

Living in Love and Faith Pastoral Guidance

Version 1

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Pastoral Guidance Cover Note

This Pastoral Guidance accompanies the use and implementation of the Prayers of Love and Faith (hereafter referred to as PLF). It is meant to emphasize good practice, as well as answer questions that clergy, lay leaders and congregations may have as they seek to make decisions around the use of the PLF.

It is important to note at the outset that the PLF resource materials are being commended, whilst it is currently envisaged that the PLF forms of standalone service will be subject to a full synodical process for authorization under Canon B2. Even though the outcome of authorization process is uncertain, this draft guidance nevertheless outlines how suitable guidance may be articulated around both commended and authorized material. However, all sections relating to the possibility of authorised forms of service are highly provisional and subject to change, and are only offered as an exemplar of what could be. These are indicated by being in italics.

The guidance was composed collaboratively, with a diverse working group, and was shared with a number of LGBTQI+ readers from different church traditions whose comments and suggestions were taken into account.

Guiding principles

The Pastoral Guidance has been arranged in a question-and-answer format in order to be user-friendly and accessible. It is intended to be a living document that can be easily added to as further questions emerge. The format, however, means that it is not possible to make a consistent theological and pastoral argument in quite the same way as in *Issues in Human Sexuality*. The underlying theological work for the use and implementation of the PLF can be found in the Theological Rationale published for the November 2023 Synod (Annex H of GS 2328 <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/gs-2328-llf-nov-2023.pdf>). The Q&A format also leads to some repetition, but allows people to search for the answers they are looking for without having to refer back to previous answers.

Commended prayers and standalone services

In various places reference is made to standalone services.

This is intended to be a reference to the forms of service currently proposed for approval by the Synod under Canon B 2, and to clearly distinguish between what is allowed with regard to the commended prayers in the PLF Resource Section, and what can only be done if and once the forms of service have been authorized.

The text relating to standalone services is liable to change in the course of the synodical process for authorization. If that process concluded that the PLF services could not be authorized, then these passages from the Pastoral Guidance would then be removed entirely.

For now, these are indicated *in italics*.

1. Guidance on the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith

The Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF hereafter) are a resource for God's pilgrim people as they journey on the way of Christ toward the fulness of his kingdom. They are another means by which to give thanks for God's gifts in creation and redemption, to turn from sin, and to seek God's aid in becoming holy, in proclaiming the gospel, in loving our neighbours and pursuing justice.

The Church of England teaches that Holy Matrimony is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman, blessed by God in creation and pointing to the love between Christ and the Church; a way of life which Christ makes holy. It is within marriage that sexual intimacy finds its proper place.

However, marriage is not open to all, and even for those who enter it, there is often a road of growth and development. Many wish to celebrate God's gifts and grace in other forms of committed, faithful relationships that are not marriage but nevertheless contains qualities and goods that are worth affirming and celebrating. Many would also like to pray for God's guidance and blessing as they seek to grow in love and faith.

The PLF make provision for stable, faithful relationships between same-sex couples and for giving thanks for their faithfulness and their fruitfulness in service to God and neighbour. In that sense, they recognize the couple's commitments to one another. They ask for God's grace in the holy ordering of companionship and godly love as they follow Christ and seek to grow in holiness. They ask for God's blessing for them and their families as they offer self-giving love to one another, and in their witness and service to their neighbours.

The PLF are specifically written for same-sex couples, because no provision is currently made for them through public forms of prayer. The PLF are not a

form of marriage service, nor do they equate the relationships brought before God to Holy Matrimony. Nevertheless, they recognize all that is good, and holy, and faithful in these relationships and enable the people in these relationships to place themselves before God and ask for God's blessing for their journey of love and faith.

This first section of the guidance will address:

- how a church may decide to start using the PLF,
- how they may relate to couples enquiring about the PLF, and
- how services may be offered, planned and enacted.

1.1 Making the decision to offer the prayers

1.1.1 Is there a process for a church to decide to offer the PLF?

The PLF are a suite of resources, which can be used and adapted in different ways for different purposes. When prayer is offered informally in private pastoral situations, outside of acts of public worship, this is left to the discretion of the minister, as part of sensitive, discerning pastoral ministry.

The PLF contain materials which can be used in prayers in regularly scheduled Sunday or weekday services. Again, this is a routine part of pastoral ministry, which is best handled by an incumbent who knows their congregation and has established a pastoral relationship with a couple asking for prayer as part of their journey of faith. The commended PLF Resource Section is designed for use in these regular services, but should not be used to offer standalone or special services (hereafter, 'standalone services'). These are services that do not fall within the normal, usual pattern of worship for a parish, and are designed primarily around the PLF.

While this more informal use of the PLF as part of regular worship is left to the discretion of the minister, it would be wise for them to discuss use in public services with their PCC and work within the tradition and sensitivities of their local context. A conversation with the PCC would need to be conducted according to the Pastoral Principles. Agreeing a simple policy on how the commended prayers would or would not be used could also be helpful, and help churches be transparent in this area. Given that the PLF would then be used as part of regular worship, involving congregations in discussion and feedback would be helpful. The LLF course could be used for this purpose. In any congregation, there will be a range of views and lived experience, so that the conversation needs handling with care and gentleness, and supported with the offer of additional pastoral care. Such a process would be one that exemplifies good practice, but in the end, use of the commended material is still left to the decision of the minister only, and they cannot be pressurized into using material they are not comfortable with, nor can

a PCC veto the use of the PLF as part of regular services. Guidance in case of serious disagreement is offered in Section 2.2.

The PLF also aims to provide a form of service for which authorization is being sought in the General Synod. Only in this case could the PLF be used as a standalone service of public worship. The PLF here would offer a discrete structure for a particular and distinctive liturgical act – a rite for marking a significant stage in a committed and faithful same-sex relationship. The following paragraphs set out how, if such a form of service became authorized, the PLF may be adopted in local contexts.

This rite was designed specifically with same-sex couples in mind, for whom no other provision is made currently. Such a service is an opportunity to celebrate the goods of their relationship, and to ask for God's guidance and care as they grow in faith and love. The service is designed specifically for couples whose relationship is faithful, exclusive, permanent and stable. The PLF provide a way for a couple's relationship to be rejoiced in by the people of God and remembered in prayer. These services are not a form of Holy Matrimony, and must not be made to look like Holy Matrimony. The Notes to the standalone services will provide more detail if and when these are authorized.

Such services are still a subject of disagreement in the Church of England, and some churches will want to offer them joyfully, while others will choose not to do so. Many others may welcome forms of prayers to be used with couples, without wanting to use the full suite, or go as far as using the standalone forms of service. In order to ensure that those standalone services offered follow a particular form and are not indicative of a change to the doctrine of marriage, the churches that wish to offer them will need to agree to the authorized form by writing to their bishop and opting into their use.

Once they have officially opted in, their details will be added to the diocesan record of churches that offer the service so that same-sex couples looking for a church where the service could take place can be directed to their nearest suitable parish. Dioceses will need to decide whether it is possible or appropriate for the list to be kept and accessed at deanery level, and how this needs to be administered.

Prior to opting in, agreement must be reached between PCC and incumbent (see 1.1.2 below).

Services for covenanted friendship are of a slightly different kind, and, given they do not concern sexual relationships, can be offered at the discretion of the incumbent in whatever form is appropriate.

