



# LIVING IN LOVE & FAITH

A response from the Bishops of the Church of England  
about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage

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The *Living in Love and Faith* teaching and learning resources were commissioned by the bishops of the Church of England in 2017 and produced in 2020. They explore human identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage in the contexts of the Christian faith, changes in society, and disagreements in the church.

During 2021 and 2022 the bishops encouraged church communities around the country to use the resources to learn together, to listen to one another and to God. The responses of the thousands of people who took part were gathered in a report, *Listening with Love and Faith*.

The bishops have been studying the Scriptures, reflecting on the Church's tradition, engaging with the resources, and listening to the churchwide responses. Their task has been to discern God's voice about what this learning means for the Church of England. The outcomes of their discernment are described here.

## CONTENTS

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A pastoral letter from the Bishops of the Church of England .....	2
About <i>Prayers of Love and Faith</i> .....	5
Towards new pastoral resources .....	9
Areas for the Church to attend to and develop .....	14

# A pastoral letter from the Bishops of the Church of England

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Thank you**

During the past six years many of you have contributed to *Living in Love and Faith* by engaging with questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, together with others across the Church. You have borne this period of learning, listening and discerning with great patience and courage. We are sincerely grateful – thank you.

Your engagement with the *Living in Love and Faith* process has helped us to listen more attentively to the diverse beliefs, experiences and hopes that are found among those who call the Church of England their spiritual home. We have taken to heart your responses gathered in *Listening with Love and Faith*, including conversations within our dioceses, and have been moved and supported by your words, prayers and creative contributions.

## **Apology**

We want to apologise for the ways in which the Church of England has treated LGBTQI+ people – both those who worship in our churches and those who do not. For the times we have rejected or excluded you, and those you love, we are deeply sorry. The occasions on which you have received a hostile and homophobic response in our churches are shameful and for this we repent. As we have listened, we have been told time and time again how we have failed LGBTQI+ people. We have not loved you as God loves you, and that is profoundly wrong.

We affirm, publicly and unequivocally, that LGBTQI+ people are welcome and valued: we are all children of God.

## **Difference and discernment**

We are deeply conscious of our call to serve both church and nation. We have studied the Scriptures, paid attention to the Church's tradition and listened to wider society, as well as to the voices of our sister churches in the Anglican Communion and ecumenical partners. Above all, we have sought the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in prayer and worship.

The differences among you are also present among us, the College of Bishops. We are partnered, single, celibate, married, divorced, widowed, bereaved; heterosexual, gay, bisexual and same-sex attracted. We have diverse convictions about sexuality and marriage.

Engaging with the *Living in Love and Faith* process has enabled us to become more open and honest with each other – an important part of what it means to be members together of the Body of Christ. Being honest has not erased our disagreements, but it has deepened our relationships and our desire to continue to walk together, seeking the deeper unity for which Christ prayed.

The Pastoral Principles are one way in which we are learning how to avoid the evils that so easily seep into our relationships with one another, into the lives of our church communities and into wider society. Whenever we encounter diversity, difference and disagreement, we, as bishops, must remind ourselves of the need to address ignorance, to cast out fear, to acknowledge prejudice, to speak appropriately into oppressive silence, to admit hypocrisy and to pay attention to power. We continue to commend these Pastoral Principles to the whole church so that together we can grow more clearly into the likeness of Christ and make his love known to this generation.

## **Future work**

*Living in Love and Faith* was an invitation to the Church to attend to a whole range of matters about being human and in relationship with God and one another. We have therefore identified a number of areas to which we believe the Church should now give further attention, both nationally and locally. These are described in more detail elsewhere and relate to being embodied people; to singleness, celibacy, friendship and the church's community life; to human identity and to everyday faithful relationships. Yet within all this there is one specific question to which a response is eagerly awaited: that of same-sex relationships and marriage. It is to this we now turn.

## **Same-sex relationships**

We are united in our desire for a church where everyone is welcome, accepted and affirmed in Christ. With joy we cherish and value the LGBTQI+ members of our churches and celebrate the gifts that each brings as a fellow Christian. We are united in our condemnation of homophobia. We commit ourselves – and urge the churches in our care – to welcome same-sex couples unreservedly and joyfully.

We continue to seek to be a church that embodies 'the radical new Christian inclusion' to which the *Living in Love and Faith* project was called by the Archbishops in 2017: an inclusion that is 'founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it – based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st century understanding of being human and of being sexual.'

## **New Prayers of Love and Faith**

We value and want to celebrate faithfulness in relationships. That is why we have drafted and asked the House of Bishops to further refine and commend a new resource to be used in churches, called *Prayers of Love and Faith*. This resource will offer clergy a variety of flexible ways to affirm and celebrate same-sex couples in church, and will include prayers of dedication, thanksgiving and for God's blessing. It could be used for a couple who have marked a significant stage in the development of their relationship, sealed a covenanted friendship, registered a civil partnership, or entered a civil marriage. This resource will represent a significant move that is intended as a loving and celebratory response to same-sex couples who are cherished and deeply valued by the Church. We are not all agreed on the extent of these prayers, but nevertheless have agreed to offer them to the Church. The use of these prayers will be entirely discretionary: clergy may choose to use some combination of these prayers or not to use them at all.

