

The Bishop of Penrith and Acting Bishop of Carlisle

The Rt Revd Robert Saner-Haigh
Bishop's House, Ambleside Road, Keswick, CA12 4DD

13th December 2023

Dear Friends,

Prayers of Love and Faith

At its meeting on Tuesday the House of Bishops decided by a majority vote to commend the Prayers of Love and Faith from this Sunday, 17th December 2023. I am writing now to set out what has been decided and to offer advice.

With these prayers, the House of Bishops has sought to provide some resources for prayer with same sex couples whilst leaving unchanged the doctrine of marriage as between one man and one woman. I know that, for some, this development is of the greatest possible concern. Others feel frustrated that this is a very small step towards where we should be.

I appreciate deeply these different feelings, as well as those of you who simply want to move on. My deep concern is that, due to the process so far, the place we now find ourselves leaves people of all viewpoints feeling vulnerable and anxious. For this reason and for my own convictions, which have not changed, I do not think that we have yet found the right way ahead. There remains much to be worked through over the coming months and I am committed to working with all to find that way. Please continue to pray with me, and for each other, that the Lord would guide us, and give us wisdom and grace.

The Prayers are commended under Canon B5, making their use at the discretion of the minister with 'the cure of souls'. My hope is that what follows will give some clarity and helpful advice, whatever your decision about their use.

Firstly, there is no requirement for you to make a decision or to discuss this with your PCCs or congregations unless you want to use the Prayers.

If you intend to use the Prayers of Love and Faith

If you wish to use the Prayers of Love and Faith, I believe it is essential that you consult with your churchwardens and PCC. I would also recommend that the congregation is consulted. Any discussion with the PCC or congregation should be conducted in accordance with the [Pastoral Principles](#). If you would value support and guidance in this, please do be in touch with my office.

The Prayers of Love and Faith should only be in private or in a 'regular' service which does not have these resources as its principle focus. Standalone services have not been commended or authorised, and are therefore not permitted. The House of Bishops has reiterated many times its intention that the use of these prayers should not depart from, or be indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England, so please refer carefully to both the resource section of the [Prayers](#) and, especially, the [Guidance](#), which are available on the Church of England website

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Where there is significant division or opposition within a team, parish or PCC, then I would strongly advise that the Prayers are not used in that parish. If you need to, please cite this advice.

If you do not intend to use the Prayers of Love and Faith

If you do not want to use the Prayers, you are not required to do so, even if you are ministering in a parish that is using the Prayers. If you are the minister of the parish (i.e. incumbent or priest-in-charge) and do not want the Prayers to be used in your parish you are not required to use them, nor to consent for them to be used.

You may still wish, for pastoral reasons, to enable a discussion within your church. Again, this discussion should follow the Pastoral Principles, and do be in touch if you would like support in this.

If the parish is in vacancy

Where a parish is presently in vacancy, these prayers should not be used. The use of Prayers of Love and Faith are at the discretion of the minister and therefore parishes in vacancy should wait until their vacancy has been filled and the new Incumbent licenced.

In conclusion

Whatever your decision, if there is tension or division, or you are coming under pressure or being criticised, please get in touch at once with me or your Archdeacon so that we can support you and the church.

This is about our care for real people whom we love, and whom God loves. The church is open to all because God's invitation and welcome is to all. It must be a safe place where there need be no pretence or fear, and where we encourage one another as we seek to follow Jesus faithfully together. Where we have failed in this, where we have somehow shut out our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters, then our Lord calls us to do better. Let us also continue to speak well and lovingly of one another. This is one of the ways in which, even in deep disagreement, we might witness to Christ's work amongst us.

Please be assured, whatever your own position, of my love, care and support for you. These things are of great importance, and concern deeply held convictions, the nature of our discipleship and the lives of people we love. I know that you will all respond with care and integrity, but please know that you need not be on your own in making a decision or in discussing this issue with the churches and parishes in your care. Do not hesitate to be in touch with me, or your Archdeacon, if you have questions or need our support in any way.

I pray that by God's grace, we will navigate our way together through these difficult times in the life of the Church, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. As always, I give thanks for all of you, for our fellowship and partnership in the gospel. May God give us wisdom, courage and grace to continue in His way.

Every blessing,

+ Robert Perin