



**The Bishop of Chichester**  
*The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner*

*Ad clerum: Prayers of Love and Faith*

13 December 2023

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The media release below follows a meeting of the House of Bishops on Tuesday, 12 December.

There are many in this diocese who will welcome these prayers and wish to use them in private or in the context of existing parish worship. These are single prayers, not new orders of service.

The legal status of these prayers is that they are ‘commended’. That means that they can now be used. They are provisional, like experimental texts that have previously been used for baptism and the Eucharist. In this respect they are different from the fully authorised texts of the Book of Common Prayer or Common Worship.

No one is under an obligation to use them. No one has the right to demand them. Rather like what has been said about making your confession: ‘all may, some do, none must.’ If you have further questions about the canonical provision of commended texts, please speak to your archdeacon.

We know that sincere people hold conflicting views about same-sex relationships. Prayers must never be weaponised or used under coercion. The Resource Section for the use of the prayers insists that first and foremost, everything done in worship ‘glorifies God and edifies the people’.

Those who have longed to use these prayers will rejoice at the opportunity to affirm Christians in same-sex relationships who seek to be good, holy and faithful.

The Resource Section also states, for the avoidance of doubt, that these prayers ‘are not a form of marriage service, nor do they equate to relationships brought before God to Holy Matrimony’.

Those will be very difficult words for some people to read. For some others, those same words will give a reassurance that the faith they hold has not been in any way diminished. For all of us, the challenge is to see Jesus Christ in each other and honour that recognition for his sake.

The media release seeks to be honest about the level of disagreement within the House of Bishops. It gives voting figures, and I was one of those who voted against making these prayers available now. Why did I do that?

There are several reasons. We do not have clarity about the stages of authorisation that still lie ahead for the prayers and for the services that have not yet been released, nor have we completed and agreed the theological rationale that will undergird Pastoral Guidance on the use of those services. We are also unclear about what 'formal structural pastoral provision' would look like, though many believe this will be essential in holding us together. I also believe that proceeding in the face of clearly divided opinion will weaken the Church of England's unity.

Uncertainty and lack of clarity so often generate fear which, in turn, inhibits kindness and the strength needed for true humility. By contrast, the Holy Spirit casts out fear by pouring into our hearts 'that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues', in the words of the Book of Common Prayer.

My vote against was a vote in favour of patience, clarity and reassurance, and of unity of purpose and understanding. These qualities are still required of us as we go forward together.

I hope that we shall not allow the uncertainties that remain to unnerve and divide us, and that we resist any clamour that disturbs our celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ.

This Christmas we shall, more than ever, need to emulate the shepherds, who come in amazement because angels summoned them with a song about peace on earth. I pray that the Magi will inspire us to bring, and not withhold from the Christ child's use, our many, different, God-given gifts.

So, if you can kneel, let us do so together in silence before the crib. Let the miracle of humanity transformed, seen in Jesus Christ, dispel all our fears and give joy and confidence for the days that lie ahead.

I hope you all have a very happy Christmas, some time for rest, and a cheerful start to the new calendar year.

*+Martin*

***House of Bishops Media Release***  
***Prayers of Love and Faith to be made available for use***  
***from Sunday***

A selection of readings and prayers of thanksgiving, dedication and asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples can be used in Church of England services for the first time from Sunday, December 17, following approval by the House of Bishops.

The final texts of Prayers of Love and Faith, commended for use in regular public worship or private prayer, are published today, together with pastoral guidance which sets out how they could be used.

At a meeting held online this morning, the House of Bishops confirmed its earlier decision to commend the Prayers of Love and Faith resources for use in regular public worship and agreed that this should take effect from Sunday December 17.

The Prayers can be used in regular scheduled services, such as a Sunday eucharist or evensong.

The House also continued to discuss separate proposals for special standalone services for same-sex couples to be formally authorised under canon law.

This follows a motion agreed by General Synod in November calling on the bishops to consider whether standalone services for same-sex couples could be made available for use, possibly on a trial basis.

The Prayers of Love and Faith were developed as part of the outcome of a seven-year period of listening, learning and discernment known as Living in Love and Faith.

The House of Bishops has said it will consider pastoral provision to protect the conscience of those who wish to use the Prayers and of those who do not.

It is intended that there will be wide process of consultation regarding the provision to ensure that whatever is agreed serves to promote unity and has broad support across the Church.

The Bishop of Leicester, Martyn Snow, and the Bishop of Newcastle, Helen-Ann Hartley, are chairing the group overseeing the introduction of Prayers of Love and Faith.

Bishop Helen-Ann said: “The Prayers of Love and Faith are resources to pray with and for a same-sex couple who are committed to one another in faithfulness and love. They are intended to enable those who wish to give thanks for and joyfully mark that commitment before God and their community of faith.”

Bishop Martyn added: “We know not everyone in the Church of England agrees on these important questions which go to the heart of who we are – about people’s lives, their love and our shared faith. This is reflected in the House of Bishops, where there remain different views on the best ways to proceed.

“These Prayers are offered as pastoral provision. It is our prayer that they can be used with grace and understanding. Sharing them will be a blessing to the whole Church.”

The House agreed by 24 votes to 11, with three abstentions, in favour of a motion (see full text below) to make the Prayers of Love and Faith resources available with effect from December 17.

Bishops also approved a motion to commend the Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship from the same date by 30 votes to six, with two abstentions. They are published together with the Prayers of Love and Faith resources.

**The motions approved were:**

“That this House, having agreed at its meeting of 9 October to commend the PLF Resource Section (‘PLF RS’) for use in the minister’s discretion under Canon B 5, now resolve that the PLF RS be commended with effect from December 17 2023 and published accordingly’

“That this House, having agreed at its meeting of 9 October to commend the Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship for use in the minister’s discretion under Canon B 5, now resolve that the Prayers for a Covenanted Friendship be commended with effect from December 17 2023 and published accordingly.’