These *Prayers of Love and Faith* will not be the same as conducting a marriage in church. They will not alter the Church of England's celebration of Holy Matrimony, which remains the lifelong union of one man and one woman, as set forth in its canons and authorised liturgies. While there is a range of convictions held by the bishops about this important matter, we have not found sufficient consensus to propose a change in doctrine at the present time.

We realise this will be disappointing for those who long for 'equal marriage' for same-sex couples. We also realise that for others among us, there will be deep concern that the *Prayers of Love and Faith* will go too far: your consciences and theological convictions will not allow you to use them.

We respect and share these differences, maintaining that within the theological diversity we represent, everyone has a secure and respected place within the Church of England. It is *from* this diversity that we, your bishops, reaffirm our commitment to serve and care for the flock of Christ. We offer these draft *Prayers of Love and Faith* with joy and in the belief that they will strengthen the mission of the Church and uphold its unity.

For these changes to be embedded in the life of the Church, we will work to produce new 'Pastoral Guidance' that will explain the practical implications of this way forward, including for the discernment of vocations within the Church of England. This new guidance will replace *Issues in Human Sexuality*.

## **Journeying together**

There are some among us who will be perturbed because they believe that these developments do not reflect the way of Christ as they understand it. Some will see these developments as steps along a continuing journey. Some will feel we have gone too far. Some will feel we have not gone far enough.

For all of us, the Bible is central to our understanding and living out of the Christian faith: as Anglicans, we believe that Scripture witnesses to God's saving work brought to fulfilment in Jesus Christ and contains within it all that is necessary for salvation. Despite being united in this belief, we interpret the Bible differently and have come to different conclusions about numerous matters, including what it has to say about gender, relationships and marriage.

Amid our differences as bishops, we know of many committed same-sex relationships between followers of Christ. We see their faithfulness to one another and the fruit of their discipleship and service. We want to find ways of affirming same-sex couples – inside and outside the church – while committing ourselves to respecting the disagreement, in conscience, of those who believe this compromises the Church's inherited tradition and teaching.

*Living in Love and Faith* has been about learning and listening together: to God, one another and the world around us. In these final stages of our discernment, we want to pay special tribute to the 'Reference Group': the twelve deeply faithful Christians who accompanied us in our deliberations in the last few months of 2022. Representing a diversity of lived experiences and convictions, they kindly held us to account, reminding us of the need for clarity, care and compassion.

We live in a society in which we are often pressured towards adversarial behaviour. As God's church, we are called to a different way – a theme we discerned in many of your responses to *Living in Love and Faith*. We agree with you and want to continue walking together, bearing with one another in love. By being honest about our own disagreements and through a gracious interpretation of doctrine, we will honour the reality of our differences within the Church of England, across the Anglican Communion, and among ecumenical partners. We hope to model this by providing prayers that bear a nuanced variety of understandings.

This is not about enforcing unity but pursuing it, by the grace of God. What we must do is create a generous space for the Holy Spirit to fill as we stay faithful to Jesus Christ, rooted and grounded in the love of God.

Our conversations, learning and prayer continue. We have reached one milestone, but there is further to go as we seek God's coming kingdom together.

May God bless you with peace and love with faith from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Background

The *Living in Love and Faith* process has called the Church of England to reflect on the diversity of relationships that we recognise in our worshipping communities and among our friends and families. This has revealed a need for the Church to find ways of responding to the goodness of relationships between two people who are committed to one another in love and faith. The *Living in Love and Faith* resources set out the different conclusions that people across the Church have drawn about this diversity. These include theologians, biblical scholars, bishops, other clergy and lay people. The *Living in Love and Faith* book explores the roots of these differences in relation to different understandings of the authority of Scripture, different interpretations of particular Bible passages and of the biblical narratives as a whole. The book also explores different understandings of what it means to be the church – the Body of Christ, and how our

#### Reflections on the Church's understanding of marriage

Church of England teaching on marriage is encapsulated in the liturgy for Holy Matrimony and its description of marriage as a union permanent and lifelong, 'for better for worse', 'till death them do part', 'of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others'<sup>3</sup>, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections, and for 'mutual society, help and comfort', 'in prosperity and adversity'. The marriage liturgies available (in the BCP, the Alternative Services: Series 1, and Common Worship) draw deeply on the Scriptural analogy for marriage of the relationship between God and the people of God in the Old and New Testaments, and on other biblical material – such as the wedding at Cana and the parables of the wedding feast – as an illustration of the kingdom.

The liturgy also refers to marriage as rooted 'in creation', referring back to God's original blessing of Adam and Eve in Genesis. This links marriage to the idea of sexual differentiation and the possibility of procreation. The positive aspects of marriage – stability, faithfulness and fruitfulness – mean that it is identified as a special, specific way of life which brings together the 'goods' needed for flourishing, or blessing. It does not mean that no other way of life can do so, but that this particular configuration of life is recognised as a source of blessing. The preface to the BCP takes this further by hinting at a sacramental quality in marriage.

