



DIOCESE of  
WINCHESTER

# BISHOPS' STUDY DAY 2025

Hosted by Bishop Philip and Bishop Rhiannon, at this study day we explored theological reflections on responses to Prayers of Love and Faith (PLF).

Our guest speakers were Revd Canon Professor Liz Stuart MBE and Revd Dr Andrew Goddard.



# REVD DR ANDREW GODDARD



## PLF Pastoral Guidance

“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”.

“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6).

## St Andrew's Day Statement (1995)

“The Church...assists all its members to a life of faithful witness in chastity and holiness, recognising two forms or vocations in which that life can be lived: marriage and singleness (Gen. 2.24; Matt. 19. 4-6; 1 Cor. 7 passim). There is no place for the church to confer legitimacy upon alternatives to these”.

## Classic biblical texts on same-sex sexual behaviour

- Genesis 19.4-5 & Judges 19.22
- Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13
- 1 Corinthians 6.9-10
- 1 Timothy 1.9-10
- Romans 1.18ff (esp vv26-27)
- Jude v7



# Steve Holmes on classic texts

If we understand sexual ethics the way the church, almost universally, has done for the past fifteen hundred years, then these texts are just not very significant for the ethical debate.... Their proper place is in a footnote, indicating that they offer a welcome, but small, degree of confirmation that a position reached for other, much weightier, exegetical and theological reasons is indeed correct. If these texts had never been in Scripture, the church would still face the same struggle with same-sex marriage, because our understanding of marriage is built on procreation and otherness" (Steve Holmes in *Two Views on Homosexuality and The Church*, p. 175).

## General Synod, February 2023

“That this Synod...lament and repent of the failure of the Church to be welcoming to LGBTQI+ people and the harm that LGBTQI+ people have experienced and continue to experience in the life of the Church”



# LLF/PLF

What has happened and  
where are we now?:  
Distinguishing Four Phases

# Phase 1: Initial proposal (Jan 2023)

- Doctrine of marriage unchanged but suggestions that “stable, faithful, committed, loving relationships are...the place for physical intimacy” (Abp of York, Sunday programme R4)
- PLF as prayers and as form of service to be commended and “not contrary to or indicative of a departure from” doctrine
- Expect new draft pastoral guidance to replace *Issues* published by July 2023 and to allow clergy in same-sex civil marriage
- Rationale: “a good case for saying that the institution of Holy Matrimony and the institution of civil marriage are now distinct” (GS Misc 1339)
- No proposals for “pastoral reassurance” for those unhappy

## Phase 2: Revised proposal (Summer to November 2023)

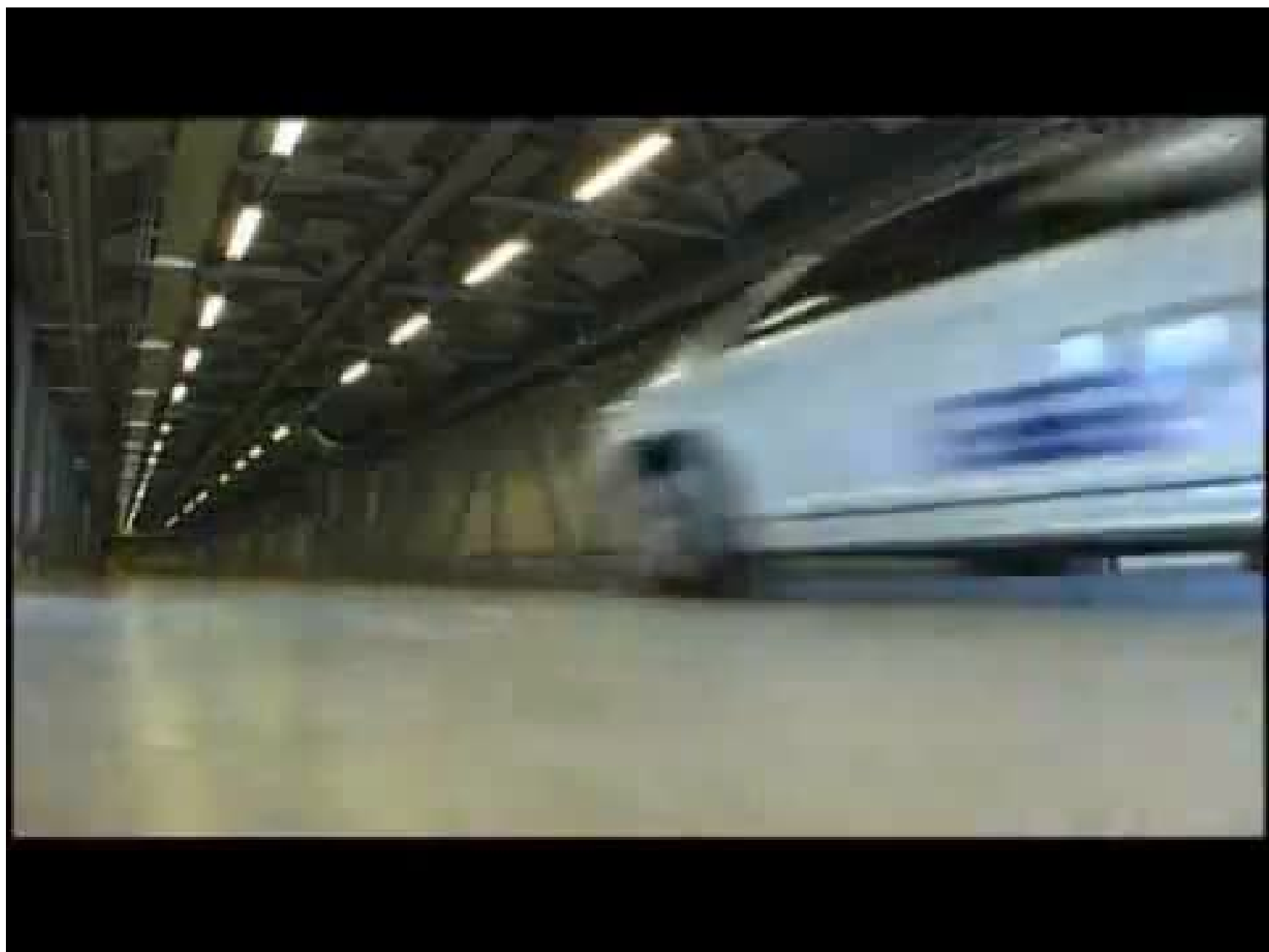
- Doctrine of marriage unchanged but now including that “It is within marriage that sexual intimacy finds its proper place”
- PLF accepted to be indicative of a departure from doctrine but not in an “essential matter” so still legal
- PLF to be commended as prayers in regular services but “standalone services” to go through Canon B2 (2/3 of Synod)
- Still intend clergy in same-sex marriage but no new guidance agreed
- Rationale changed to “pastoral provision in time of uncertainty”
- Recognition of need for some “pastoral provision or reassurance” (ie alternative episcopal oversight) for those opposed to developments

