January 2026

Statement of the House of Bishops on Living in Love and Faith

To friends in Christ across the Church of England

"Do nothing from selfish ambitions or conceit but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2.3-4)

1. We are deeply conscious of the pain and sensitivities in the life of the Church of England in this moment around questions of identity, sexuality and same sex relationships, evidenced in what we are hearing from LGBTQI+ sisters and brothers and from those whose trust in the processes of the Church of England has been undermined. We write as the House of Bishops, conscious of our own shortcomings, seeking to regard others as better than ourselves, seeking to look to the interests of all those served by our imperfect Church, and to discern together the mind of Christ.

2. We therefore remind ourselves, and the whole Church of England, at the beginning of this statement that God is Love. God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to share our human nature, and to live, die and rise again for us. God's invitation to know, love and follow him through Jesus Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit extends to all people, in every place and time, without exception, and thus including all those who are LGBTQI+. God's will is for the flourishing of each person in a world transformed by that peace and justice which are the marks of God's kingdom.

3. In the words of the Declaration of Assent[1]: "The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation". The call to proclaim the faith afresh requires continual, humble, loving reflection together on the formulation of doctrine and practice in the light of scripture, tradition and reason.

4. As bishops at this time we are called to love and serve the Church of England, with its particular inheritance of Christianity which is both catholic and reformed; set in a particular relationship to the people of England and to the polity of the United Kingdom[2]; bearing a unique set of responsibilities to the Anglican Communion, a global fellowship of diverse, independent

[1] The Declaration of Assent is made by deacons, priests and bishops of the Church of England when they are ordained and on each occasion when they take up a new appointment.

[2] We acknowledge of course that the Diocese in Europe and the Diocese of Sodor and Man are in a different relationship to jurisdictions beyond England.

provinces bound together by a common story, ways of being Church together, and a shared sense of God's mission; and in dialogue with ecumenical partners both in the United Kingdom and across the world.

5. Our Church is seeking to respond lovingly and faithfully to recent insights and understandings about sexuality and in particular to the affirmation and acceptance in much of our society of lifelong, faithful, stable same sex relationships and marriage. Anglican churches and provinces in many parts of the world, across different traditions (together with our own ecumenical partners) are involved in this process of discernment. As your bishops, we are united in seeking to build a generous, welcoming church to all in this generation.

6. Following a long process of study and reflection it remains clear that we, and the Church we serve, hold differing views on whether and to what extent these lifelong, faithful and stable same sex relationships and marriages can be recognised and honoured in the light of scripture and the tradition of the Church. Some of us, after careful engagement with scripture and the Christian tradition, are deeply convinced that such relationships can rightly be understood as akin to marriage between persons of the opposite sex. Others, even after long and thoughtful study, remain uncertain. Still others, with equal depth of conviction and reflection, believe that taking such a step runs counter to the message of scripture and the Christian tradition.

7. As a Church we have been debating these questions for decades. In particular, the *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF) process has been a focus for much of the Church of England for the last decade. We are grateful for all those who have engaged with this debate and have brought different understandings and experiences together. We have particularly valued the contributions of LGBTQI+ Christians among us, from a variety of perspectives, who have courageously shared their own experience as part of this process. Many, holding a variety of convictions, have felt, and still feel, bruised, hurt or unsafe by the conversations and the discussions we have had, particularly LGBTQI+ people. We are very sorry that the process has become so protracted and painful.

8. St Paul reflects in the Letter to the Philippians on the challenges of the Church being called to live with differences which are doctrinal (3.2-4); personal (4.2-3) and ethical (3.18-20). The letter acknowledges the challenge of discerning the mind of Christ. St Paul commends the primacy of love (1.9); the vital importance of humility (2.3); the direction of energy and attention to what is true and good (4.8) and the precious quality of perseverance in the face of broken relationships (4.9).

9. Throughout the LLF process, we have found common ground in our desire to love and welcome all people; to be honest about our views and differences with humility; and to hold together as one Church, albeit with diverse views on important aspects of sexuality and relationships. We acknowledge the value of this deep engagement with one another. We recognise that discerning the mind of Christ on contemporary questions demands time and energy. We maintain that God by his Spirit continues to guide the Church in faith and truth as we listen to scripture and to one another.

