how to determine their approach to the Prayers of Love and Faith and b) how best to implement transparency regarding offering couples the Prayers of Love and Faith;*
- *guidance for TEs, DDOs, people in the discernment process and ordinands*
- *considering a variety of approaches to pastoral reassurance (including informal and more formal options) and articulating a range of possibilities for the Bishops.*

6. Freedom of Conscience

- 6.1. Many texts of the New Testament teach against association with those not accepting apostolic teaching or promoting wrongdoing.³ What guidance will be given to those who see such texts applying to this matter?
- 6.2. Please provide guidance on how a minister (clergy or lay) who concludes that the PLF appear to be affirming, celebrating, or condoning sin, or to be undermining Apostolic doctrine as the Church has received it, can remain under the spiritual oversight of a bishop who commends PLF, without compromising their own conscience?
- 6.3. What alternative arrangements could be made for clergy who are unable, in good conscience, to work with a bishop who seems to them to be affirming sin or undermining the doctrine of the Church, without requiring them to leave the church or compromise their conscience?
- 6.4. Please might you provide guidance as to how the oaths/affirmations of Canon C 14 can be said in good conscience to a Bishop who takes a different view on matters of doctrine and ethics?
- 6.5. What advice might be offered to ordinands whose consciences are disturbed at the thought of being ordained by bishops who are in favour of the use of PLF?

³ e.g. 1 Corinthians 5.11-13; 2 Corinthians 6.14; 2 Thessalonians 3.6; Revelation 2.2.

- 6.6. What confidence might an incumbent, priest-in-charge, holder of Permission to Officiate or clergy-person working under a Bishop's Mission Order have in a bishop who does not share their view on human sexuality? How might they be reassured that they will not be discriminated against when it comes to preferment?

7. Vocations

- 7.1. How will those who hold to the current teaching of the Church of England be given confidence that their views will not be held against them during the vocation discernment process?
- 7.2. What guidance will be given to colleges to ensure that both those who could not use the prayers are honoured?
- 7.3. Will Theological Education Institutions (TEIs) be required (or encouraged) to have teaching staff who could not use PLF? How would this be monitored?
- 7.4. What monitoring process will be recommended to dioceses to ensure that "gate-holders" such as bishops, TEIs, Diocesan Directors of Ordinands (DDOs), Vocations Advisors, parish clergy etc. are not discriminating against those who hold to the current Church of England teaching on marriage?
- 7.5. Will dioceses ensure that each diocese will have either a DDO or assistant DDO in post who holds the traditional view of marriage to give confidence that traditional candidates for ordination will be fairly dealt with?

8. Curates

- 8.1. How will curates who in good conscience cannot use the Prayers of Love and Faith be protected in the Initial Ministerial Education (IME2) process, particularly in cohorts of mixed views?
- 8.2. What support will be given to curates who find themselves in conflict with either/both their Training Incumbents or/and their parishes on this issue?
- 8.3. Where there is a divergence of views on this matter between a curate and their Training Incumbent/parish will their diocese help them to move to another title post if necessary?
- 8.4. Will curates be signed off even if they have disagreed with the bishop about PLF?
- 8.5. Will those curates who disagree with their bishop on this matter be welcome to remain in their diocese and/or be given a favourable reference?

9. The Support of Ministry

- 9.1. Should an incumbent come under pressure simply because of their views on PLF (for, or against) will the bishop publicly and unequivocally support that person?
- 9.2. Will a priest-in-charge have the same rights of conscience as an incumbent?

- 9.3. Will a holder of Permission to Officiate have the same rights of conscience as an incumbent?
- 9.4. Would clergy working under a Bishop's Mission Order have the same rights of conscience as an incumbent
- 9.5. Where people withdraw giving because of an incumbent's stance on PLF will the diocese take this into account when seeking Parish Share?
- 9.6. Will diocesan education departments train head teachers on the issues surrounding the use of PLF?
- 9.7. Where parents lobby schools to stop the incumbent taking assemblies because of their refusal, in good conscience, to use PLF will the diocese ensure the school publicly supports the incumbent?
- 9.8. What steps will be taken by the bishops to ensure the protection of chaplains who hold to the traditional view of marriage?
- 9.9. What protections will be given to lay people who on grounds of conscience are not willing to participate in services using PLF (e.g. organists, flower arrangers, vergers etc)?
- 9.10. How will clergy be protected from actions under the Clergy Discipline Measure and discrimination allegations should they not be able to use PLF for reasons of conscience?
- 9.11. How are the bishops proposing to address the issues of clergy well-being following the vote in Synod?

