**Prayers of Love and Faith FAQs**

1. **What are the Prayers of Love and Faith?**

The Prayers of Love and Faith are a series of prayers that are intended to be used for same-sex couples by ministers. They are intended to be used to pray with and for a same-sex couple who love one another and who wish to give thanks for and mark that love in faith before God. The House of Bishops have commended a suite of prayers which include prayers of dedication and thanksgiving; prayers for guidance, for companionship, for God’s blessing, and for the couple’s home and families. Some of these prayers have been specially authored and others are older and have been identified as suitable for this use.

1. **Are the Prayers of Love and Faith a form of marriage service for same-sex couples?**

No. The Prayers of Love and Faith are not a form of marriage service. They are offered as a form of pastoral provision because there is currently uncertainty about the outcome of the Church’s discernment in relation to same-sex relationships.

1. **Who can use the Prayers of Love and Faith?**

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

1. **Do I have to use the Prayers of Love and Faith?**

No, you are not obliged to use the Prayers at all. You may wish to use some and on grounds of conscience refrain from using others. You may also opt to offer the Prayers in private but not as part of public worship. Saying the Prayers as part of a regular service is at the discretion of the minister with cure of souls, following the conditions laid out in sections 9 and 10 below. A minister 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 speak with their PCC before using the Prayers in public worship.

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

Some ministers will feel that their conscience will not allow them 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, sensitive and without judgment and signpost the couple to the incumbent of another church that does use of the Prayers.

1. **What if there is disagreement between the minister and the PCC over using the Prayers?**

It is recognised 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 leadership teams, within the leadership team, among the PCC and the wider congregation. Therefore, while an incumbent 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, <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/house-bishops/pastoral-principles>

1. **What role do benefices play regarding Prayers of Love and Faith?**

We know that benefices 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 benefices. 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, the decision for their use rests with the Incumbent and will apply to all parishes within his/her benefice. 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).

1. **What if we don’t have a minister and are asked to offer the Prayers?**

As the decision to use the Prayers is the Incumbent’s this will need to wait until a new Incumbent is in post. Where a parish/benefice is in vacancy and a request for the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith in a service in church arises, the area dean should be consulted and couple’s signposted to another church/minister in the deanery/locality where the prayers may be held.

1. **When 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 normally take place irrespective of whether the Prayers were to be said. 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 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.

1. **Who are the Prayers intended for?**

The decision to offer the Prayers is a primarily pastoral decision to be taken by the minister in conversation with a couple. There is no legal entitlement to these Prayers being used, unlike the entitlement of opposite-sex couples to get married in a parish church. Couples are free to ask for the Prayers to be held in any church in their area. Before proceeding, 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.

1. **What sort of preparation is appropriate for a couple asking for the Prayers?**

A minister should establish (if not already developed) a pastoral relationship with a couple asking for the Prayers 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. If the minister has doubts about the relationship then they should have a conversation with the couple with a view to help them work on their relationship. It will be necessary to deal with couples carefully and sensitively where one or both of them have been previously married. It may be appropriate to delay or refuse formal Prayers, if you have any concerns about the breakdown of previous relationships. Pastoral preparation with the couple should make it clear that a service with Prayers of Love and Faith is distinct from a wedding service.

1. **Can the Prayers of Love and Faith be offered in a stand-alone service?**

The Prayers of Love and Faith cannot be offered in a stand-alone service. While General Synod has asked the House of Bishops to consider stand-alone church services for same-sex couples to be authorised under Canon law on a trial basis, no decision on this has been made yet.

1. **Will stand-alone services be allowed in future?**

If General Synod authorises stand-alone 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.

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

Please contact the Diocesan Communications Team for advice and support about responding to media enquiries relating to the Prayers of Love and Faith. It may also be possible to have a pre-emptive conversation with them about developing a local communications strategy regarding the Prayers of Love and Faith.

1. **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, we would love to hear from you. Please contact [details here]*

*[Name of church] is not legally able to offer marriage services for same sex couples. We can however offer prayers of thanksgiving and blessing for same sex couples. Please contact [insert name of contact or church office] for more information. You can find out more about Prayers of Love and Faith here [insert link].*

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 Pastor who will be able to advise you on which churches locally to contact. 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 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 Pastor who will be able to advise you on which churches locally to contact.*

1. **PLF, LLF and Schools – advice from DBE**

The 2016 Church of England Vision for Education is reinforced by the 2023 document ‘Our Hope for a Flourishing Schools System.’ These documents affirm that through Church of England Schools and Academies the educational offer is ‘deeply Christian, for the common good’, enabling all to flourish (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools, 2023).

The relationship between a school and a local church is a key opportunity for churches to connect to the wider community and live out the Five Marks of Mission. All schools will have their own values, policies and guidelines which will comply with legislative requirements. The Parish has the opportunity to be a key partner in setting the vision and policies of their foundation school via the ex-officio Clergy seat on **every** governing body and the appointment of Foundation Governors. As school governors, Clergy and the members of the Parish operate within the code of conduct for school governors and the Nolan principles. If there are concerns arising from PLF and LLF these should be discussed in governors meetings, subcommittees and if necessary through the school’s informal and formal complaints procedures.

If Clergy, or other members of the parish, visit to provide collective worship or take part as guests and volunteers in other aspects of the life of the school, they do so at the invitation of the Headteacher. As guests they must work within school guidelines and policies. The Headteacher should agree in advance the content of any sessions and ensure that the person volunteering in the school community is aware of the school’s ethos and values and how these relate to the content or activity. If there is concern raised, the Headteacher’s professional opinion must be sought and followed.

If there is a conflict in the views of the Headteacher and Parish representatives concerning aspects of the curriculum or theological underpinnings of the school’s Christian vision and how it lives this out, the Director of Education (DDE) can facilitate an open discussion. Similarly, if there are questions from the school community about the theological position of the local Parish, Clergy or school volunteers on matters of LLF or PLF these should be discussed with the Director of Education. Following open discussions with all parties, the DDE will provide advice to the Headteacher, governing body and Parish concerning any necessary changes to governance or management of volunteers in a way that enables the school to fulfil its statutory obligations whilst preserving the school and parish relationship.

1. **Helpful Resources and support for Prayers of Love and Faith:**

With many differing viewpoints over the Prayers, it may be useful to consider using some of the materials available to help people discuss issues of sexuality, relationships and difference in a positive and healthy way. The *Difference* course gives foundations for having difficult conversations more broadly and LLF offers a framework to discuss sexuality and relationships in particular. Additionally, for further learning the course on the Pastoral Principles will build on the foundations work in *Difference*.

There is also support and advice available from the archdeacons’ team. There are also a group of chaplains on hand to give advice, help and support if you would find that helpful. Please contact Associate Archdeacon Gail Phillip, gail.phillip@coventry.anglican.org

Further details of LLF can be found on the diocesan website, <https://www.coventry.anglican.org/info-for-parishes/inclusion/llf/>.

**Some Useful Links:**

Pastoral Guidance: Pastoral Guidance (churchofengland.org) November General Synod LLF Paper:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/living-in-love-and-faith-pastoral-guidance.pdf>

LLF Conversations Template (developed by Exeter Diocese):

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

Pastoral Principles Course:

[https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/pressreleases/pastoral-principles-course](https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press%20releases/pastoral-principles-course)

Difference Course:

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