Questions about the nature of marriage today ask whether sexual differentiation is central or incidental: we already make pastoral provisions for couples who cannot have biological children, so is procreation a core aspect of the nature of marriage? Or would it be better to speak of 'fruitfulness' in a much wider sense? How far does the biblical metaphor of Christ and the church control our theology of marriage, and does the difference between Christ and church map out against sex difference between bride and groom? Would moving away from sexual differentiation as essential constitute a fundamental change, or would it be an extension of the present doctrine, to include a wider category of people? These are questions about which we have not yet reached a consensus.

calling to live holy lives as followers of Jesus Christ relates to 'being church' and to same-sex relationships.

The *Living in Love and Faith* book also examines the place of marriage in the Christian faith, both in its inherited form as a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman, and within an understanding that some believe could be extended to include a lifelong relationship between two people of the same sex.

The *Living in Love and Faith* resources have also presented the Church with a diversity of lived experiences among faithful Christians who find their spiritual home in the Church of England. Many of them are powerfully portrayed in the *Encounters* in the *Living in Love and Faith* book and in the story films, some of which are included in the *Living in Love and Faith* course. Even more significantly, we find this diversity among our friends, family members and colleagues: people of God we have learned to cherish and love and whose stories we take to heart.

The *Living in Love and Faith* resources do not direct the reader to one conclusion or another –

which has been a source of frustration and even disappointment for some. It has been our work as bishops and teachers of the faith to draw on Scripture alongside tradition, reason and prayer to discern the direction we believe God is calling the Church to take regarding same-sex relationships.

### **New prayers to celebrate committed relationships between two people**

It is with this backdrop that we have agreed to develop and commend a suite of resources called *Prayers of Love and Faith* by means of which relationships between two people can be joyfully affirmed and celebrated in church. These prayers will give thanks and praise to God for the gift of two people who love one other; they will mark the couple's commitment to one another and offer prayers with and for them. By selecting appropriate prayers and readings, it is envisaged that the service may be adapted to offer different ways for couples to publicly confirm, give thanks for, and celebrate their love and commitment. Some may wish to use the service for dedication and thanksgiving, and others for dedication and blessing. They may be used by a couple who have marked a significant stage in the development of their relationship, sealed a covenanted friendship, registered a civil partnership, or entered a civil marriage.

The aim is for this liturgical resource to be further refined and then commended by the House of Bishops for use by clergy at their discretion. Whatever our convictions as bishops, all of us are committed to serving all the churches and clergy in our dioceses, and to respecting and supporting those who want to use these resources in their church community and those who do not.

One of the ways in which we have been helped to agree to work towards commending these resources is our deeper understanding of the theology of blessing. We recommend the reflections offered here – and a more detailed exploration available on the *Living in Love and Faith* website.

#### **Reflections on blessing**

What does it mean to bless? We often ask for God's blessing on people and situations, as we make decisions, as we seek the way forward. To ask for God's blessing is to express an intention to walk with God and put God at the centre of what we do and how we relate. Our prayers ask for *God's* blessing - they are prayers, not pronouncements. God will answer as God chooses.

In contrast, in popular culture, to give someone our blessing means to approve of what they want to do and to encourage them on the way. Our culture narrows and restricts the meaning of blessing, making it conditional.

In Scripture, we see a generous attitude to blessing. God blesses all living things in Genesis 1. God blesses many people in Scripture – not all of whom live good lives or make good choices. But the initial blessing, God's desire to see people flourish, is always present and unconditional. The people of God are encouraged to do the same and pray for the blessing of all – including enemies and persecutors, whose actions we definitely do not approve of!

In Scripture, blessing is given to *people* rather than things, actions or ways of life. There are, two exceptions: the Sabbath is blessed and in the New Testament, bread is blessed before eating. The example of the Sabbath shows that certain actions and ways of life can be sources of blessing, creating the conditions that bring about human flourishing. We read in the Psalms and the Beatitudes: blessed (or happy) are those who... These are not prayers for God to bless but statements about ways that enable blessing.

To pray for the blessing of people is therefore to reflect the blessing of God in all creation. To declare certain ways of life as blessed is to recognise that for the blessing of creation to be fully realised, human beings need to walk in God's ways. The prayers we are offering here do not all contain blessing. Where they do, we ask for God's blessing – recognising that it is not our blessing or approval that is conferred, but a prayer for God to bring about flourishing and growth in the ways of God.

### ***Prayers of Love and Faith and marriage***

The fact that the liturgical resource that we plan to commend does not constitute a service of marriage in church – Holy Matrimony – will be a source of deep disappointment for some, including some among us bishops. Nevertheless, we have agreed at this time to maintain the doctrine of Holy Matrimony which the Church has received, and which is set out in its Canons and authorised liturgies, namely that Holy Matrimony is between one man and one woman for life. We have also agreed to continue to listen, learn, reflect and pray together regarding this matter.