10. Toleration and Mutual Flourishing

- 10.1. There have been no complementarians in ordinary suffragan or diocesan posts since the 1990s, which has led many to conclude that minority views are not allowed to flourish in the Church of England. What reassurance can the bishops give that a similar experience will not occur for those who cannot use PLF?
- 10.2. Will dioceses implement whistle-blowing policies for officeholders as well as employees to ensure discrimination does not take place?
- 10.3. Will there be an independent ombudsman to rule on situations where there is a breakdown between diocese and clergy/parish?
- 10.4. Will cathedrals commit to having a divergence of views within the chapter so as to ensure they fairly reflect their dioceses?
- 10.5. How will the implementation of these prayers be monitored centrally?
- 10.6. What steps will be taken to ensure consistency in approach to PLF across all dioceses?
- 10.7. Will dioceses monitor the experience of clergy holding both views concerning PLF and regularly report to their diocesan synods on their findings?
- 10.8. Will dioceses ensure that amongst their bishops (suffragan and diocesan) there are bishops who have publicly stated they would not be prepared to use the prayers so that those clergy who have a similar view can have confidence that they will be supported in their decision?

- 10.9. Will bishops appoint a person holding to the traditional view of marriage to sit on their staff team and play a representative role similar to the Dean of Women's Ministry?
- 10.10. Will provisions for those who are not able, in good conscience, to use the PLF be time-limited or have no limit of time?

11. Multi-Parish Benefices

- 11.1. In benefices where some Parochial Church Councils (PCC) are supportive of PLF and others are opposed, what support will dioceses give to their clergy?
- 11.2. Would a parish be able to petition their bishop to move to an adjacent benefice where the minister shares their view on PLF?

12. PCCs

- 12.1. What involvement of the PCC in the decision to use (or not use) PLF is anticipated?
- 12.2. Should such a decision be regularly reviewed?
- 12.3. Where a PCC withholds parish share over this issue, will the bishop confirm that this will not influence decisions on deployment?
- 12.4. Where a PCC and an incumbent differ on the use of PLF how would the bishops recommend matters proceed?
- 12.5. Where an incumbent cannot, on grounds of conscience, use the PLF will the PCC be able to compel that incumbent to allow another clergy-person to conduct them in the parish church?

13. Pastoral Re-organisations

- 13.1. Will an incumbent who does not seek to use the prayers be required to take on a parish which has a history of using the prayers (or vice versa)?
- 13.2. Will the views of PCCs and churchwardens on this matter be given due consideration in re-organisations?
- 13.3. If, after re-organisation, an incumbent who will not use the prayers has a parish where couples are booked in for such services will he or she be able to cancel those services?

14. Vacancies

- 14.1. In multi-parish benefices where parishes hold different views on PLF will the archdeacon be required to bring the benefice to a single view prior to advertising?
- 14.2. On parish profiles, will it be legal for a parish to require a minister who will, or will not, use the prayers?
- 14.3. On parish profiles, will dioceses include a statement as to how they will protect clergy who hold to a traditional view?
- 14.4. During a vacancy, who decides whether parishes may or may not use PLF? The Rural Dean, the PCC, Churchwardens, Archdeacon?

15. Ministry under Bishops Mission Orders

- 15.1. Will those holding Qualified Common Tenure be afforded the same protection as clergy having incumbency status?
- 15.2. What assurances might BMOs be given that their views on PLF will not be a factor in renewing their licences?

16. Monitoring of Prayers of Love and Faith

- 16.1. Section f of the LLF motion reads: "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". Has the House of Bishops agreed on criteria for this monitoring?
- 16.2. Will clergy well-being be monitored, and how will this be done?
- 16.3. Will congregation numbers be monitored?
- 16.4. Will the number of services using PLF be counted?
- 16.5. Will the status of couples blessed under PLF be recorded?
- 16.6. Will actions taken against clergy who, in good conscience, cannot use PLF be monitored?
- 16.7. Will the experiences of clergy be sought?
- 16.8. What form will the report to synod take?

17. General Synod and PLF

- 17.1. Will General Synod be asked to vote upon the final form of PLF?
- 17.2. Will General Synod be in possession of the Pastoral Guidance prior to any vote on PLF?



Conclusion

The questions we raise reflect the breadth and depth of concerns raised with us over the past few months. There is a real fear amongst those in the church who hold to the current teaching of the Church of England on marriage. We hope that bringing these fears into the open in a way which protects the identity of those who hold them might be the first step in working towards a solution for the future of the church we love.