

Introducing the Prayers of Love and Faith in the Diocese of Exeter

A Q&A guide for clergy, licensed lay ministers and parishes

1. What are the Prayers of Love and Faith?

The Prayers of Love and Faith are commended by the House of Bishops as resources in praying with and for two people who love one another and who wish to give thanks for and mark that love in faith before God. To celebrate in God's presence the commitment two people have made to each other is an occasion for rejoicing. The texts are offered to express thanksgiving and hope, with prayer that those who are dedicating their life together to God may grow in faith, love and service as God's blessing rests upon them.

They are appropriate for any couple dedicating their relationship to God. You might read them and consider if you would like them for your own relationship, renewal of vows, anniversary and so on. The prayers may be used a same sex couple who have marked a significant stage in the development of their relationship, sealed a covenanted friendship, registered a civil partnership, or entered into a civil marriage.

There are no plans to change current Church doctrine that Holy Matrimony can only be between a man and a woman. The Prayers of Love and Faith are prayers for a relationship and must not emulate the marriage service.

Some of the prayers have been specially authored and others are older and have been identified as suitable for this use. The prayers are likely to be commended before Christmas 2023. Once they are commended, they will be published along with pastoral guidance about how to use them. You can read the draft prayers here:

www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/final-draft-prayers-of-love-and-faith.pdf

2. Where can Prayers of Love and Faith be said?

The *Prayers of Love and Faith* can be used in private prayer or as part of a regular service, i.e. a service which would take place irrespective of whether the Prayers were to be said. But the *Prayers of Love and Faith* cannot be made the principal focus or structure of such a service.

Some authorised forms of service make their own provision for the use of prayers and other material at the discretion of the minister: for example, the prayers of intercession at the Holy Communion where “other suitable words may be used”, or at a Service of the Word where the prayers may include “petitions of intercession, litanies, thanksgivings and other forms of extempore prayer”, and there is a discretion, at certain times, to use scripture readings other than those prescribed in the lectionary. The resources accompanying the *Prayers of Love and Faith* include example service outlines, showing how the prayers may be incorporated into a public worship service.

In the context of a public worship service, the *Prayers of Love and Faith* may, under the authority of a minister with cure of souls, be offered by an ordained or licensed lay minister, including those who hold the bishop’s Permission to Officiate.

It is not currently possible to hold special or ‘standalone’ services to offer *Prayers of Love and Faith*. In November 2023 the General Synod agreed that the House of Bishops could consider whether standalone church services for same-sex couples should be authorised under Canon law on a trial basis. But the implementation of this is yet to happen.

3. Do clergy or lay ministers have to use the Prayers of Love and Faith?

No – no minister can be obliged to use the *Prayers* at all, and a minister may use some but refrain from using others. A minister may also opt to offer the *Prayers* in private but not as part of a public worship service. Saying the *Prayers* as part of a regular service is at the discretion of the minister with cure of souls – they cannot be forced by a PCC to offer the *Prayers*, nor can a PCC veto their use. However, it is strongly recommended that the incumbent minister speak with their PCC/s before using the *Prayers* in a public worship

service. Where a parish is in vacancy and a request for the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith in a service in the church arises, the Rural Dean should consult with the PCC before any authorisation is given.

4. What if ministers and PCCs disagree about offering Prayers of Love and Faith?

We recognise that churches may not be of one mind when it comes to offering *Prayers of Love and Faith*. There may be differences of opinion between the PCC and the leadership, among the leadership team, or among the PCC and wider congregation.

Therefore, while an incumbent minister does not need the approval of the PCC to offer *Prayers of Love and Faith* in a **regular** service, it is recommended that the minister is attentive to the tradition and sensitivities of their local context and holds a conversation with the PCC or members of the congregation according to the Pastoral Principles.

If the General Synod authorises standalone services centred around the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, or when this is trialled in the future, then the PCC and incumbent would need to both agree to opt-in to providing these services, and this would need to be reflected in a PCC resolution.

In cases of conflict or intractable differences within a church over the use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, the diocese can offer support, facilitation and mediation, initially through the local Archdeacon. Churches may also find the Diocese of Exeter LLF Conversations template, Living in Love and Faith course and wider resources, and the Pastoral Principles course helpful in enabling different voices to be heard and held. *Links to download all of these resources are at the end of this document.*

5. Who can the prayers be offered to?

The decision to offer the *Prayers of Love and Faith* is a primarily pastoral decision to be taken by the minister in conversation with a couple. There is no legal entitlement to these *Prayers*, unlike the entitlement of opposite-sex couples to get married in a parish church where they live or have a qualifying connection. Conversely, because there is no legal

requirement for residence or a qualifying connection, couples are free to ask for the *Prayers* within any church in their area.

Ministers should be satisfied that the couple's relationship is permanent, faithful, stable and exclusive. But it would not be appropriate for a minister to ask questions that concentrate on the details of any couple's intimate relationship.