Some may question whether offering a service of dedication, thanksgiving and/or blessing for same-sex couples implicitly contravenes the Church’s understanding of Holy Matrimony especially if the couple concerned has entered a civil marriage. This is an understandable question and its answer – that this service and prayers will not contradict the Church’s doctrine of Holy Matrimony – lies in the complexities that sets the Church of England apart from any of the other churches in the Anglican Communion because of its status as the Established Church, as explained below.

#### **Marriage, the State and the Church of England**

Until 2013 civil marriages and marriages in Church were conducted with the same understanding of marriage as being between one man and one woman. Couples who married in church were civilly married according to the law and entered Holy Matrimony by means of the solemnisation of the marriage in the marriage service.

In 2013, the Government redefined marriage under the general law as being between two people who could be of the same or opposite sex, while leaving unchanged the Church’s definition of Holy Matrimony contained in ecclesiastical law as being the union of one man and one woman. Consistently with that, no provision was made in the 2013 Act for marriages of same-sex couples to take place according to the rites of the Church of England. This exposed a distinction between civil marriage and Holy Matrimony that existed before but was not so apparent because civil and religious understandings of marriage did not previously contradict each other. It can therefore be argued that the 2013 Act resulted in there being two institutions in the law of England, both of which for legal purposes amount to “marriage” and have the same consequences in civil law, but which have distinct definitions: civil marriage which is gender neutral and Holy Matrimony which requires the couple to be respectively male and female.

This distinction between Holy Matrimony and civil marriage now means that all couples who enter a civil marriage are obtaining a civil status (which has always been the case); but they are not necessarily entering a marriage as understood by the Church of England (i.e. Holy Matrimony). It can be argued that a same-sex couple entering into a civil status which does not claim to be Holy Matrimony should not of itself be regarded as challenging or rejecting the Church’s doctrine of marriage as expressed in Canon B30 (Of Holy Matrimony) and that those who do so should not, therefore, be regarded as acting in disobedience to that doctrine. On that basis it would be possible for same-sex couples who are in a civil marriage – like those who are in a civil partnership – to have a service of dedication, thanksgiving and/or blessing without contradicting the Church’s doctrine of marriage.

### ***Prayers of Love and Faith and sexual intimacy***

Another question arises regarding sexual intimacy in relationships. The *Prayers of Love and Faith* do not explicitly refer to sexual intimacy. They leave open the possibility that some may wish to enter into a covenanted friendship that does not involve sexual intimacy, while for others – as in the case of most (but not all) opposite-sex couples coming to be married in the church today – their relationship has been sexually active before they come to take part in a service of dedication, thanksgiving or blessing. How the Church responds to this reality in a way that continues to encourage holiness in holding faithfulness and commitment together with sexual intimacy is another area where convictions among us differ, and where it



is important to create a generous space for one another's consciences. Some further reflections on these matters can be found below.

### **Reflections about sexual intimacy and marriage**

Tremendous social change has reconfigured the ways in which human beings grow up and inhabit the world of adulthood. In England, for example, people stay in education longer, form long-lasting relationships later in life, and live for much longer. Access to contraception and new means of procreation have changed attitudes to sexual activity, family and the meaning of relationships. It is now increasingly rare for those who choose to marry in church to be living apart before the wedding, and many couples already have children before they are married.

While not explicitly stated in the Church's Canons, for many years the church has taught that the only rightful place for sexual activity is marriage. There is disagreement in the Church about how this applies in our culture today. The reality within which the Church now lives is that couples inhabit their relationships differently. Many would say that when two people aspire to be faithful to one another and fruitful in their service of others and of God, these 'goods' of relationships are worth recognising and celebrating. The prayers offered here are an attempt to respond by celebrating what is good and asking God to fill these relationships so they can grow in holiness. Others may question such an approach and would wish to reinforce what they understand to be the Church's teaching about sexual intimacy and marriage for all cultures and contexts.

### ***Prayers of Love and Faith: a joyful offering***

The plan to develop and commend *Prayers of Love and Faith* is a sign of joy and thanksgiving for couples who have entered a civil partnership or marriage, a new stage in their relationship, or wish to form a covenanted friendship. They will be a celebration of God's faithfulness and of the gift of human love.

*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.*

1 John 4.16

The full text of the DRAFT *Prayers of Love and Faith* is appended as a separate booklet.

# Towards new pastoral resources

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## Formation of a new Pastoral Consultative Group

### Background

During the first phase of the *Living in Love and Faith* process, when the resources were being produced, the episcopal members of the Pastoral Advisory Group offered pastoral responses to bishops concerning LGBTQI+ clergy and lay people. The Pastoral Advisory Group reached the end of its life when the *Living in Love and Faith* resources were published in November 2020.

In the meantime, bishops continue to be asked to respond to pastoral situations for which there is currently no clear guidance in the Church of England. Often circumstances are complex, involving not just questions of sexuality, relationships and marriage, but gender identity, transition and childbearing. Sometimes these questions arise in the context of vocational discernment regarding ordination or various forms of lay ministry.