1.1.2 If a form of standalone service became authorized, how should the decision to offer them be made?

The decision to offer the rite described in the question above will need to be carefully negotiated in a local context. Although an incumbent or priest-in-charge has oversight of worship, the culture and church tradition of their local community needs to be taken into account. Given the strength of feeling around this question, it is wise to come to an agreed, negotiated decision after a process of sensitive consultation, informed by the Pastoral Principles (these can be found here [The Pastoral Principles | The Church of England](#)) for any use of the PLF as part of public worship.

If a church wants to offer a standalone service, however, it is a requirement that the decision must be agreed between PCC and incumbent, and reflected in a PCC resolution. No minister can be made to use a form of service against their conscience, and no incumbent may override a decision by the PCC not to offer the prayers in that parish.

Most churches, in practice, will gather people who hold a range of opinions. Consultation with the wider congregation needs to enable people to express freely and safely what their views are, and explore together why these are the views they hold. The Living in Love and Faith (LLF) course, the Pastoral Principles course, and the wider LLF resources <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith/living-love-and-faith-resources> and advocates can help local leaders to hold conversations in gracious and undefended ways, so that when decisions are taken, they rest on a transparent process that attends to different voices.

In cases of conflict or intractable difference between PCC and incumbent, the area/rural dean, archdeacon and/or bishop should be asked for advice and mediation. If no agreement can be reached at this time, PLF standalone services cannot be used in that setting, though this does not preclude future exploration of underlying questions, feelings and reasons for the disagreement with a view to revisit the decision at a later stage. No minister can be made to use a form of service against their conscience

even if a PCC would like them to; conversely, an incumbent cannot overrule the decision of a PCC if they have decided not to use the PLF.

When a church opts in to offer this type of service, they should refer to a PCC resolution on the matter, and briefly explain how they have consulted with the wider congregation. Churches must notify the bishop and the area/rural dean of a decision to opt in.

It will be the role of the Pastoral Consultative Committee to respond to questions and develop guidance where particularly complex local arrangements give rise to further questions.

1.1.3 Can the PLF be offered in a cathedral?

The PLF can be offered in cathedrals, subject to proper cathedral process.

Cathedrals have a particular place within the life of a diocese, and need to function as places where all are welcome. This is particularly difficult with regard to the PLF, because either offering, or not offering them, may cause consternation with certain parts of the church. However, cathedrals are also well practised at being places of welcome for many, and strive to enable all groups in a diocese to find a home there, and access the cathedral – in attending services, in using the premises and in relationships with the staff. The range of clergy in any one cathedral may include different opinions on the PLF, and this diversity can be an asset in relating to all in the diocese. Cathedrals have a particular role in modelling gracious disagreement and welcome to all, and, in their practice, refuting any sense of taint by association with a space where the prayers are, or are not, offered.

The decision to use any form of commended prayers would be at the discretion of the Dean, subject to the same restrictions about not using them for a standalone service, or a service whose main or entire focus is the PLF. The same good practice guidance about consultation and transparency would apply as with parishes.

Should standalone forms of service be authorized, the following principles would apply.

At one level, the process for cathedrals opting in to using the prayers will be similar to other churches. Agreement should be arrived at between the dean and the chapter. Consultation with the college of canons and key stakeholders would be desirable, but the ultimate decision lies with the dean and chapter.

Given part of the role of cathedrals as the seat of the bishop, chapters should seek the views of their diocesan bishop before making a decision, rather than simply notify the bishop. This conversation is primarily about ensuring good ongoing relationships, recognising that the final decision lies with the dean and chapter.

1.1.4 Can the prayers be used in chaplaincy contexts?

Yes, the prayers can be used in these contexts. Where there is a chapel or worship space associated with the chaplaincy, the same principles as with local churches should be followed to come to an agreement to use the prayers in the place of worship where they will take place. A local church may be used in consultation with the incumbent, *and, should standalone services be authorized, may only be used for standalone services where this has been agreed between PCC and incumbent.*

1.1.5 Can some of the prayers be offered, but not all of them?

Yes. The PLF are a suite of resources, and different churches will feel able to offer different combinations of prayers for different circumstances. Some churches may want to offer private prayers only, others none at all, others may wish to offer the full range and, *if standalone services are authorized, opt in to be able to offer full standalone services*, while yet others may wish to use forms of prayers as part of their regular services only. Some may wish to use only prayers that do not include blessings. The PLF are meant to offer the flexibility needed for the wide range of local contexts of the Church of England.

1.1.6 How can a church explain their decision not to offer the prayers?

The provision of an opt-in system for standalone services, should they be authorized, means that churches that wish to offer the full suite of prayers can say so proactively and joyfully, and be identified as doing so easily for those looking for such provision.

For those using commended resources, churches that wish to offer the PLF as part of regular services may also advertise, including by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.com.

For churches that choose a more limited approach, they will need to decide how far they explain this in their public presence (such as social media), and how to respond pastorally to questions from those who ask. Transparency and honesty, with kindness and generosity, are strongly recommended. Specific wording should be thought through locally and reflect the particular concerns of the parish, and make every effort to be positive without being misleading.

Churches may choose not to offer the PLF for a range of reasons, and it is incumbent upon all other church leaders and diocesan staff not to speculate, condemn or pressurize churches that are either not ready or not willing to offer the PLF. Where churches are challenged by local groups or people for not opting in, appropriate support should be offered by archdeacons and diocesan communications officers.

1.1.7 Who can offer the prayers?

Informal prayer drawing on the PLF suite of resources, such as, for instance, the prayer of Richard of Chichester, may be used by anyone to pray for others in private contexts.

In the context of a service of public worship, the PLF should only be used by licensed ministers, lay or ordained, as well as those who hold the bishop's Permission to Officiate, under the authority of the minister with the cure of souls.

1.1.8 Is the decision to use the prayers binding on all clergy in a team, including curates, associates, SSMs and retired clergy, and in all places?

Using commended prayers as part of regular worship can only happen at the discretion of the minister with the cure of souls. No minister can ever be forced to use the prayers against their conscience. Ministers who use commended prayers must ensure that they comply with the requirement that they should not seek to replicate or imply an equivalence with Holy Matrimony, and, if they are not the minister with the cure of souls, must obtain permission to do so.

Should the PLF forms of service be authorized, then the following principles would apply.

The decision of whether to use the prayers is made jointly between the incumbent and the PCC for this specific church, and binding on all ministers. No member of the team may use the prayers in that parish if the PCC and incumbent had not agreed that they should be used. If the PCC and incumbent had agreed that they could be used, however, no member of the clergy and licenced ministers team may be compelled to conduct a service using the prayers against their conscience.

The decision is parish-specific, which means that if a clergy person was the incumbent of a church that did not agree to opt in to use the PLF for separate services but was invited to conduct such a service in a different church, whose PCC and incumbent agreed to them being used, they would be at liberty to do so. This may, of course, create friction with their own congregation, which they would have to consider in making their own decision on whether to accept such an invitation.

Similarly, other members of the ministerial team would be at liberty to conduct a service in another church with the agreement of that parish's incumbent and PCC. Yet again, this may cause friction within the team and with the original parish, and needs considering carefully and prayerfully.

Where a parish has made a decision, it is expected that members of the ministerial team would generously support it, whilst not having to go against their own conscience. Diversity within a team can be a source of conflict, but it can also be an asset in ministering to groups of people who

will never be fully monochrome, and gives an opportunity to model generous handling of difference.