6. What if I am asked to offer Prayers of Love and Faith but do not feel able to do so?

We recognise that not all ministers will feel it is in line with their conscience to offer *Prayers of Love and Faith* if asked to do so by a same-sex couple. It is recommended that churches are transparent about their practice - whether they would offer private *Prayers*, *Prayers* as part of a regular service, or not at all – so that regular attenders can easily find out whether they would be able to receive *Prayers of Love and Faith*.

If a same-sex couple enquire about receiving *Prayers of Love and Faith*, which you do not feel able to offer, any response should be pastoral and sensitive, and signpost the couple to the incumbent of another church who does support the use of the *Prayers* or to your Archdeacon's office. A minister may explain their reasons for not offering the *Prayers*, but they should avoid trying to force their own perspective on a couple or speaking in judgment against them.

7. What sort of preparation for a couple receiving the Prayers of Love and Faith is appropriate?

A minister should establish (if one has not already been developed) a pastoral relationship with a couple asking for prayer as part of their journey of faith. Couples' situations, hopes and expectations will vary greatly, and ministers are encouraged to engage in conversation with them at an early stage to discuss how, where and when prayers might best be shaped, and which resources would be most appropriately used.

The purpose of any preparation with a couple should be on each partner enabling the other to flourish and grow more fully into the likeness of Christ as well as how their household may model increasing grace and loving generosity. It should encourage a positive, lifegiving,

mutual, faithful, respectful relationship. Pastoral preparation with the couple should cover the fact that a service with *Prayers of Love and Faith* is distinct from a wedding service.

8. What role do Mission Communities play in regard to Prayers of Love and Faith?

We know that Mission Communities will bring together ministers and congregations with different perspectives on many theological and ecclesiological issues, including the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, as well as LGBTQ+ people for whom this is a deeply personal issue.

Therefore, respect for one another's consciences and conducting conversations in undefended, honest and pastorally sensitive ways are key to the formation and life of Mission Communities. The LLF Conversations template, Difference course, LLF course, and Pastoral Principles course, as well as diocesan support with mediation, are useful resources in developing and maintaining those kinds of relationships.

With respect to the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, our hope is that the diversity within Mission Communities will make signposting couples to other ministers within the grouping easier. It is at the discretion of each incumbent minister to offer *Prayers of Love and Faith*. But we would strongly recommend that they engage with the PCC of the parish where they plan to offer the prayers beforehand (see Q4).

9. What if we get contacted by the media about whether we are offering the Prayers of Love and Faith?

Please contact the Diocese of Exeter's Communications Team for advice and support about responding to media enquiries relating to the Prayers of Love and Faith. The Director of Communications, Chloe Axford, is also happy to have a pre-emptive conversation about developing a local communications strategy regarding the Prayers of Love and Faith. Please contact her to arrange a meeting if you would like to:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/resources/communications/>

10. What should we have on our website about the Prayers of Love and Faith?

Churches should aim to be transparent about offering the Prayers of Love and Faith. What you want to say will vary according to your local context. The following paragraphs are just examples for guidance:

For churches planning to offer the prayers:

If you would like to have a conversation about getting married at [name of church], or renewing your wedding vows, or about receiving prayers of thanksgiving and blessing for same sex couples, we would love to hear from you. Please contact [insert name of contact or church office].

You can find out more about Prayers of Love and Faith here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/prayers-love-and-faith-bishops-agree-next-steps-bring-synod> *[NB there is currently no CofE webpage about the PLF it would be suitable to direct couples to. We have asked for one to be created. We will also publish one on the Devon Church Weddings website – making it clear that PLF are not in any way a form of wedding service].*

For churches not planning to offer the prayers:

If you would like to have a conversation about getting married at [name of church], or renewing your wedding vows, we would love to hear from you. Please contact [insert name of contact or church office].

If you would like to have a conversation about receiving prayers of thanksgiving and blessing for same sex couples (known as Prayers of Love and Faith), please contact the Archdeacon of XX who will be able to advise you on which churches locally to contact. [insert Archdeacon contact info]. Our decision not to offer the Prayers of Love and Faith is an accepted theological one within the Church of England. We believe that everyone is made in God's image and equally-loved by God. You can read more about our perspective here: [insert appropriate website page here].

For churches which have not decided whether or not to offer the prayers:

If you would like to have a conversation about getting married at [name of church], or renewing your wedding vows, we would love to hear from you. Please contact [insert name of contact or church office].

If you would like to have a conversation about receiving prayers of thanksgiving and blessing for same sex couples (known as Prayers of Love and Faith), please contact the Archdeacon of XX who will be able to advise you on which churches locally to contact. [insert Archdeacon contact info].

Helpful Resources

Draft Prayers of Love and Faith:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/final-draft-prayers-of-love-and-faith.pdf>

November General Synod LLF Paper (including draft pastoral guidance):

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/gs-2328-llf-nov-2023.pdf>

LLF Conversations Template:

<https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/LLF-Conversations-Final.pdf>

Pastoral Principles Course

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/pastoral-principles-course>

Difference Course

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/difference>