### The need

Bishops need to be able to respond to ongoing questions in a way that reflects the Church's teaching, promotes consistent good pastoral practice across the Church, and enables churches to become places which are as safe as possible. While the guidance for some circumstances will become clearer once the *Living in Love and Faith* outcomes are embedded in the Church's practice, there are likely to be other areas, such as questions of gender identity, transition and reproduction, for which the Church has not yet done the necessary theological, ethical or ecclesiological groundwork to underpin practice. That means that the need for such a group will be required beyond the lifetime of *Living in Love and Faith*.

### Aim

The aim of the Pastoral Consultative Group is to support and advise bishops and dioceses on pastoral responses to circumstances that arise concerning identity, relationships, sexuality and marriage among clergy, ordinands, lay leaders and the lay people in their care.

- The advice will reflect the Church's responsibility to offer pastoral care in the pattern of Christ to all people, modelling "*radical Christian inclusion founded in scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it*".
- The advice will seek to be consistent across dioceses and reflect the doctrine and ecclesiastical law of the Church of England.
- As cases accrue, the group may begin to articulate and disseminate additional good pastoral practice in the areas of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, as well as draw the Church's attention to emerging questions for which theological, ethical and ecclesiological foundations may need to be laid.

In addition, the Pastoral Consultative Group will lead – together with others – the production of the new pastoral guidance described below and present it to the House of Bishops.

### Responsibilities

1. The group will respond to requests for advice from bishops regarding specific situations relating to questions of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. The situations are likely to involve:
  - the pastoral care and discipline of clergy;
  - offering pastoral advice to clergy responding to lay people;

- other cases which may arise in the course of bishops' ministries.
2. The group will promote an appropriate level of national consistency in approach by collating the material arising from these cases.
  3. From time to time, the group will reflect on the situations that have arisen:
    - to consider whether there are opportunities to disseminate good pastoral practice across the Church, and to incorporate this in a review of the pastoral guidance described below;
    - to consider whether there are situations that raise theological, ethical and ecclesiological questions which the Church may need to attend to and address.
    - to commission further research, consultation or policy development.

### Way of working

The group will comprise a number of bishops who take responsibility for the advice offered in each case. They will be supported by consultants regarding ethical, legal, pastoral and theological matters as appropriate. The group will strive to be as diverse and inclusive as possible.

## Developing new pastoral guidance

### Introduction

Jesus calls us into relationship with him and into different kinds of relationships with each other. Following the February 2023 sessions of the General Synod, the bishops commit to working on the development of new pastoral guidance for the whole Church about the qualities of godly relationships. These will be set out in the context of social, relational and ministerial vocations for lay and ordained people.<sup>1</sup>

**This guidance will replace *Issues in Human Sexuality*.**

### How will the guidance be produced?

Bishops recognise that the process of producing this guidance is as important as its content. In producing the guidance, bishops commit to:

- engaging with a wide diversity of people

It will be vital for the widest range of voices to be heard to ensure the new guidance is as informed and pastorally sensitive as possible.

- reviewing past guidance and delineating necessary areas for future guidance

This will involve gathering and reviewing all the existing guidance, pastoral statements and teaching documents relating to questions of sexuality, civil partnerships and marriage. It will also involve identifying and addressing areas where there is little or no guidance – for example, regarding singleness and celibacy. This work will gather the relevant revised material into a single new pastoral guidance resource.

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<sup>1</sup> As set out in more detail in *Kingdom Calling: The Vocation, Ministry and Discipleship of the Whole People of God* p26 ff accessed here <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/GS%20Misc%201254%20Kingdom%20Calling%20Web%20Version.pdf>.

- reviewing the guidance regularly

The guidance needs to be responsive to new situations, developments and questions, including the insights which are likely to emerge when the Church attends to the areas described on pages 14 - 17.

- continuing to reflect on the Church's tradition and teaching as the Church of England has received it
- learning from work done elsewhere in the Anglican Communion and in other denominations

While the proposed pastoral guidance will be for the Church of England, there is wisdom to be found in exploring resources that sister provinces and denominations have produced in recent years.

- continued collaborative and prayerful discernment across differences and disagreements

The guidance is likely to address matters about which there will continue to be disagreement in the wider Church as well as among bishops. Bishops commit to the values of GRACE – gratitude, relationship, attentiveness, compassion and encouragement – as part of a collegiate and collaborative way of working that seeks to follow Christ together in these matters.