10. We are acutely aware that, over the course of the past three years, hopes have repeatedly been raised and dashed, and anger has mounted at the perceived disregard for due process. We are aware that, as a result, many LGBTQI+ people feel less welcome, not more so, in our churches. This is a cause for profound sorrow. The House of Bishops, for our part, must take responsibility for this situation and we apologise to all who have been harmed by shortcomings in our leadership.

11. We realise that the decisions communicated in this statement are the cause of profound anguish to many LGBTQI+ people and their allies, who had believed further progress was imminent. We bitterly regret the pain our decisions have caused.

12. We reaffirm the treasured place that LGBTQI+ people, from a great variety of life experiences and theological commitments, have in the Church of England and our commitment to ensuring that everyone is, and feels, consistently valued and safe. 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.

13. The General Synod passed a comprehensive motion in February 2023[2]. For the past three years, the House of Bishops has overseen a process seeking to take forward the different parts of the motion together. This Synodical process has involved large numbers of faithful Christians who have given generously of their time and commitment through a range of working groups. We are grateful to them and to those who have served as lead bishops and as staff in this process. We believe we have fulfilled, albeit imperfectly, the February 2023 General Synod motion as best we can[3] given the range of views across the Church of England, including replacing *Issues in Human Sexuality* after the July 2025 Synod motion, without departing from or indicating any departure from the Church's doctrine of marriage.

[3] The Programme Board for LLF have prepared a report for the February 2026 Synod detailing the different motions carried by the Synod and the ways in which they have been taken forward.

14. We believe, as a House, that the time has now come formally to conclude this Synodical process in February 2026 and to identify the next stages of work which will need to be considered by the House of Bishops and the General Synod in the coming years, including the ongoing structures for development, dialogue and discernment.

Prayers of Love and Faith

15. The House of Bishops has commended the Prayers of Love and Faith for use in existing services in local churches as a way of offering public affirmation and recognition of the goods which are to be found in same sex relationships. These prayers are part of the regular pastoral provision which can be offered by a minister, lay or ordained, following consultation with their Parochial Church Council or equivalent body[4]. The texts of the Prayers of Love and Faith and the further guidance can be found here: Prayers of Love and Faith | The Church of England. The Prayers of Love and Faith for use in regularly scheduled services remain commended by the House of Bishops for use under Canon B5. We are committed to monitoring and receiving feedback on the use of Prayers of Love and Faith as part of our ongoing discernment.

16. These prayers remain an optional and pastoral provision. We reaffirm in this declaration that no minister or parish within the Church of England is obliged to offer Prayers of Love and Faith, or act against their conscience on this matter. Nor should any minister or parish be disadvantaged through a decision in conscience not to offer (or to offer) Prayers of Love and Faith.

17. We are grateful to the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) and its Episcopal Reference Group (ERG) for two further pieces of work around Prayers of Love and Faith. The ERG commended the paper GS Misc 1407, Living in Love and Faith and the Doctrine of Marriage to the February 2025 meeting of the General Synod. In commending GS 1407, the ERG recognised "that the PLF in themselves (considered in the light of the Nine Theses) do not characterise the relationship of any given couple as marriage and do not therefore impinge upon the doctrine of marriage". FAOC have now produced a further guidance paper: The Doctrine of Marriage and the Prayers of Love and Faith: Text and Context (GS Misc 1430) for the House of Bishops in October 2025. This further paper considers further the relationship between text and context in Prayers of Love and Faith.

18. The House has considered the guidance and the alternative ways of moving forward proposed by this second paper. With a high degree of consensus, the House has concluded that the additional challenges posed by bespoke services will require maximum communal authorisation through the Canon B2

[4] See the advice on good process for these decisions outlined in the Pastoral Guidance on PLF.

process of approval. We address the next steps in this process in the paragraphs below.

19. Some bishops, clergy and lay people believe it would be right to enable further provision, such as permitting Church of England churches to solemnise the marriages of same sex couples. However, we have not found sufficient consensus to proceed further with these suggestions at the present time, given the range and balance of views across the Church. Our common discernment on these questions will continue in the coming years.

