



Advent is a season of waiting, and for many of us yearning and working for change in the Church of England's persistently restrictive rules and expectations around same-sex relationships, this continues to be a time of waiting, measured in decades rather than weeks. But on the coming Third Sunday in Advent, the austerity of the season is traditionally relaxed, in some places by wearing rose-coloured rather than purple vestments, by the candle of that colour in many Advent wreaths, and perhaps (like many Sundays in Advent, if we are honest) some seasonal refreshments.

And this Sunday there is indeed a moment of rejoicing, that the House of Bishops has commended the suite of the *Prayers of Love and Faith* for use in public worship. For the first time the goodness and holiness of committed same-sex relationships will be formally recognised in the liturgies of the Church of England.

Of course, we still await consideration of 'standalone' services which might be used for a couple around the time of their civil marriage or civil partnership. But the approval of the *Prayers* for use in regular services suggests a beautiful opportunity. In very many churches there will be in the regular congregation same-sex couples, faithful worshippers for years who have never had the opportunity to be named and celebrated in the words of the liturgy. And clergy and PCCs in such parishes may well have discussed extensively their desire to celebrate with same-sex couples as soon as suitable approved resources are available, as they will be from this Sunday.

We therefore suggest that, in as many parishes as possible where same-sex couples are regular worshippers, they should be named and prayed for as couples this Sunday, probably in the regular intercessions. Local judgments will need to be made about whether they should come to the front, or stand up, or in some other way be more clearly identified. See below for some particular texts and links.

By taking place within the regular service, such a celebration entirely conforms with the current strictures on the use of the *Prayers*. But more importantly, it owns in the public space of Sunday worship, in the fellowship of God's gathered people, the love and commitment that many couples have shown for years in spite of the disregard and hostility of the official Church of England. And it might, perhaps, be a Sunday for seasonal refreshments after the service as well.

Revd Neil Patterson, Prof. Helen King, Nic Tall – General Synod Gender & Sexuality Group
Revd Dan Barnes-Davies, Fiona MacMillan – Inclusive Church
Very Revd Joe Hawes, Revd Trevor Wyatt – MOSAIC
Revd Nigel Pietroni, Revd Brenda Wallace – Campaign for Equal Marriage in the Church of England

Appendix – Suggested texts

The full Prayers of Love and Faith are at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/prayers-of-love-and-faith.pdf>

Pastoral guidance outlining the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith may be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/living-in-love-and-faith-pastoral-guidance.pdf>

Two particular prayers that might be used:

For the Gift of Love

(PLF p.7, to be used as a general prayer celebrating love)

God of wonder and of joy:
grace comes from you,
and you alone are the source of life and love.
Without you, we cannot please you;
without your love, our deeds are worth nothing.
Send your Holy Spirit,
and pour into our hearts
that most excellent gift of love,
that we may worship you now
with thankful hearts
and serve you always with willing minds;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayers for God's Blessing

(From PLF p.10, to be used to pray for and give thanks for a named couple or couples)

God of generosity and joy,
with you is the well of life and in your light, we see light:
we give you thanks for *N* and *N*,
for the love and friendship they share,
and for their commitment to one another.
As they come before you this day,
trusting you as the giver of all good gifts,
strengthen their love by your love,
and gladden their hearts with your joy,
that their journey through life
may become a pilgrimage of grace.
By your blessing,
and with you as their companion and guide,
may they rejoice in hope and be sustained in love
all the days of their life and in the age to come,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.