

## Praying with Love and Faith

Earlier this week the Church Council had an opportunity to consider the recently published *Prayers of Love and Faith*, provided by the House of Bishops of the Church of England as resources for clergy to use when ministering to same sex couples. Our PCC voted unanimously to encourage our clergy to feel free to use them, although some spoke with considerable regret that they did not yet permit parishes like ours to marry same-sex couples.

As your very new Rector, this vote brought me considerable joy, because in my 18 years as a member of General Synod this is a significant moment. For the first time in our history the Church has provided some prayers and readings that can be offered to LGBTI+ people without any sense of moral disapproval or qualification. When I was first elected to General Synod in 2005 even these modest resources seemed a long way off: Civil Partnerships only came in in 2005 and same sex marriage was only legalised in the UK in 2013. These social changes have come within a generation, and it is hard to see them being reversed, even by the most authoritarian politicians we have.

I would therefore first like to invite both directly and through you anyone who might like to explore some sort of celebration or blessing of their same-sex relationship to feel free to approach one of the clergy. We want to take the opportunity to ensure that couples who come through our doors know that the love and blessing that comes from God can be part of their relationship, and I know we will want to respond with enthusiasm and creativity. So if you are in a same-sex relationship yourself or have family members who are, do let us know if you are interested. It is lovely to be able to – at last – say yes, not just on behalf of myself or even our congregation, but on behalf of the whole Church of England.

We are an inclusive church and, as we move into a place where we have a positive offer to LGBTI+ people, there may be some among our church community who have some concerns. An inclusive church is serious about welcoming all people, and for me that includes those who hold a more conservative position than Holy Trinity & St Mary's does. At a personal level, I welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you, and my commitment to pastoral care as a parish priest extends way beyond those who I happen to agree with on an ethical or political matter. All means all!

The General Synod meets again in a couple of weeks' time and, for the first time since 2005, I won't be a member. I won't miss it too much – I've done my time. But please pray for our own Carolyn Graham and every member of Synod as they continue to debate these matters, especially as conservative Anglicans have chosen this subject as the ground on which to fight what is a very vocal, well-funded campaign to save, as they see it, the Church of England from heresy. It is going to be a very unpleasant period of conflict and anger for those who are members.

But let us at the parish level rejoice that, this week, Holy Trinity & St Mary's is a little more inclusive than it was last week!

Simon Butler  
Rector