### What will the guidance contain?

We are suggesting that the content of the guidance should include:

- A pastoral emphasis on the **need for the church to welcome and demonstrate love and respect to all people**, whatever their identity, sexuality, marital status and pattern of relationships, and to respect the dignity of all people as made in God's image.
- A **restatement of the Pastoral Principles** as offering a basis for how the church should live well together, welcoming and supporting all and being a place of listening and growth.
- Agreement and affirmation of **the necessary qualities for a relationship to be considered faithful and holy**. This will need to make explicit reference to the legal forms of relationship in existence, namely civil marriage and civil partnerships, as well as other less formal expressions of relationship and singleness across the Church and society.
- Clear guidance about the **discernment and expectations of all who are exploring, training or serving in a ministerial vocation**. The guidance will relate both to expectations of the personal relationships of those in ministerial vocations and to the ministry they offer to others. The new guidance will replace the role for which *Issues in Human Sexuality* has come to be used in this regard.
- Principles **for living well together as a Church with diversity and difference**. The *Living in Love and Faith* journey has already shown the broad range of deeply held convictions across the Church regarding human identity, relationships, gender and sexuality. It will be important that the new guidance holds all of us to account in the way we respect each other as being made in the image of God as we continue to walk together in love and faith.

## Guidance for good practice in praying with others

### Why is the guidance being written?

The purpose of this guidance is to offer the Church good and wise practice in pastoral prayer in a range of contexts. It will be especially relevant for those in the Church who oversee and provide pastoral care.

The impetus for embarking on this work was the Government's consultation on banning so-called Conversion Therapy and the concerns arising from it about coercion in the practice of prayer. In the context of the Church's rejection of Conversion Therapy, the purpose of the guidance is to give bishops confidence about the Church's commitment to ensuring awareness of the issues at the heart of the debate.

It soon became clear that while the material would need to reference questions of coercion, this would not be its main focus. Rather, the guidance needs to have a broad remit about the practice of prayer in a pastoral context. In addition, it became clear that the resource would need to be for the whole Church, especially for all who are involved in pastoral care and prayer. That is why, in addition to the guidance, there will be a companion booklet for use as an assessment and study tool for churches.

### **What is the guidance about?**

Christians gather regularly to pray, sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, in formal services, in small groups, and in informal settings. Prayer also happens in the context of pastoral care, whether with an ordained person, or with members of pastoral or prayer teams. Pastoral prayer implies a degree of vulnerability for the person being prayed for. Praying well with another person who may be distressed, anxious or seeking guidance, is something we learn and keep learning about. The Church has a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to offer on the practice of praying with others, and this guidance seeks to draw on this.

The guidance also recognises that prayer has not always been perceived as a blessing, and that in some contexts it has been mishandled and even, occasionally, abused. As a church, we need to listen to these negative experiences so that we can continue to learn how to pray.

This booklet will be a resource for churches and local ministry teams, to reflect on their practice of pastoral prayer or prayer ministry, to think about how those who pray with others can grow and develop in this, and to put guidelines for good practice in place which reflect the learning of the church over centuries of prayer for one another.

### **What will the guidance contain?**

The guidance will begin with a biblical and theological reflection on the gift of prayer, focusing especially on Jesus' response to the disciples' request to Jesus to 'teach us to pray'.

The second part of the guidance will encourage readers to reflect on the practice of prayer from a variety of perspectives, including how prayer relates to community, self-awareness, learning, listening, disagreement, power and vulnerability, and transformation. It will reflect on prayer as 'saying the unsayable' and the experience of fear in prayer. The guidance will offer biblical precedents for the guidance given and practical ways to embed good practice in church communities.

### **When will the guidance be available?**

The guidance has been jointly commissioned by the *Living in Love and Faith* Next Steps Group and the Faith and Order Commission. It will be completed by mid-2023.

## Guidance for Church of England schools

The Church of England's vision for education includes the following aim:

*Educating for dignity and respect: the basic principle of respect for the value and preciousness of each person, treating each person as a unique individual of inherent worth.*

As a key part of their work following the February 2023 sessions of Synod, the bishops commit to working with the National Society to consider the following:

1. How to strengthen the relationship between a school and its parish church, even where there are significant differences of approach among clergy, congregations, and the school leadership in relation to issues of identity, sexuality and relationships.

2. How to help with navigating different views held within the Church on questions of sexuality especially in delivering relationships and sex education.
3. Provision of guidance on how best to support young people in school who are exploring their gender identity and sexuality.
4. How collective worship can be used well in exploring questions of identity and relationships.
5. How to create a safe school environment for staff, pupils and family members who identify as LGBTQI+, together with those who hold to the traditional teaching of that church.

This work will lead to the production of an updated version of the Guidance for Church of England schools, *Valuing All God's Children*.

## Areas for the Church to attend to and develop

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### Introduction

In exploring the *Living in Love and Faith* resources and in listening to churchwide engagement with them, bishops have identified a number of areas to which we hope the Church will attend and so assist the Church's continued engagement with wider society and its commitment to pastoral care. The following topics will need to be addressed locally and nationally as part of future conversations within our church communities in the years ahead. It is our hope that they will support the wider church and be part of the Church's contribution to national debate. They will also need to be addressed in the light of the outcomes of the *Archbishop's Commission on Families and Households*, some themes of which intersect with the ones described below.

