

Using the Prayers of Love and Faith in the Diocese in Europe

December 2023

A Q&A guide from Bishop Robert and Bishop David for clergy, licensed lay ministers and chaplaincy councils.

- This is guidance based on current information – as this changes, we will update it as appropriate.
- This guide gives suggested responses, and can be read alongside and with the pastoral guidance which has been published on the Church of England website here: [PLF Pastoral Guidance](#)
- Any detailed queries from chaplains or Chaplaincy Councils should be discussed with Archdeacons
- Fr Louis Darrant lgbt.liaison@europe.anglican.org is the LGBTI+ liaison officer and is available to discuss any issues arising, or signpost to support where needed.

Prayers of Love and Faith Timeline

- The House of Bishops commended Prayers of Love and Faith resources for use during regular public worship and private prayer at the discretion of incumbents (Chaplains in the Diocese in Europe) from Sunday 17 December.
- The finalised texts of the prayers have now been published and are available here: [Prayers of Love and Faith](#)
- Separately, the House of Bishops will be asking General Synod to authorise special standalone services from Prayers of Love and Faith, under Canon B2. That process is likely to take about two years, will involve consultation with dioceses and will require two-thirds majorities in General Synod.
- However, following an amendment at the recent meeting of General Synod, there is also the possibility that special standalone services could be available on a trial basis before that, using Canon B5A. This trial is still to be discussed by the House of Bishops.
- If such a trial basis were agreed, further details including guidance for chaplains will be shared as available.

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 adult same-sex couples by lay or ordained ministers. They are intended to be used to pray with and for a same-sex couple who love one another, are in a committed relationship and who wish to give thanks for, and mark, that love in faith before God.

The House of Bishops has commended a suite of prayers which include prayers of dedication and thanksgiving for those in a faithful relationship; prayers for guidance, for companionship, 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.

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. The Church of England is not of one mind on this matter. There are no plans to change Church doctrine that marriage (Holy Matrimony) is between a man and a woman.

All chaplaincies will be mindful of their local cultural and ecumenical contexts when considering their use of the *Prayers*.

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, be offered by an ordained or licensed lay minister, after an incumbent Chaplain has made known her or his decision as to use in that Chaplaincy. Those who hold the Bishop's Permission to Officiate will be bound by the decision of the Chaplain.

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 minister can be obliged to use the *Prayers* at all, and a minister may choose to 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 chaplain; "the chaplain" being the minister licensed as the chaplain of that chaplaincy, and not any other cleric, for these purposes. They cannot be forced by their Chaplaincy Council to offer the *Prayers*, nor can a Chaplaincy Council veto their use. However, it is strongly recommended that the chaplain discuss with their Chaplaincy Council before using the *Prayers* in the context of a regular public worship service.

4. Can the decision to offer Prayers of Love and Faith be taken when the chaplaincy is in a vacancy?

The decision on the principle of whether or not Prayers of Love and Faith may be offered in a chaplaincy is a matter for the chaplain, in accordance with Canon B5 and the notes to the *Prayers*. Whilst it will be good practice for the chaplain to consult the Chaplaincy Council and be sensitive to the tradition and local context and ecumenical relationships of the chaplaincy, it is ultimately a matter for the discretion of the chaplain. It is not anticipated, therefore, that any decision (or any change to a previous decision) on the use of the *Prayers* would be taken during a vacancy.

5. What if the chaplain and Chaplaincy Council 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*.

A chaplain does not need the approval of their Chaplaincy Council to offer *Prayers of Love and Faith* in a regular service, but it is recommended that the chaplain is attentive to the tradition and sensitivities including ecumenical relationships in their local context and holds a conversation with the Chaplaincy Council.

As always, advice and support from Archdeacons is available.

6. Who can request the Prayers?

In a chaplaincy where the *Prayers* are offered, the decision to offer the *Prayers of Love and Faith* is a pastoral decision to be taken by the minister in conversation with a couple.

Ministers should be satisfied that the couple's relationship is permanent, loving, stable and faithful.

7. What if I (as a chaplain) am asked to offer Prayers of Love and Faith but do not feel able to do so?

All ministers will have their own views about offering *Prayers of Love and Faith* if asked to do so by a same-sex couple. We recommend 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 chaplain of another church who does support the use of the *Prayers* or to the local Archdeacon.

8. 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, within regular services of worship 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 grave doubts about the relationship it may be appropriate to delay or refuse formal *Prayers*.

Pastoral preparation with the couple should cover the fact that a service with *Prayers of Love and Faith* is distinct from a wedding service or the blessing of a civil marriage.

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

Please contact the Diocese in Europe's Communications Team (communications@europe.anglican.org) for advice and support about responding to media enquiries relating to the Prayers of Love and Faith.

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

The decision about whether or not to refer to the Prayers of Love and Faith on your Chaplaincy website is a local matter and what you may 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, or having a marriage blessed at [name of church], or renewing your wedding vows, or about receiving prayers of thanksgiving and blessing for same sex couples (known as Prayers of Love and Faith), we would love to hear from you. Please contact [insert name of contact or church office].

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.

11. Are there any legal or other ramifications of choosing to offer the prayers or not using the prayers?

A decision by the chaplain that the Prayers may be used in the chaplaincy is an exercise of discretion under Canon B5. As with all other variations to existing forms of service, the chaplain must be satisfied that they are “reverent and seemly and shall be neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter.

Chaplains will need to be mindful of their local legal, ecumenical and cultural contexts.

12. Will the Prayers be available in other languages? Can we translate them?

The Diocese in Europe does not have any translations of the Prayers of Love and Faith.

13. Do we have to inform the diocese when we have made a decision whether to offer the Prayers or not?

Chaplains who decide to offer these Prayers in their chaplaincies are requested to inform the Bishop’s Chaplain. This is so that we can best direct enquiries from couples across our diocese.

Please note that there is no timeframe for you to make a decision about offering the Prayers.