The configuration of team ministries is varied, and specific circumstances and questions may vary. Complex local questions may be referred to the Pastoral Consultative Committee.

1.1.9 Can decisions around the use of the prayers be reversed by a new incumbent? What happens if an incumbent changes their mind?

No minister can be required to use the prayers. When a new incumbent comes into post, this will have followed an appointment process. If the parish has strong views on whether the prayers should or should not be offered, and in what form, this should be agreed in advance of appointment and clearly flagged in the paperwork, so that there would be no surprises when a new incumbent takes up their post.

It is up to the discretion of the minister with the cure of souls to use or not use the commended prayers, in accordance with the notes to the PLF. However, it would be good practice to be transparent and collaborative in making and implementing decisions locally.

If standalone forms of service are authorized, then for churches that have already had a conversation and made a formal decision, jointly between PCC and incumbent, there is no reason why this could not be revisited in a PCC meeting if an incumbent changes their mind. Here, the principles set out in 1.1.1 would apply again, asking for consultation and agreement with the PCC. Conversely, revisiting the decision could also happen in response to a motion brought by a PCC member.

If either a new incumbent comes in and wishes to revisit the status quo, or an existing incumbent changes their mind, in a way that creates conflict and strong disagreement with the PCC, mediation and advice should be sought from suitably qualified persons – this may be the area/rural dean, archdeacon, or a locally appointed LLF advisor. Dioceses should nurture a small team of people able to come alongside parishes and ministers; mediators need suitable skills, capacity, and the willingness to remain impartial.

In addition, it would be advisable for PCCs and incumbents to build in a review period after their first conversation on this matter. If they decided to offer the full suite of PLF, this would allow for review of how this has been received, what has worked well, and how they may want to continue, as well as make it possible for those who disagree to express their thoughts. If they decided not to offer the full suite of resources, it is also an opportunity for evaluation and seeking to learn from practice so far. In both cases, such a conversation would open the way for possible changes.

1.1.10 How can a church who are not choosing to use the prayers, either publicly or privately, still respond well to enquiries by couples asking for a service?

Churches should strive for a position of maximum transparency over their practice, so that couples who attend the church regularly would know what the stated position is, and those who are not regular attenders would be able to find out easily. It would be helpful to be clear about how far a church may go – would they offer private prayers at all, private prayers only, prayers as part of regular Sunday worship – as well as what they will not do (a standalone service following a civil ceremony, or using prayers of blessing). However, no church is required to make their position known.

If an enquiry is made from outside the regular congregation, an appropriate pastoral response needs to be made, which explains the reasons for not offering the prayers or service that a couple is requesting, without trying to coerce a couple into the church's own perspective. The couple should be signposted to a church that offers the type of service they are looking for, or to the deanery or diocesan point of contact who could do so. Every diocese has a responsibility to ensure that a system is in place to facilitate this. Whether a list and point of contact are available at deanery, area or diocesan level will be dependent on local context, sensitivities and capacity.

Contact with a couple should always be sensitive and generous, and avoid becoming judgemental or coercive. Local churches need to be aware that, whatever their reasons, and however well they try to explain them, the simple fact of saying 'no' can be taken as deep rejection and

judgement. Entering into protracted conversations or arguments over this is not appropriate.

It would still be appropriate however to welcome a couple warmly if they attend on a Sunday and offer a conversation if they found it helpful.

If an enquiry is made from within the regular congregation, it is possible that messaging is unclear about what the church would or would not offer out of the suite of resources. It could also indicate a lack of transparency over doctrine and teaching, and reveal how much diversity there often is in most churches, even when the leadership assume that the majority or totality of a church agrees with them. It would be helpful for local leaders to reflect on how they can engage the wider congregation in thinking about questions of sexuality, and on how ministry can take into account the reality of diversity within the congregation in the most appropriate way.

An open, pastorally sensitive conversation should be had, where the couple's perspective can be expressed safely, whether they decide to stay within the church and abide by its teaching, stay within the church and live with difference but still seek the service they long for in another church, or decide to move to another church.

1.1.11 Can a church decide to only offer the PLF in private situations?

The canons regulate the forms of service that may be used in public prayer and the administration of the sacraments. Prayers in private, pastoral contexts are left to the discretion of the individual minister. A church is completely at liberty not to offer any of the PLF within the context of public worship, but this would not bar ministers from praying with people in other contexts.

1.1.12 What is the system for ensuring all couples can be signposted to a church that will offer the prayers for them?

Churches that wish to use the commended resources as part of regular services may indicate this on their website.

Should standalone forms of services be authorized, then the opt-in system for churches to decide whether to offer a standalone service for same-sex

couples will be the main mechanism to enable such a system. A list will be kept at diocesan level, and, if appropriate, at deanery level. A point of contact should be available either at diocesan or deanery level, and publicized clearly on the diocesan website, so couples could be signposted to their nearest church able to offer these services. Churches that have opted in may signal this by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.com.

It is important to note however that there is no automatic right for such a service to be offered – even when a church has opted in, it is still left to the discretion of the minister whether to offer them to a particular couple, based on a pastoral conversation.

Churches that opt in to offer these services will in all likelihood offer the full range of PLF. Other churches may offer prayers as part of a Sunday service in more informal ways, on a case-by-case basis, and it will be up to them to explain and make clear what they would or would not do.

1.1.13 If a church offers the prayers, do couples have an automatic right to have a service?

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.

The offer of a service in a particular case is at the discretion of the local minister. Having said this, it would be good practice to have a pastoral conversation, and, if the church normally offers such services, the minister should have a valid pastoral or other reason (including reasons of conscience) for refusing, and be able to support the couple in understanding their decision. Ministers should be satisfied that the couple's relationship is permanent, faithful, stable and exclusive.

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.

1.1.14 Are there prayers for single people or friends?

There are already many prayers already available for many different life situations, which ministers should be familiar with. However, one stream

of further work identified in LLF was to give more attention to singleness and friendship, and additional prayers may be part of that work.

A number of prayers in the resource section of the PLF may be suitable for friends, and the sample service for a Covenanted Friendship shows how this may be shaped.

1.1.15 Can the prayers be used with opposite-sex couples?

The PLF were designed specifically for same-sex couples, for whom no other provision is currently made. There are prayers included in the PLF that may be suitable for opposite-sex couples, some of which are already commended elsewhere.

The possibility of a separate rite however is conceived with same-sex couples in mind only, as there is already ample provision for opposite-sex couples which is not available for same-sex couples. If an opposite sex couple wanted a service following a civil marriage, there is existing provision in Common Worship with the Order for Dedication after a Civil Marriage <<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/marriage#mm107>> or the Thanksgiving for Marriage <<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/marriage#mm109>>

1.1.16 Should standalone services be authorized, would the opt-in system protect churches who choose not to opt in from litigation under the Equality Act 2010 (hereafter EqA)?

A same-sex couple who want a standalone service of prayer following a civil marriage might wish to challenge the decision of a PCC not to opt in, or the refusal of a minister whose PCC has opted in not to themselves lead such a service, on the basis that a Common Worship Order for Dedication after a Civil Marriage or the Thanksgiving for Marriage would have been given to an opposite-sex couple, and so they are being treated less favourably on the basis of their sexual orientation. The risk that such legal action will be commenced cannot be avoided, but it is unlikely to be successful. The EqA makes it unlawful to discriminate (i.e. treat a person less favourably) because of a 'protected characteristic' (one of which is sexual orientation) but only within certain areas of activity defined in the

EqA. Discriminatory acts committed outside those areas are not unlawful. There are also some discriminatory acts which, although prima facie unlawful, can be the subject of exceptions which make them lawful.

The only area of activity that is likely to be relevant is 'services and public functions'. It is unlawful for a 'service-provider' to discriminate against a person requiring the service by not providing the person with the service (EqA s.29(1)). The EqA does not comprehensively define 'service' but the statutory code of practice issued by the Equality and Human Rights Commission states (at para 13.69) that acts of worship do not themselves constitute 'services' within the meaning of the EqA. This reflects what was said in the explanatory notes to the EqA (see Explanatory Notes, para 742).

In the unlikely event that a court were to decide that the EqA should be read in a way contrary to that taken by the EHRC, and hold that the provision of 'services' includes worship services, it would be possible for the PCC or the minister to rely on the exemption in the EqA (schedule 23, para 2) for 'organizations relating to religion or belief'. That permits an organization the purpose of which is to practise a religion or belief, and its ministers, to restrict participation in its activities by reference to a person's sexual orientation if the restriction is imposed to avoid conflict with strongly held convictions of a significant number of a religion's followers ('the non-conflict principle'). As it is clearly the case that there are a significant number of active members of the Church of England who strongly hold the conviction that it would be wrong to use a PLF standalone service, this should not be difficult to demonstrate.

1.2 Meeting couples and planning the service

1.2.1 Can the prayers be used within services of public worship?

The PLF are designed for use in a range of contexts, following conversations between couple and minister about what pastoral need the prayers meet and how the church is able to respond.

Prayers from the Resource Section of the PLF may be included in the intercessions or prayers of a regular service. Like all prayers in public worship, the intercessions at such a service must not be 'contrary to, or indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in

any essential matter'. They may not be used to construct an entire service whose focus is the PLF.

Should standalone forms of service be authorized, prayers from the Resource Section may form part of a standalone or special service which follows the service structure provided in the PLF, provided that it does not look like and cannot be mistaken for a service of Holy Matrimony; these are services that a local church would have to opt in to use, by agreement of incumbent and PCC.

1.2.2 Can the prayers be used in standalone services?

Only if these are authorized via the B 2 process. At this point, they could be used, provided the service does not look like and cannot be mistaken for Holy Matrimony. A public standalone service may be appropriate following a civil ceremony (civil partnership or civil wedding) but would be subject to an opt-in requirement whereby an incumbent and PCC have to jointly agree that these services will be offered and notify the bishop that they will do so, after which the church will be added to the diocesan (and deanery if appropriate) list of churches offering this type of service.

1.2.3 Do the PLF presuppose sexual activity? Could or should a minister ask questions of the couple with regards to sexual activity?

The PLF make no assumptions with regards to sexual intimacy. Instead they seek to encourage the relationship as a whole to display virtues of stability, faithfulness, loyalty and exclusivity and to seek God's help in growing in those.

It would not be appropriate for a minister to ask questions that concentrate on the details of any couple's intimate relationship – whether this is a couple asking for the PLF, or an opposite-sex wedding couple.

Having said this, appropriate preparation should encourage a positive, lifegiving, mutual, faithful, respectful relationship. The focus of preparation 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.

1.2.4 Who can the prayers be offered to?

The decision to offer the PLF in any form is a primarily pastoral decision to be taken by the minister in conversation with a couple. The discernment of the minister here is paramount, though they can only offer the PLF to consenting adults (over 18), and can only offer standalone services if they become authorized, and then only in agreement with the PCC.

Faithfulness and commitment to long-term relationships matters and are appropriate subjects to discuss with an enquiring couple. As with all pastoral contact around relationships, wisdom and good discernment will be necessary. The decision to recognize and pray for a relationship in public worship is significant, since public services help to communicate the types of goods and virtues that we value in a relationship. Public worship also helps to embody our theology. The PLF embody a theology of pastoral provision that affirms everything that is good, faithful and fruitful and seeks God's help and blessing in growing in faith, love and holiness.

Preparation for any couple, in any case, should include a discussion of the type of Christian virtues that they are committing to develop within their relationship, such as stability and faithfulness within a monogamous lifestyle. The focus of preparation is what kind of commitment the couple intend to make, and their readiness to make it. 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. If concerns emerge that are of a safeguarding nature, appropriate referrals should be made.

It nevertheless remains that the overall ethos of the PLF is to help a couple grow in holiness with the help of the church around them, praying for them, where holiness is a goal to work towards rather than something already owned – as indeed is the case for all human beings.

1.2.5 Can the prayers be offered after a couple has contracted a civil marriage or civil partnership?

Yes, they can. Ministers should consult the Notes to the service for advice and guidance in shaping the service.

1.2.6 What are covenanted friendships?

Friendship is an important category of relationship in Scripture and in Christian tradition. Many of us will have a number of friendships, and these will have different degrees of intimacy and commitment. Christians belong to those whom Jesus Christ calls his friends, for whom he lays down his life. Christian friendship involves mutual love and harmony with one another, sharing one another's burdens and joys, in conformity to Christ. It is something more than a bond over common interests, tastes or affiliations. Friendship is a form of affectionate, hospitable shared Christian life we need to recover. However, it is possible that some such friendships take on a special meaning, or that two people may want to express the depth of commitment and trust of their friendship, for the deeper pursuit of its goods, in a more formal way. An example of this is found in the covenant between David and Jonathan in the Bible (1 Samuel 20), and there are other precedents in Christian tradition.

There is no template for this type of covenant, no preconditions. It is the free decision of friends who wish to express their mutual love and loyalty before God in a deeper way. The conditions needed are defined by these friends, as are the type of goods they commit to embody. The inclusion of covenanted friendships in the PLF reflects the importance of deep friendship, particularly in a world in which commitment is often associated only with sexual relationships. Covenanted friendships in contrast embody a type of relationship that is both committed and non-sexual, which is not exclusive, yet deeply meaningful, particular, and seeking to grow in holiness.

1.2.7 Can prayers for covenanted friendship be offered to any set of friends? Do they presume exclusivity? Can married people enter into a covenanted friendship with other people?

Friendships are relationships of an entirely different nature to marriage. Those who wish to seal a covenanted friendship may be of the same sex or opposite sexes. The friends may be married to other people, or unmarried. The friendship is by definition not sexually intimate. It will likely be expressed in practical forms of sharing aspects of life together.

As with all friendships, care will need to be taken to identify the nature of the covenant and how the bonds of covenanted friendship will complement other friendships and (where relevant) the bonds of marriage.

Covenants with respect to friendship are of a fundamentally different nature to a marriage covenant, and this difference needs to be explored thoroughly. If a person seeking to enter a covenanted friendship is married, it would be good practice to explore how this different type of covenant may impact or enrich the distinct and still deeper covenant of marriage to which they are already committed.

1.2.8 Can churches choose to use the prayers for covenanted friendship, but not the other PLF?

Yes, churches can choose which aspects of the PLF they want to draw on for their own particular context.

1.2.9 What kind of preparation may be appropriate for couples ahead of a service using the PLF? Can they be invited to marriage preparation classes with other couples?

It is appropriate to offer a form of preparation for any couple who wish to mark a significant stage in their relationship, and support them in growing in their lives together before God. Whether this is best done individually or with other couples is a question that should be discussed locally, with the couple, and with a careful consideration of the context, and how different types of relationships and services will be acknowledged. It should not be assumed that a same-sex couple cannot join preparation or relationship nurture classes with opposite-sex couples; conversely, it should not be assumed that they should automatically feel comfortable in doing so. Pastorally sensitive conversations that explore different options and possibilities, and are honest about the opportunities and complexities of a local context, are essential.

1.2.10 How can local churches (individually or together) offer appropriate relationship support in terms of both preparation and follow up?

Churches should follow good practice developed with any other couple when working with those requesting the PLF: pastoral conversations and preparation as well as post-service contact and pastoral follow up are appropriate and show the care and concern of the local church, and their commitment to support a couple in their growth in commitment, love and faith.

It would be at the discretion of churches locally to develop further resources, and consider whether preparation and follow up could be done jointly. The sharing of good practice and learning points at deanery level should be encouraged.

1.2.11 Do we ask questions about previous relationships (including, if the person has been previously married, checking that they are legally divorced)?

The work of preparation with any couple needs to be done kindly, generously and sensitively. Good preparation does involve speaking of 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. The aim of the conversation is not to judge the worth of a couple but to enable them to grow in their current relationship and establish solid foundations. Where a previous relationship is not formally dissolved, offering any kind of public prayers must be delayed until this is resolved.

Grace and generosity need to be the hallmark of such conversations, with a recognition that there is much that will remain unsaid, and that relationships fail for all kinds of reasons. Whilst it is appropriate for a minister to ask about former relationships, it would not be appropriate to push or pry.

1.2.12 If someone has been divorced, or had a civil partnership dissolved, does this affect whether we can offer the prayers? Should appropriate prayers of repentance be included?

This should be approached with an appropriate sense of pastoral tenderness and attention to God's abundant grace. There will be individual circumstances in which there may well be a longing for an opportunity for repentance, but it will be important to contextualize that in a rich and gracious sense that while all enter marriage and civil partnerships with a commitment to lifelong faithfulness and devotion, some relationships break down for a multitude of reasons, and new promise is offered in new relationships; no sense of judgment or condemnation should be implied by any kind of conversation about relationships which have come to an end.

However, equally, if after conversation with the couple the minister feels uncomfortable that it would be appropriate to offer the prayers, they should feel under no compulsion to do so. It would be pastorally appropriate for the minister to be clear about their reasons for not doing so as part of the conversation, but again with no sense of judgement or condemnation.

1.2.13 What prayers and services are appropriate for a couple where one or both partners have transitioned?

It is already possible for a person who has transitioned to marry in their legally acquired gender within an opposite-sex marriage in church, but the usual legal obligation for parish priests to marry them does not apply.

The PLF were designed to be broad and generous. It would be entirely appropriate and consistent with the intent of the PLF for them to be used to affirm the goods found in the relationship of a couple where one partner has transitioned, and to pray for God's help and support as they seek to grow in love and faith together.

1.3 Guidelines for a public service including the Prayers of Love and Faith

1.3.1 Are lay ministers authorized to offer the prayers?

Yes, they are, with the oversight of the incumbent and in line with any agreement between PCC and incumbent.

1.3.2 How might we include children in conversation/preparation/the ceremony?

Children can be included in the same way as we might include them in preparing for and participating in other occasional services. Decisions on how this may happen rely on the wisdom, experience and discernment of local ministers.

1.3.3 When the PLF are used in a service of public worship, should that fact be recorded in the service register?

When the PLF are used within a regular service, a note can be made in the service register. *If standalone forms of service become authorized and a separate service is offered, this service should be recorded in the service register, with its own entry.* No record should be made in the register of marriage services, as it is for marriages only.

1.3.4 Can some form of certificate be issued?

Churches can design a keepsake card if they wish to do so in order to mark the occasion. This would be purely commemorative and have no official or legal status. Such certificates must not suggest or imply in their wording or design that they commemorate or are proof of a marriage.

1.3.5 Are there things we cannot do in a service using the PLF, in terms of words and symbols?

Ministers should take care in the use of words and symbolic actions such as vesture that these are reverent and seemly, and do not indicate any departure from the doctrine of the Church of England. The PLF should not give the impression of simulating marriage. No parts of the authorized

text for the solemnization of Holy Matrimony may be used in a service using the PLF.

As for any other occasional services, the shape and content of the service should be discussed and planned within a pastoral setting with the persons seeking the prayers.

1.3.6 Are there expectations about dress (for the couple and for clergy)? Should couples be told not to wear traditional wedding dress? What about other wedding traditions?

Pastoral preparation with the couple should cover the fact that this is not a wedding, in the same way that Prayers of Dedication after a Civil Marriage, or the Blessing of a Marriage, are not services of Holy Matrimony. The use of the prayers in the service should not attempt to resemble Holy Matrimony. The aims and nature of the service should be clearly explained as part of a warm welcome to all who attend.

What couples choose to wear, the music they choose, how different people are involved in the service, chosen readings and so on, are rooted in evolving cultures and subcultures rather than in theological or liturgical principle. How these are incorporated (or not) properly belongs to decisions made locally by the minister after conversation between minister and couple.

1.3.7 How much space is there to adapt the service, and to explain what it means?

Where material from the Resource Section (commended material) is used in a public service, it must not be the central focus of that service, or constitute a separate, standalone service. It must not seek to replicate Holy Matrimony.

If standalone services came to be authorized then, like all authorized forms of service, they may be subject to variations not of substantial importance, provided that they are not 'contrary to, or indicative of a departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter'. A form of words to explain the service can be found in the preface to the prayers.

1.3.8 What happens if the relationship prayed for through the PLF comes to an end?

Just as with the breakdown of any relationship, compassionate pastoral support is the best way to care for a couple whose relationship has broken down. The PLF do not affect a couple's legal status, and there are therefore no official steps to be taken.

1.3.9 What financial contribution is expected for the PLF?

No fee is chargeable, but payment may be requested to cover direct expenses associated with a standalone service.

2 Church life in local contexts

2.1 Making transparent decisions locally

2.1.1 How can a local church come to a common mind about the PLF?

While use of the commended prayers from the resource sections of the PLF is down to the incumbent, it would be very wise for this decision to be discussed with the PCC, with some consultation with the wider congregation, and made known ahead of time.

It is important to acknowledge the honest limits of a church's 'common mind': in almost every church there will always be a range of views on any matter. Coming to a common mind, therefore, may be a matter of coming to a considered mind among the leadership: that is, agreement at the level of minister and PCC (in short, establishing a policy commitment which reflects the considered mind of the leadership).

In very many cases, coming to a considered mind will be a reasonably straightforward outworking of deep bonds of trust and shared work between lay and ordained leaders. As with very many pressure points in church life, finding consensus will likely entail compromise and generosity, grounded in a desire to focus on the church's mission and call.

It is also important, at the outset, to be honest about the fact that the PLF are only part of a wider conversation, and that the decision of whether or not to offer the PLF in any form needs to be taken against the backdrop of these wider conversations about being human, sexuality, church and ethics. These wider conversations can be sustained through the material offered by LLF (Living in Love and Faith (churchofengland.org)) <https://llf.churchofengland.org/> and need to be framed by consistent use of the Pastoral Principles (The Pastoral Principles | The Church of England). <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/house-bishops/pastoral-principles>

As set out in 1.1.2, should standalone services be authorized, the process for agreeing the PLF will be as follows:

The decision to offer the rite described in the question above will need to be carefully negotiated in a local context. Although an incumbent or priest-in-charge has oversight of worship, the culture and church tradition of their local community needs to be taken into account. Given the strength of feeling around this question, it is wise to come to an agreed, negotiated decision after a process of sensitive consultation, informed by the Pastoral Principles (these can be found here [The Pastoral Principles | The Church of England](#)) for any use of the PLF as part of public worship. If a church wants to offer a standalone service however, it is a requirement that the decision must be agreed between PCC and incumbent, and reflected in a PCC resolution. No minister can be made to use a form of service against their conscience, and no incumbent may override a decision by the PCC not to offer the prayer in that parish

Most churches, in practice, will gather people who hold a range of opinions. Consultation with the wider congregation needs to enable people to express freely and safely what their views are, and explore together why these are the views they hold. The LLF course, the Pastoral Principles course, and the wider LLF resources and advocates can help local leaders to hold conversations in gracious and undefended ways, so that when decisions are taken, they rest on a transparent process that attends to different voices.

In cases of conflict of intractable difference between PCC and incumbent, the area/rural dean, archdeacon and/or bishop should be asked for advice and mediation. If no agreement can be reached, PLF standalone services cannot be used in that setting, though this does not preclude future exploration of underlying questions, feelings and reasons for the disagreement with a view to revisit the decision at a later stage. No minister can be made to use a form of service against their conscience even if a PCC would like them to; conversely, an incumbent cannot overrule the decision of a PCC if they have decided not to use the PLF.

When a church opts in to offer this type of service, they should refer to a PCC resolution on the matter, and briefly explain how they have consulted with the wider congregation. Churches must notify the bishop and the area/rural dean of a decision to opt in.

2.1.2 Is there any help/are there any resources in enabling good conversation in churches and PCCs?

There is a great wealth of resources, in the Church of England, in the wider church and in non-profit organisations to help facilitate good conversations on difficult topics. Some of these are more generic and not specific to conversations around sexuality, like training for leaders by Bridgebuilders or various coaching organisations, or the Difference Course (The *Difference Course* | The Archbishop of Canterbury); <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/priorities/reconciliation/difference-course> CPAS has resources for PCCs; and dioceses have members of staff, particularly archdeacons, who have wisdom and experience in helping churches in times of conflict.

More specific resources are available on the LLF hub (Living in Love and Faith | The Church of England) <https://llf.churchofengland.org/> with the LLF course and wider resources, and of course the Pastoral Principles <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/house-bishops/pastoral-principles> as a starting point. All of these should help churches have good conversations within a respectful, open environment that promotes learning together in contexts of disagreement. Diocesan LLF advocates may wish to continue their role and offer support in this way.

In addition, it would be highly desirable for every diocese or group of dioceses to consider having trained facilitators who can come alongside churches, either at the point of first conversation, or when/if these conversations become conflictual.

2.1.3 What does a church need to say on their website and information about their stance on sexuality?

There is no formal or legal requirement for local churches to make the whole of their theological views known. Detailed statements on websites may not be the best way to convey information about deeply sensitive, pastoral matters, but this needs to be balanced by concerns for transparency, and care for those looking for a church that will welcome them.

Given that websites can be a first point of contact for enquirers, transparency is strongly recommended, with a statement about whether the church offers the PLF, and to what extent, is highly recommended. If a church does not offer the PLF, it would be pastorally appropriate to have details of how couples can contact someone to help them find a church that does (the deanery or diocesan point of contact).

The importance of transparency is discussed in section 1.1.6 above:

The provision of an opt-in system for standalone services, should they be authorized, means that churches who wish to offer the full suite of prayers can say so proactively and joyfully, and be identified as doing so easily for those looking for such provision. While the authorization process takes its course, churches that wish to offer the PLF as part of regular services may also advertise, including by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.com.

For churches that choose a more limited approach, they will need to decide how far they explain this in their public presence (such as social media), and how to respond pastorally to questions from those who ask. Transparency and honesty, with kindness and generosity, are strongly recommended. Specific wording should be thought through locally and reflect the particular concerns of the parish, and make every effort to be positive without being misleading.

Churches may choose not to offer the PLF for a range of reason, and it is incumbent upon all other church leaders and diocesan staff not to speculate, condemn or pressurize churches that are either not ready or not willing to offer the PLF. Where churches are challenged by local groups or people for not opting in, appropriate support should be offered by archdeacons and diocesan communications officers.

2.1.4 How can a church model honesty, clarity and respect in teaching, whatever their theological outlook?

The Pastoral Principles <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/house-bishops/pastoral-principles> offer a solid basis on which to base the teaching of a church. They do not prescribe any one view, but concentrate on the type of underlying attitude that makes for respectful, honest and caring speech. The wider LLF material can also help resource teaching, especially for churches that are used to engaging with clearly

delineated perspectives, so that they can be confident that they do not misrepresent perspectives other than their own.

Churches cannot assume that their congregations will be monolithic, with everyone agreeing with a stated position; any group of people will contain theological and experiential difference. And in any church, there will be members who have friends, family and loved ones who are deeply affected by these matters, and what is said must therefore hold these relationships gently and generously.

Good teaching helps others learn, and therefore needs to make space for discussion and for the respectful consideration of the best of all positions, without pretending that all positions are equal. In all things, avoiding homophobia, hatred, caricature and *ad hominem* accusations is a hallmark of good teaching. Incumbents are responsible for the oversight of all other leaders, who may not have received the same level of training or been exposed to the same breadth of perspectives; it is therefore their responsibility to ensure a culture of respectful teaching and learning in local communities.

2.1.5 How can a church explore its practices and their impact on people, in particular in relation to homophobia?

As with the previous question, there are ample resources already available to help churches do this. The LLF course and the Pastoral Principles course would be helpful, along with robust self-examination on the part of the minister(s) and PCC, and reading the resources mentioned in the LLF book and the online library. There are also LGBTQIA+ Christian organizations and professionals who hold expertise and wisdom in facilitating conversations with congregations, PCCs, and individuals that may be fruitful. These organisations span the full breadth of the theological spectrum, and every church should be able to find support and advice sensitive to their theological views.

An undefended listening exercise which asks for feedback may also be indicated, though this would be better done if facilitated by someone with experience and wisdom in this area.

An additional forthcoming resource from the Church of England, *Teach Us to Pray*, will help churches explore their practice in relation to pastoral prayer and prayer ministry, with a view to nurture healthy cultures with respect to prayer in pastoral setting, including (but not limited to) questions around sexuality.

Familiarity with and implementation of safeguarding guidelines around spiritual abuse <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safeguarding-children-young-people-and-vulnerable-adults/42> and guidelines for nurturing healthy cultures is also crucial in this respect.

2.2 Disagreement and conflict

Significant disagreement is and always has been part of the life of the church in its journey, and strives toward deeper accord in its shared fellowship in Jesus Christ, not only because of sin but also because Christians have to work out what it means to proclaim and respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ in their particular contexts and cultures (or, as the Declaration of Assent puts it, to ‘proclaim afresh in each generation’).

Responses to disagreement should respect and express the fellowship or communion, the common participation we have in Christ and lead to its deepening, even where we discern serious error and need for repentance in one another. Disagreeing well in the church is framed by such recognition and impelled by the command to love one another. It aims to avoid destructive conflict and the settled antagonism of opposed parties, to value every member, and to move ‘creatively through disagreement toward the fullness of agreement in God’s truth, so that this may be proclaimed before God in worship and before humanity in mission.’¹ In practice, it involves the practice of consultation that reflects the participation of every member of the body in the shared gift of divine wisdom, the practice of conciliar decision-making attentive to the wider catholicity of the churches, and a concern for the conscience of each person.

1 Faith and Order Commission, *Communion and Disagreement* (GS Misc 1139, 2016). [communion_and_disagreement_faoc_report_gs_misc_1139.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/communion_and_disagreement_faoc_report_gs_misc_1139.pdf) (churchofengland.org)

2.2.1 What guidance can be offered to an incumbent of multiple churches with different traditions and wishes regarding the prayers?

It will always be advisable to find pastoral provisions in contexts where the wishes and traditions of the churches differ on the use of PLF; such an approach may require deep love, grace and respect (as well as 'agreeable disagreement') between the vicar and the different churches; love, grace and respect are marks of communities seeking to grow ever more like Christ – where there are different churches in, for example, a team where there are a range of convictions, it will be crucial that fellowships never lose sight of their vocation to be sites of character and grace.

Use of commended prayers in regular services will be the prerogative of the incumbent, but it would still be wise for this to be discussed extensively with the PCC, though they would have no right of veto.

If standalone forms of service were authorized, then, practically, each parish/PCC would have to make its own decision, together with the incumbent, on whether to use the PLF, following the guidance in 1.1.2. No church can demand that their incumbent should offer the PLF against their will, nor can they veto their incumbent offering the prayers in a different church if that church's PCC has agreed to the PLF being offered.

Where more than one clergy person is available, or there are LLMs willing to offer the prayers, it would be possible for the ministry team to agree between them that some ministers do not offer the prayers while others do. However, this could never override the decision of each parish, and the agreement to offer the prayers in any parish must be reached between the incumbent and the PCC.

2.2.2 What guidance can be given in cases of deep differences of opinion between vicar and PCC/church?

When there are deep differences, it can be helpful for the parties involved to make space for de-escalating conflict and reflecting prayerfully. This might entail a season in which a vicar and PCC are advised to take a period of time for prayer and further learning before considering again questions about the use of PLF. During this time, the disagreeing parties

might undertake the LLF course together, and/or the Pastoral Principles course, or even simply agree to hold a time when the matter is not on the agenda. External help and facilitation are often a key to having better conversations where each party can have space to articulate their views and feeling without having to simultaneously hold the process for the entire room.

Every diocese should issue guidance that is appropriate to their local context, and reflects the availability and skills of local staff, advocates and advisors who may be able to help. This might include deanery chapters, senior staff, MDR consultants, and clergy counselling or dispute advisory services. Bringing in outside trained facilitators would also be important, but would need to be at the invitation of/with the agreement of the incumbent.

If differences over the PLF and the wider questions it connects to threaten a pastoral breakdown between clergy and PCC, the archdeacon should be brought in at the earliest opportunity.

2.2.3 What support is there for clergy in cases of conflict with their congregation, with PCCs, with the bishop or with schools or other organisations they work with?

This question is one that is best fleshed out at local level, with knowledge of local resources. As above, it might include deanery chapters, senior staff, MDR consultants, and clergy counselling or dispute advisory services. Dioceses should also consider facilitated support groups for clergy and lay ministers.

In addition, clergy and lay ministers are encouraged to speak to their spiritual director, and, if appropriate, seek the advice of a work consultant or coach.

2.2.4 How do we protect clergy against malicious claims (of discrimination, or of conduct unbecoming)?

It is not possible to protect clergy against all malicious claims if someone is determined to complain. However, ongoing work around the new

Clergy Conduct Measure needs to take this matter into close consideration. What does and does not constitute grounds for a complaint needs to be made clear at national and diocesan levels: if clergy are acting in line with what has been agreed nationally then they cannot be the subject of a complaint, so a complaint should not be raised, and if it is, it should be dismissed.

It is also important to note that the use of the PLF is a matter of 'doctrine, ritual and ceremonial', and therefore specifically excluded from the current CDM and draft CCM. The bishop should be consulted in order to arrange pastoral and practical support where needed.

Any formal proceedings relating to use of the PLF would probably need to be brought under the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Measure 1963 (on the basis that they involved matter of doctrine, ritual or ceremonial) rather than under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003.

2.2.5 What should a church do if attacked (in person, online, etc.) for their stance on sexuality?

Churches should respond as they would normally do when attacked for any reason, by contacting their diocesan communications team for advice, and act on that advice. If the action involves threats to persons or criminal damage, they should report it to the police.

It is good practice for all churches to develop a simple communications policy about who responds, and when/how, to any attacks, however they come, regardless of the motive.

Support should also be offered through area/rural deans and archdeacons.

2.2.6 What are the expectations and boundaries for clergy in speaking about their personal views?

Clergy in the Church of England have longstanding freedom in expressing a variety of views, and twice during the creation of the current CDM Synod rejected the possibility of a form of misconduct for expressing particular opinions. The expectations and boundaries would remain what they currently are under the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy.

Neither clergy nor LLMs should engage in any kind of hate speech, incite violence or engage in actions that would be criminalized.

All ministers should balance their right to free speech with appropriate sensitivity and respect for the views and lives of others, and have particular regard for the way in which their own views may affect their parishioners, and their partners in the community.

2.2.7 Is there a social media code of conduct for how we speak of one another in public, in times of deep disagreement on sexuality?

There is no official national set of guidelines on conduct online, however, the principles outlined in the previous question apply here.

The Pastoral Principles [<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/house-bishops/pastoral-principles>](https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/house-bishops/pastoral-principles) offer powerful ways of reflecting on how we relate to one another in both online and offline life.

Dioceses, benefices or churches may consider adapting the Church of England social media guidelines [<https://www.churchofengland.org/help/social-media-guideline>](https://www.churchofengland.org/help/social-media-guideline) for local use.

2.2.8 What protection to freedom of conscience will be given to lay people who are currently involved in weddings – e.g. vergers, choir, bellringers and organists – who do not wish to be involved in services using the Prayers of Love & Faith?

It would not be appropriate to force a lay person to participate in a standalone PLF service should these be authorized, just as clergy cannot be forced to do so.

If the PLF are being used in the context of a regular act of worship, this would be more complicated, especially in the case of an organist or member of the choir if they have a contract, and especially in smaller churches where there may not be other organists available locally, even at deanery level.

In both cases, a pastoral conversation with the lay people involved, which respects their conscience, would need to happen with a view to reach an agreement on the way forward. If employment issues arise, advice should be taken from the archdeacon and/or the diocesan registrar.

2.2.9 Can an incumbent say that they do not wish the church building to be used at all for services using the PLF or would there be an expectation that they would allow the building to be used by other ministers if the PCC wishes them to be?

In terms of the use of the PLF as part of regular public worship, it would be wise for incumbent and PCC to agree a policy, but use of the prayers falls under the discretion of the incumbent.

