

Lena's clarifications

Just to recap-In February the Church of England's **General Synod** welcomed proposals which would enable same-sex couples to come to church after a civil marriage or civil partnership to give thanks, dedicate their relationship to God and receive God's blessing. The majority was roughly 60/40 which leaves a significant portion of the Church of England disenfranchised. And of course the split goes right through individual churches. Our survey of members showed roughly equal numbers with strong feelings on both sides of the debate.

A set of draft texts known as **Prayers of Love and Faith**, which could be used voluntarily in churches for these couples who have marked a significant stage of their relationship is currently being refined by the bishops . Initially it was hoped that these texts would be ready by July but currently the timescale is now November. The bishops are also preparing new pastoral guidance for the Church on sexuality and marriage before the prayers are formally commended for use in churches.

Some other churches locally are also considering their position:

At **SJR Methodist** church the Church Council voted and decided in favour of offering marriages to same sex couples. However their minister will not be conducting them as he does not agree. So he will refer it up to someone at circuit (or district?) level, who will then sort out a minister for them.

Just a snapshot of what is happening at a local and national level.

What do I currently think as an ordained minister who has heard & reflected on many of the current discussions?

I think if we had a loving, monogamous same sex couple who had seriously considered celibacy but who were unable to live in that way.

Who clearly expressed their belief in Christ, who were displaying the fruit of the spirit in their lives as they followed Jesus.

If they were clear in their minds that in all conscience they believed that God blessed their relationship.

Then I would so want to see them and our community flourish that I would be generous in my practise of blessing their relationship in the hope that as Walter Mobley so eloquently expressed that 'this willingness to bless might contribute to being blessed by God in surprising ways using that imagination given by the Holy Spirit to seek a way forward currently not visible'.

I want to emphasise that this is quite a narrow path that is proposed and is not, as some of those opposed to the idea of blessing such partnerships, 'a caving into the culture' at all. In fact it is offering the 10% of the population not identifying as heterosexual a possible way forward that includes them in a faith community.

I do possess the gift of the Holy Spirit which can help me reimagine both what our church & society would look like without the severe judgement that is still integral today to being homosexual and I believe it would help those who identify as gay or lesbian not to either deny or over promote their own sexuality.

However I fully acknowledge that Dan in his position as 'Vicar' here at Shirley has decided that as a church we will not be offering prayers of blessing to same sex couples. So I will not be able to offer them here as I am part of this community. I would add that the decision SJR have made makes this easier for me as there is a local church where such couples would be fully welcomed.