### Human Embodiment

The *Living in Love and Faith* process has underlined the extent to which social mores and beliefs about what constitutes good, flourishing and hopeful human relationships have shifted in the past fifty years. At the same time, these shifts towards inclusion and the celebration of human variety and diversity do not remove the many barriers to the fullness of human flourishing which continue to exist. The *Living in Love and Faith* process has highlighted wider questions about the gift and cost of embodiment in an often unjust and exploitative world.

#### **Why does this matter?**

Christianity is a deeply corporeal and embodied faith. We are created by God and, as humans made in the likeness of God, the Christian faith takes bodies very seriously.

At the heart of Christianity is the incarnation: Christ's life as a human being, his bodily resurrection and his ascension to God the Father, reveal that embodiment is a place of dignity and promise in both earthly and risen life. The ministry of Jesus shows consistent attention to bodies, to their needs and vulnerabilities.

This cherishing of human embodiment as a gift within God's ecology of faith, hope and love is a live issue in a rapidly moving society. In a world increasingly technologically-driven and globalised, there are many challenges and opportunities in thinking about human identity and embodiment, which the church needs to think about theologically and pastorally. These include:

- The emergence of complex forms of artificial intelligence
- The impact of the online world and disembodied communication on body image, mental health and human relationships
- The continued reality of the exploitation and commodification of human bodies, for instance, through pornography
- The reality of human bodies as limited, fragile and mortal, and complex societal responses to the valuing of human life in its different configurations, including shifting attitudes around assisted dying

These are only some of the areas in which the Church needs to be resourced to speak constructively and confidently.

By seeking to attend more fully to these pressures and opportunities, we wish to better understand the pastoral implications of these emerging ideas about what it means to be embodied in a changing world. The Church needs to be better equipped to speak in the public square from its historic and biblical wisdom about incarnation, embodiment and resurrection, commending richer visions of what it means to be embodied people seeking to live virtuous, hopeful lives in a pluralist society and speaking out against abuse of the body.

We acknowledge that many questions have been raised about the Church's own ability to cherish actual bodies in their rich diversity. The Church has historically promoted the care of the individual through its involvement in health care, social care and the hospice movement. But the Church has also been a place for the exploitation of children and other vulnerable people. All our work in this area will require careful attention, tender prayer, and discerning reflection, as we strive for the Church to be a place where there is great confidence in our shared vocation to be Christ's Body as well as a place where everyone's vulnerable, holy body is cherished and brought to fullness in Christ.

## Singleness, celibacy, friendship, community, family and household

The LLF process has increased our awareness of the experiences of people who, for a range of reasons, do not have sexual partners. While the catalyst for the LLF process was disagreement within the Church of England on what kind of sexual relationships the Church should be able to affirm, we have sought to emphasize that questions of sexuality and relationships arise for all of us, whatever our circumstances. The Church's response to particular disagreements needs to be based on a rich theology and understanding of sexuality and relationships that speaks of Christ's grace and truth to every person.

### Why does this matter?

In this context, five interwoven themes have come into focus as important areas for continued learning together as we seek to foster communities of faith in which all can flourish.

One is **singleness**. We have heard a widespread concern that while single people make up about a third of UK households, church life can sometimes appear dominated by couples and families and their celebrations, leaving single people feeling marginalised. There is a need to find appropriate ways to celebrate, value, care for and include those who are single for whatever reason and of affirming and valuing the gifts single people are in our church communities as well as in wider society.

Another theme relates to **celibacy and chastity**. Historically in the Church of England celibacy has been used to denote those living under religious vows, either as solitaries or in community: a calling that we continue to affirm and value. Chastity is the discipline of refraining from sexual activity, or, of refraining from immoral sexual activity. Today, celibacy refers to anyone who lives without sexual partnerships. The tradition of honouring those who embrace this way of life in the church goes back to New Testament times, but it can look like a puzzle or even a scandal in a contemporary society where freedom for sexual expression is readily aligned with personal fulfilment, though we recognise the negative effects of some aspects of this tradition. While the closure of many traditional religious communities has decreased the visibility of this way of following Christ, we know that there are other contexts in which it is being embraced, not least by some who live alone as single people. Some dioceses have developed liturgies for recognizing those called to the vocation of a single consecrated life within the Church of England – a provision we would want to encourage across the whole Church. We are also conscious that the theme of celibacy and the discipline of abstinence inevitably connects with the Church's teaching about sexual relationships. In whatever forms of relationship the Church judges it right to include sexual activity,



Christians who in conscience cannot enter them are bound to seek – and need to find – a compassionate and authentic acceptance of celibacy as their path of discipleship.

Other themes are **friendship, community, family and household**. The resources produced for the *Living in Love and Faith* process have repeatedly dwelt on the importance of friendship as a category of relationship: one that underpins so much else in our lives, shared by married people and single, sexually active and celibate. Intimate relationships of deep trust and shared vulnerability need not include sexual activity and the expectation that they should is damaging on many levels. Deeper attention to friendship in all its forms would enrich our lives as churches and as people from many different types of households.

We would like the Church to be at the heart of developing communities of friends that reflect the joy of all healthy relationships and that alleviate the loneliness that so many experience. The church is well placed to celebrate the intergenerational call of God and to offer to society new models for good family life, community cohesion and trust.

