

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.

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.

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 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*. General Synod agreed that 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 be considered by the House of Bishops.

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 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 area 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 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 and mediation. Churches may also find the Living in Love and Faith course and wider resources, and the Pastoral Principles course helpful in enabling different voices to be heard and held.

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 the Bishop's Chaplain (bishops.chaplain@leicestercofe.org). 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, life-giving, mutual, faithful, respectful relationship.

In that context, it may be appropriate to ask about previous relationships and the way in which they may colour the current relationship, whether through learning and experience, or the presence of scars, or both. But this should be done kindly, generously and sensitively.

If the minister has grave doubts about the relationship – because of infidelity or in cases of unhealthy or abusive dynamics of power, for instance – then they should have a conversation with the couple with a view to help them work on their 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.

8. What do Minister Communities mean for offering Prayers of Love and Faith?

We know that Minister 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 Minister Communities. The 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 Minster 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 do Prayers of Love and Faith mean for church-school relationships?

Leicester Diocesan Board of Education remains firmly committed to [Valuing All God's Children](#), which provides guidance on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying within schools. The LDBE has a vision for its schools to be 'scandalously inclusive', providing a welcoming and safe space for all children, where they can develop healthy self-esteem, and are prepared for life in modern Britain such that they are not afraid of difference and can engage critically with a breadth of viewpoints in a way that demonstrates respect for the individuals who hold them.

The Diocese and its Board of Education are also firmly committed to supporting meaningful, reciprocal relationships between churches and schools. Such relationships are built on mutual trust and understanding, which should include understanding and respecting the different contexts of school and parish and the particular legal responsibilities which schools exercise towards their students, staff and other stakeholders.

Within a school's locality there will be churches and clergy holding a breadth of views on many issues, including whether they wish to offer *Prayers of Love and Faith*. School leaders should recognise the validity of these different positions within the Church of England.

We encourage clergy and lay ministers involved in ministry within a school context to speak with the headteacher and school governors about their position with regards to Living in Love and Faith and explore together how, if they are not supportive of same-sex relationships or gender transitions, they can minister in line with their convictions while honouring the 2010 Equality Act under which the school operates.

When discussing differences that exist within the Church with children and young people, careful use of language such as "some Christians believe", "other Christians believe" is more helpful to holding a range of views together than absolute language. Clergy should be also mindful that there may be a range of family groupings and relationships represented within the school community who should not be made to feel alienated, different or wrong.

If you need advice about relating to a local school, either as a governor or someone who leads Collective Worship, with regards to Living in Love and Faith, please contact the Diocesan Director of Education, Carolyn Lewis (carolyn.lewis@leicesterdbbe.org).