## Phase 3: Further revisions and delays (Summer 2024)

- Doctrine still unchanged but new theological work on the development of doctrine
- PLF been commended for regular services (Dec 23), now plan to commend for standalone services not use Canon B2 process
- Standalone as “opt-in” and only introduced (likely in July 2025) when there is also agreed “delegation of some specific and defined episcopal ministry” where parishes have problem with their bishop
- Plan for bishops to decide on clergy in same-sex marriage in early 2025 and produce new guidance

## Phase 4: Current situation (Feb 2025 General Synod)

- Need more time before can “advise on the congruence (or otherwise) of the PLF in bespoke services with the Church of England’s doctrine of marriage” (GS Misc 1407)
- More work on development of doctrine and on “the doctrinal implications of a possible relaxation of restrictions on Clergy in Same Sex Marriages” (GS Misc 1407) to bishops by May
- FAOC paper expresses “scepticism that a clear distinction between holy matrimony and civil marriage can withstand scrutiny” (GS Misc 1406)
- Proposed “pastoral provision” through Delegated Episcopal Ministry (DEM) but need more work on theology of DEM.
- No further decisions now expected in July 2025 General Synod so either November 2025 or February 2026.











# Pastoral Provision or Reassurance

What structural changes might be  
necessary?

# Wide range of options

- **Together for the CofE** called for “carefully defined conscience provision” which “clearly designed to further unity, rather than deepen the divisions, in the CofE” (Oct 2024)
- **The Alliance:** spoken of “six essential criteria” which “can only be met through the powers of the ordinary of an orthodox diocesan bishop...delegated oversight on a regional basis will not work” (Oct 2024) and also working to “establish what would in effect be a new de facto ‘parallel Province’ within the Church of England and to seek pastoral oversight from bishops who remain faithful to orthodox teaching on marriage and sexuality” (Open Letter to Abps in June 2024)

# What is rationale for provision?

- Not something good but a sad necessity
- Not “choose your own bishop who believes what you believe” but structure to enable highest degree of communion possible with integrity
- Some need it as they believe their bishop is leading church away from doctrine they promised to uphold and from liturgy and discipline consistent with that
- Claim is that they should not be deprived of a bishop holding to doctrine and following it in their ministry

# Current proposals

- Idea of “3 spaces in 1 church” rejected by bishops in June 2024 but may resurface in some form
- Key elements:
  - House of Bishops’ Statement
  - Code of Practice which “provides for the delegation of some specific and defined episcopal ministry”,
  - Oversight by an Independent Review Panel and monitored over 3 years
- This is for standalone services, more provision likely needed if/when permit clergy in same-sex marriage

# Alternative Episcopal Oversight: Some key questions

1. What justifies handing over? Theological rationale
2. Who handed over to? Something like current PEVs?  
Another local bishop? Bishop of a Society?
3. What functions and powers are handed over? Ordinary jurisdiction?
4. How handed over? Delegated or transferred from current bishop?
5. On what basis handed over? Mandatory or discretionary?
6. For how long? Permanent or provisional arrangement?
7. How monitored? Independent Reviewer?
8. What is the alternative? Separation?