Finally, we recognize that there are people for whom a particular friendship becomes the foundational relationship for their adult lives. We would encourage local churches to consider offering as a resource an affirmation of covenanted companionship or covenanted friendship, where two people make a formal commitment to deep and lasting friendship with one another in a non-sexual relationship that profoundly shapes and marks their journey of discipleship.

## Human identity

The *Living in Love and Faith* process has made us ever more aware of the riches and complexity of human identity. In recent decades, many in UK society have negotiated, wrestled with, and come to accept a range of understandings of gender identity, as well as come to a better appreciation of trans, asexual and bisexual identities. However, there remains disquiet, and debates in wider society, as well as in the church, are often damaging and bitter.

### Why does this matter?

The Lambeth Call on Human Dignity reminds us that ‘within God’s good gift of creation (Gen. 1:31), humanity, male and female, is made in God’s image and blessed by God’s care and love (Gen. 1.26-28).’ This gives all human beings a dignity that cannot be taken away. The Lambeth Call concludes: ‘Whenever we face another, we see a reflection of God’s infinite love and glory.’

We continue to acknowledge that despite this God-given human dignity, too often the Church has treated LGBTQI+ people as a problem. The *Living in Love and Faith* process has, understandably and appropriately, given close attention to concrete proposals for the better cherishing of same-sex relationships. Although there is significant consideration of related questions in the *Living in Love and Faith* Book, we recognise that, on the whole, the worldwide church is at a very early stage in responding theologically to new perspectives on the riches and complexities of human identity. Therefore, much work of grace and love remains to be done, not least in a better and richer understanding of trans, bisexual and asexual people and their rightful cherished place within the Church and society.

We are aware that, in the UK and US especially, much political discourse around matters of gender and biological sex has become fraught, especially on social media. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that for many people, these are not just 'debates', but are issues that speak at the deepest and most personal level into their lives: trans, non-binary, bisexual, asexual and intersex people simply are beloved members of their families, communities and churches. Nonetheless, there are people, both religious and non-religious, representing a range of political views, who hold deep and often contradictory

views which have distressing impacts on people for whom these questions relate directly to their lived experience. We want to learn – and put into practice – how to respond pastorally to those for whom these issues are live and personally distressing, regardless of our convictions. At the same time, we want to find ways of listening attentively to the full range of views within the Church and wider society regarding gender identities and how human relationships and personal identity are to be understood. Such an approach reminds us that identity is something that we discover together – with and not about each other – and that these questions affect all of us in our sense of who we are and how we relate to others.

The Church seeks to be a community of character and grace in which the rich diversity of God-given humanity can flourish and grow ever more into the likeness and pattern of Christ. As those who exercise episcopal leadership and ministry, we wish the Church to be both attentive to, and better informed about, emergent expressions and conceptions of human identity. We wish to do so within the Church's vocation to be a community which models Christ's reconciling love and grace and within which we discover our own identity. At the heart of this reconciling love is the belief that Christians find their primary identity in Christ through baptism and are nurtured in and through the community of the baptised. Whilst we are very concerned by the bitterness of debates about gender identity we believe that paying close attention to our baptismal identities will encourage vibrant and theologically rich challenges for everyone, and may offer a prism through which the Church can encourage wider society to model a deeper and more loving understanding of human difference.

## Everyday faithful relationships

The area of attention we have identified here is about what wisdom the Church may have to share about living well in everyday faithful relationships, whether same-sex or opposite sex, married or not married. We believe that our theology of the body, for instance, should inform our understanding of what makes sexual relationships healthy and good, as also of what leads them to be damaging to self and others. We affirm 'gospel values' that can orient growth in virtues for all who live in committed sexual relationships: virtues such as love, faithfulness, self-giving, mutual trust and truthfulness.

We also want to consider how the Church can communicate a compassionate and celebratory Christian vision for marriage that enables people to inhabit committed sexual relationships in a way that is hopeful and life-giving, and that provides a stable context for the flourishing of family life.

### **Why does this matter?**

Many people spend much of their adult lives in relationships that combine sexual intimacy with a commitment to sharing everyday life and their hopes and plans for the future with their partner. Married couples only make up a certain proportion of such relationships, and one that has declined in recent decades.

Conscious that pain, pressure and struggle are likely to be part of every couple's experience at some point, we want to celebrate the transforming grace and joy that people find, day by day, in devoted love for one another – the source of which is ultimately found in Christ. We would want to affirm the important place of long-term stability as the best foundation for bringing up children, and the potential that the inter-generational nature of the church has in creating good relationships between people of different ages.

We want to consider how church communities can be places where people are able to share the challenges and joys of their everyday relationships and find help when they need it. We hope that we can articulate wisdom from our Scriptures, tradition and long experience of pastoral care to come alongside those whose relationships are thriving, those who struggle, those who are weary, and those who need support in any way, so that our churches can be safe, hospitable and transformative places for all who come into contact with them.