The conduct of ordinands and the clergy

20. We have been conscious throughout this process of particular questions around the expectations and guidance for clergy in same sex relationships; on whether clergy in same sex marriages should be able to be licensed to new posts; and on whether candidates in same sex marriages can be sponsored as candidates for ordination.

21. There has been wide consensus that the House of Bishops' guidance on these questions in *Issues in Human Sexuality* from 1991 needs to be replaced. We were heartened by the decision of the General Synod, at its sessions in July 2025, to ask the House of Bishops to adopt the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy as the appropriate context for guidance on these questions instead, and the House agreed this change in July 2025. The Ministry Development Board has now prepared draft guidance on the integration into the National Shared Discernment Process of the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy and has confirmed to the House of Bishops this has now been implemented.

22. The House of Bishops received further theological advice from FAOC in October 2025, both on The Nature of Doctrine and the Living God (GS Misc 1429) and on The Exercise of Discipline and Clergy Exemplarity in the Church of England: the Case of Same Sex Marriage (GS Misc 1431). At the same time the House of Bishops received a further summary of legal advice in relation to Living in Love and Faith (GS Misc 1432).

23. Under guidance agreed by the House of Bishops in 2014, clergy who have entered into same sex civil marriages have received an informal rebuke. Such clergy have been able to continue in their present beneficed or licensed roles but not permitted to undertake new roles. We recognise that this is creating situations of pastoral hardship and difficulty for such clergy, their families and parishes. Bishops in good conscience have a range of views on how they should exercise their responsibilities in relation to discipline and pastoral care when considering how to respond to clergy in same sex marriages in their own dioceses.

24. However, in the context of the doctrine of the Church of England and in light of theological and legal advice, we acknowledge that a more general permission for clergy to be in a same sex civil marriage would require a formal legislative process. Following February 2026, we will continue to reflect, in dialogue with the wider church, on the advice received from FAOC and the Legal Office to explore what such a process would involve. Until any such process is complete, existing guidance from the House of Bishops will continue to apply.

25. We have considered carefully the possibility, in the interim, of some bishops sponsoring ordinands who are already in same sex marriages through the discernment process and training, before the wider questions of clergy in same sex marriage are resolved by the whole Church of England. However, this would introduce at this time an unmanageable level of complexity to our shared discernment and formation processes. Consideration of these questions will need to wait for the resolution of the wider question of clergy entering same sex marriage.

Pastoral Reassurance

26. Many local churches and ministers welcome these modest steps toward greater inclusion, rejoice that we have reached these decisions together, and warmly embrace them as positive developments while continuing to long for further progress. Many of those who cannot themselves use the prayers are nevertheless content to be fully part of a Church which allows other parishes to offer Prayers of Love and Faith and understand that this diversity enables greater connection with more of our society.

27. However, there remains a significant number of clergy (including some bishops) and local churches who, whilst welcoming and supporting LGBTQI+ members in a variety of relationships, believe that the Church of England is in error in making this provision, as well as others who would regard any further developments of this kind (such as bespoke services) to be a step too far.

28. Some of those who hold such views have sought patterns and degrees of differentiation from a Church which they believe to be in serious error and the provision of episcopal ministry with separate and independent jurisdiction. There is at present insufficient consensus among us and, we believe, in the General Synod, for these requested provisions to be put in place. The wider disruption to Anglican ecclesiology and mission would be very significant and would, we believe, seriously jeopardise our calling as bishops to be a focus for unity in the church as set out in the ordinal.

29. We have also explored together the possibility of formalised provision of delegated episcopal ministry through a Code of Practice. Our consensus is that such a scheme would not be proportionate to the changes introduced by

the commendation of Prayers of Love and Faith. As a group, we are conscious that this is an area that needs careful thought and discernment in order to preserve our distinctively Anglican understanding of the Church and God's mission. This is why the Faith and Order Commission has been asked to provide further theological reflection in this area for the House of Bishops to consider in due course.

