



AD CLERUM FROM THE BISHOP OF SOUTHWELL AND NOTTINGHAM
12th DECEMBER 2023
Concerning The Prayers of Love and Faith

Dear Friends,

Ad Clerum Concerning 'Prayers of Love and Faith'

I am writing in relation to the majority decision of the House of Bishops in commending the Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF), [communicated today](#), following the recent Motion passed in General Synod.

Some of you will have followed closely the journey of *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF), particularly over the past year, and therefore be familiar with the context in which these Prayers have been commended by the House of Bishops. You may also be aware that [along with a number of bishops](#), I have expressed substantial concerns about the proposal brought to General Synod in February and the subsequent process and further work undertaken prior to General Synod in November. For these reasons I was not able to vote with the majority who supported the commendation of the PLF at the House of Bishops this morning.

I continue to recognise the disappointment and pain of those who wanted the bishops' proposals to go much further, and also the depth of concern of those who believe they represent a departure from the doctrine and teaching of the Church of England on matters of fundamental importance in relation to marriage and sexual ethics. This is an immensely difficult and sensitive issue over which it is clear there is deep disagreement in the Church of England. All are agreed that the church has often failed LGBTQI+ people but we are not agreed on whether its teaching needs to be changed and on what is permissible within the present teaching. This disagreement exists within every diocese and many parishes; it was also reflected in the very narrow majorities in the Houses of Laity and Clergy in voting to pass the Motion in the General Synod.

In my commitment to the flourishing of ministry across the diocese, through this ad clerum, I want to set out clearly what decisions have been made, as well as to provide some initial pastoral guidance and advice as Diocesan Bishop specifically in relation to the commended Prayers. I do this seeking to serve the pastoral stability and unity of the Church especially within the local parish and diocese, and having in mind the responsibilities and spiritual care entrusted to me as your Bishop and particularly in relation to [Canon C18](#). My hope in doing so is to explain why I am unable to advise that the commended PLF be used in public worship at this time.

My guidance does not purport to impose constraints on parish ministers from continuing to exercise their discretion in this matter as set out in [Canon B5](#). As I will go on to explain below, I would nonetheless request that before using the Prayers in public worship, that ministers give consideration to waiting until the standalone services have been through the process set out within [Canon B2](#). Canon B2 is the right and proper way for liturgical matters that are a source of contention affecting the wellbeing and the unity of the Church of England to be carefully weighed and considered by the General Synod.

What decisions have been made by the House of Bishops?

The House is commending the PLF as able to be used at the discretion of the minister with cure of souls (under Canon B5.1) for a same-sex couple desiring prayer and asking for God's blessing. If it is used publicly this should be in a regular service which does not have the PLF as its principal focus or structure and should follow the published [Pastoral Guidance](#). The November General Synod Motion also asked the House of Bishops to consider whether 'standalone services' might be made available on a trial basis before the completion of a B2 process of authorisation in General Synod, which is now under consideration. The House of Bishops is also still to decide the content of the forthcoming section of Pastoral Guidance which will address questions of authorised ministry (and replace *Issues in Human Sexuality*) and what formal pastoral structural provision might be given in the light of all these changes.

In considering how to use your discretion in relation to public worship it is important to recognise that commendation by the House of Bishops does not give these Prayers any legal status; the commendation is a formalised suggestion by the House of Bishops that the minister with cure of souls might wish to use material which the House of Bishops considers meets the requirements in Canon B5. You need, however, to exercise your own discernment in this and to do so in the light of the church's doctrine and canons. The doctrine of marriage remains unchanged, including that it is within marriage that sexual intimacy finds its proper place.

Why, as Diocesan Bishop, am I not able to support the commendation of the PLF or advise their use at this time?

In the light of the House of Bishops' commendation I think it important to explain why, as Diocesan Bishop, I have concluded I cannot advise their use in public worship.

The bishops have been advised that it is likely that such use is indicative of a change of doctrine. As your bishop I simply cannot advise you to use prayers that indicate a departure from the clear teaching of the Church of England. In addition, the legal and theological advice I have seen has not convinced me this change is not "in any essential matter" (Canon B5.3).

In our appeal at the end of the [LLF book](#) we said "we are united as bishops in our commitment to promote peace in the Church and to strive for the visible unity of the church." I believe that pastoral stability and unity over such a contentious matter where there is deep disagreement requires the proper canonical route of consideration by General Synod under Canon B2. Furthermore, the unity and partnership in the gospel with the majority of the Anglican Communion is being put under great strain by this commendation.

For those with the cure of souls who would wish to use the commended PLF

As set out above, I cannot advise you to use these Prayers in public worship. However, after considering my reasoning and guidance, alongside the fact that they have been commended by a majority of the House of Bishops, you may still conclude that you wish to use your discretion under Canon B5 in using the PLF in public worship. In the first instance I would stress the importance of you nonetheless consulting the churchwardens and the PCC before proceeding. If you would appreciate support and guidance in facilitating these conversations, please do be in touch with the [Archdeacon of Nottingham](#) or the [Archdeacon of Newark](#).

Please follow the Guidance of the House of Bishops closely to ensure that the PLF are being used as directed, mindful still that the intention of the bishops is that the doctrine of marriage be unchanged and therefore care needs to be taken with the context in which the Prayers are used.

For those with the cure of souls who do not wish to use the commended PLF

You are not required to use these Prayers, neither are you required to permit their use by other licensed ministers within your parish. If you find there are concerns or tensions arising from this decision within the congregation or wider parish, please again seek support and guidance from the Archdeacons in the first instance.

For a parish in vacancy

Where a parish is presently in vacancy, I direct that the PLF are not used at this time.

Pastoral support and wellbeing

Whatever the standpoint of particular clergy or parishes, I would remind everyone of the privilege and responsibility of providing pastoral care to all. As we navigate the uncertainty that lies ahead for the Church of England on these matters, let us be sure to commit ourselves to listening to the experience of LGBTQI+ people and to giving careful attention to the importance of the [Pastoral Principles](#) in the life of the church.

If you would appreciate pastoral support at this time, please contact the Principal of Wellbeing and Ministerial Development, [The Revd Sarah Patten](#). Should you have any general questions or concerns, please do be in touch with my Chaplain, [The Revd Amanda Lees](#).

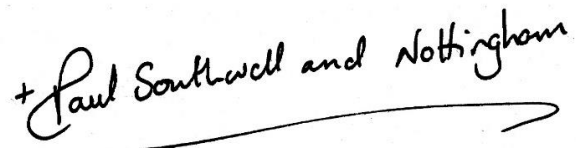
Conclusion

I do pray that by God's grace and wisdom we can navigate our way through the uncertainty that lies ahead, continuing to cherish the bonds of fellowship between us and our partnership in the gospel of the Lord Jesus. This has long reflected the character of this diocese and our commitment to love and care for one another, even where we may disagree. I assure you, whatever your views on these matters, of my love, prayers and ongoing pastoral support at this time.

My prayer for us all this Christmas and in the year to come is the prayer of the apostle in Romans 15 – a prayer that is at heart of our refreshed diocesan vision in Growing Disciples – *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, that you may overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

With my continuing prayers,

+ Paul Southwell and Nottingham



The Rt Revd Paul Williams
Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham

Cc: Church Wardens
Licensed Lay Ministers