Churches can only be used for standalone services using the PLF if those are authorized, and then only by agreement between the incumbent and the PCC following which they opt in to using the prayers and notify the diocese that they are doing so. It would be perfectly possible for an incumbent to agree that the building could be used for services led by another minister if the PCC wished them to be, but this would have to be freely agreed by the incumbent.

2.2.10 What will be done in response to accusations of homophobia, coercive prayer/conversion therapy and safeguarding risk?

The decision of a church or minister to adopt the PLF or not is a statement about the theological position it holds, and does not reflect positively or negatively on its safeguarding practices. All churches are required to comply with House of Bishops' Safeguarding Guidance and Safeguarding Code of Practice, and therefore people can reasonably expect safeguarding allegations to be dealt with in the same way regardless of where they might occur.

Instances of, for example, spiritual abuse or coercive prayer can occur anywhere, in any denomination, and in churches of all theological positions. The critical factor therefore relates to how healthy its culture is, how well people can challenge unhealthy behaviour, and how well disclosures of abuse are responded to.

Guidelines for good practice in pastoral prayer, *Teach Us to Pray* are being prepared and will help churches examine their own practices to ensure healthy practices of prayer with those who ask for it.

Where the alleged behaviour amounts to a crime, this should be reported to the police, and in relation to clergy, a CDM should be considered. It is important that adequate pastoral care is provided to the person reporting the crime, irrespective of both parties' theological positions.

There may be occasions where the behaviour does not amount to a crime, but is still deemed to be unhealthy Christian behaviour, and is at risk of becoming spiritually abusive. Examples of such behaviours and potential responses can be found in the *Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults* <<https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-e-manual/safeguarding-children-young-people-and-vulnerable-adults/42>> guidance. It is important that at very local levels, all church officers and indeed congregations are aware of (and vigilant about) the hallmarks of a healthy culture, and the indications that either an individual, or a group of individuals, may be moving the wrong way along the spectrum of behaviour.

Where the person making the accusation is a child, young person or vulnerable adult, then the relevant Practice Guidance <<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/practice-guidance-responding-to-assessing-and-managing-safeguarding-concerns-or-allegations-against-church-officers.pdf>> must be followed.

2.3 Relating to other churches locally

2.3.1 What is the role of deaneries or wider groupings of churches in ensuring that all couples can find a place of welcome and belonging?

This was explored earlier in question 1.1.12.

Churches that wish to use the commended resources as part of regular services may indicate this on their website.

Should standalone forms of services be authorized, then the opt-in system for churches to decide whether to offer a standalone service for same-sex couples will be the main mechanism to enable such a system.

A list will be kept at diocesan level, and, if appropriate, at deanery level. A point of contact should be available either at diocesan or deanery level, and publicized clearly on the diocesan website, so couples could be signposted to their nearest church able to offer these services. Churches that have opted in may signal this by using a PLF tag on AChurchNearYou.com.

It is important to note however that there is no automatic right for such a service to be offered – even when a church has opted in, it is still left to the discretion of the minister whether to offer them to a particular couple, based on a pastoral conversation.

Churches that opt in to offer these services will in all likelihood offer the full range of PLF. Other churches may offer prayers as part of a Sunday service in more informal ways, on a case-by-case basis, and it will be up to them to explain and make clear what they would or would not do.

In addition, churches may want to use deaneries and other local structures to share good practice and learning with regards to the PLF and wider LLF conversations.

2.4 Church school and educational settings

2.4.1 How can church schools be encouraged to work with clergy holding a breadth of different views?

Church schools are expected to have a meaningful and reciprocal relationship with their parish church. This relationship will often extend to other churches in the locality and deanery. A school should undertake its best endeavours to foster a good relationship with its parish church where possible.

Within a school's locality there will be churches and clergy holding a breadth of views on many issues. The Prayers of Love and Faith have been authorized for use but not everyone will agree they should be used or want to use them, and School leaders must recognize the validity of these different positions within the Church of England.

All relationships between schools and their parish churches and clergy should be built on mutual trust and understanding. This 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.

At times a school may need to hold a range of views together including those of clergy, staff and parents and be a role model for good disagreement. The Pastoral Principles <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/general-synod/house-bishops/pastoral-principles> developed as part of the Living in Love and Faith process provide a framework for good disagreement. Whilst ultimately the guidance and the law (referenced above) must take precedence over the range of views that exist locally, school leaders will need to carefully navigate these situations and ensure that their response is proportionate. Where disagreements exist which require mediation or further support, a school should call upon the expertise within its Diocesan Board of Education.

2.4.2 What advice is there for clergy in relating to their local schools' expectations in terms of what is taught and modelled?

Clergy exercise an enormous privilege when entering a school, particularly if this is the school that is attached to their parish church. They may exercise a pastoral role, serve as a governor, be invited to lead Collective Worship and take part in the teaching of parts of the curriculum as an expert from the local Christian community.

Schools should have a clear written policies for visitors which all visitors, including clergy, should be asked to adhere to. They should also have written policies and plans for Collective Worship, Religious Education (RE) Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Policies for visiting speakers may also be in place. Where policies and plans are written well, they can help everyone to feel safe in expressing their opinions and beliefs in ways which are not threatening or discriminatory. These policies will be written in line with up to date legislation and the school's distinctive Christian vision, and will be scrutinized through the inspection process.

For example, the Goodness and Mercy resources for Relationships and Sex Education exemplify how children can learn about different kind of relationships they will encounter in modern Britain, how those relationships can be legally recognized by civil marriage and civil

partnership and how the Church of England teaches that Holy Matrimony is the joining together of one man and one woman.

When discussing differences that exist within the Church, 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.

2.4.3 What should be done in case of conflict over an ex-officio (clergy) member of the governors over sexuality?

In maintained church schools the incumbent is usually an ex-officio member of the governing body and the PCC, deanery and diocese may appoint Foundation Governors. Many academies have representation from the local clergy on local governing committees in order to retain the historic local relationship between church and school.

Governing bodies may wish to consider a working agreement in place with an ex-officio governors. This good practice is recommended by some dioceses and could cover the postholder being:

- willing to promote the views and policies of the parish and Diocese (and indeed of the Church of England as a whole in terms of its published Vision for Education) as appropriate at meetings of the Governing Board and at other meetings concerning, for example, any change in the future status of the school;
- a link to ensure the school features regularly on PCC and other local church leadership team agenda and vice versa;
- a visible presence in church and in school;
- prepared both to represent the parish during a SIAMS Inspection and to explain to the Inspection Team how parish and school work together;
- prepared to undertake ongoing training as required;

- prepared to set aside time to meet and to pray regularly with the Chair of Governors and the Headteacher about both parish and school.

All governors, regardless of how they hold office, should understand their duties under the relevant legislation. Many organizations have role descriptions in place for all governors and trustees and will ask office holders to subscribe to a code of conduct which will often be linked to the Seven Principles of Public Life (The Nolan Principles) and may contain explicit reference to the Equality Act. These role descriptors and codes of conduct are useful to revisit at times of disagreement and tension. Many dioceses will have a governance support officer who can provide further assistance in navigating disagreements. Further information on the roles and duties of governors and trustees can be obtained from organizations such as the National Governance Association www.nga.org.uk and the Confederation of School Trusts www.cstuk.org.uk.