30. We recognise, however, that these debates around differentiation and alternative jurisdiction and provision will need to continue into the future (alongside the ongoing debates around the possibility of clergy entering into same sex marriage and the solemnisation of same sex marriage). We trust that these debates will continue in a spirit of honesty, grace and mutual respect, and with sensitivity to those whose lives and relationships are most deeply affected.

31. A number of parishes have responded to the introduction of Prayers of Love and Faith and the prospect of further change by withdrawing from some diocesan events and worship and/or diverting or reducing parish share. We recognise such gestures of protest have been made in good conscience. However, at this point, we would together urge all parishes to uphold the call to worship and walk together, and to uphold the principles of mutual support and a common fund administered by and through dioceses into the future.

32. Since no new developments are envisaged immediately, we are not proposing any new arrangements for pastoral reassurance beyond the commitments offered in this statement. In the event that developments such as the authorisation of bespoke services under Canon B2 or the easing of the restrictions which presently limit the licensed ministries of clergy who enter into same sex civil marriage, pastoral reassurance and provision will need to be provided that is proportionate to the degree of change envisaged.

Drawing the *Living in Love and Faith* process to a close and next steps

33. As bishops, we therefore find ourselves ministering in and for a Church which is seeking both to be generous and inclusive, and to hold together those of very different views on permanent and faithful same sex relationships. We commend the continuing dialogue and study of these matters to the whole Church and to every local church in the coming years.

34. Whilst the dialogue will and must continue, we also recognise that the Synodical process which began in February 2023 now needs to draw to a conclusion, albeit in a way which is imperfect, untidy and which leaves some important questions unresolved. We dare to hope that the LLF process will leave a legacy of greater inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in the life of the Church

of England, together with deeper understanding of the theological issues and greater honesty about, and tolerance of, individual differences.

35. The House has given careful consideration to next steps in this process. There is a need to allow due space for further reflection across the Church of England on the theological and legal advice we have received to discern its implications. Lessons need to be learned from the process of the last three years. It is important to avoid a further cycle of hopes or anxieties being raised only to be disappointed. However, it is also clear that there remains work still unresolved from LLF which needs both resources and co-ordination.

36. The House of Bishops therefore commits to commissioning a Working Group which will enable it to:

    a. undertake the necessary legal and theological preparatory work to explore the approval process under Canon B2 for bespoke services of Prayers of Love and Faith;
    b. define further the appropriate formal legislative changes and any further theological work which would be required to enable clergy to enter same sex marriage;
    c. continue to explore, in dialogue with the wider church, any pastoral episcopal provision and reassurance which would be proportionate to any further changes proposed;
    d. report back to the General Synod with recommendations within the first two years of the new General Synod quinquennium;
    e. establish a Pastoral Consultative Group as a subgroup of the Working Group to advise bishops and archdeacons on specific cases in the interim and facilitate consistent practice across the Church of England.

37. The House of Bishops has asked the LLF Programme Board to continue to meet until the new structures in paragraph 36 are in place.

38. The House of Bishops will seek the support and advice of the General Synod in February 2026 to establish this programme of work. Further details and terms of references for the Working Group and the Pastoral Consultative Group will be published in advance of the February group of sessions.

39. The LLF process identified the need for ongoing reflection on a number of questions of identity and sexuality which go beyond consideration of permanent and stable same sex relationships. These include questions of singleness; transgender identity; technology and sexuality; and the wider sexualisation of society. These questions remain for the Church and will be addressed through an ongoing process of study, engagement and reflection,

supported by the Working Group and the Church of England's *Faith and Public Life* team.

40. The LLF process was established primarily to offer to the Church comprehensive theological resources and a process for an informed conversation on the deepest questions of identity and sexuality. We remain thankful for what has been achieved through the process and in fulfilling the motion passed by General Synod in February 2023. The significant resources produced by LLF can continue to be accessed through the Church of England website[5]. We acknowledge the deep disagreements these questions have provoked and accept that there are no easy answers on any side of these debates, which will continue into the future. We also continue to recognise, in humility, the presence of Christ in different parts of his Body, the Church, and the widespread commitment to grace and to love.

41. We therefore hope and pray that, together the whole Church will continue to work to fashion a generous Church for this generation which stands in such need of the good news of Jesus Christ.

[5] https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith