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Tuesday 21 November 2023

## STATEMENT TO ALL SOULS CHURCH FAMILY FOLLOWING THE APPROVAL OF PRAYERS OF LOVE AND FAITH

On 15th November 2023, the Church of England voted narrowly in favour of introducing the Prayers of Love and Faith for blessing same-sex couples. The Prayers are expected to be ready for use from mid-December. As you may recall from the All Church Meeting on 2nd November, this is the outcome we anticipated.

The final vote had only a tight margin in the end and it was significant that the debates which preceded it revealed deep-seated, irreconcilable differences at every level of the denomination about issues that lie at the heart of our faith, including our commitment to the authority of Scripture, the nature of marriage and the nature of pastoral care.

At All Souls, we remain deeply committed to the responsibility we have in our culture and generation to be truthful about what God has said and to remain true to God's good word, the Bible, in which there is hope for all. To do anything other is deeply unloving. The Prayers of Love and Faith fail to reflect the goodness and truth of God's word and they remove from the Christian care of same sex attracted people the call for repentance from same-sex sexual activity.

Across the span of its 500 year history, the Church of England's liturgy has been consistent with the Bible, its supreme authority. That has included the call on us all to repent of sin and live according to the teachings of Jesus. As of 15th November, that is no longer true. With Scripture no longer the Church of England's supreme authority, we expect more inconsistencies. We anticipate that new Guidance next year will allow clergy to enter into same sex civil marriages for the first time.

We grieve for the impact of this vote on the many same sex attracted people within the CofE - including those in our Congregation - who are seeking to order their lives according to the Bible's teaching against a culture - and now their denomination - that encourages them to do otherwise. We remain committed to All Souls being a church where all people can flourish by finding their identity in Christ, joy in knowing unconditional love, and peace in the forgiveness of Jesus.

Following what we said on 2nd November, given the introduction of these Prayers, All Souls, Langham Place is compelled to create a clear, public separation from false teaching in the CofE and to ensure that we obey the Biblical mandate to have no partnership with it. So with great sorrow, we are beginning the process of differentiation.

We are not able to create permanent structural differentiation on our own. While the House of Bishops have committed to providing "pastoral reassurance" for churches like ours, there is currently no certainty of what that will be. In that context, our plan is to adopt those elements that lie within our gift on a temporary basis while we pursue a permanent form of differentiation that is embedded in the CofE's legal structures.



We are not looking to do this alone. The Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) is supporting churches like ours by offering temporary provisions so that – at least for now – we can remain a part of the Church of England while permanent, structural provision is pursued. Specifically, the PCC has decided to pursue:

1. **Alternative spiritual oversight**, which will mean that, while the Bishop of London will continue to have legal and formal oversight, including safeguarding, our current spiritual oversight arrangements are impaired and we will be seeking spiritual support from the CEEC's panel of orthodox bishops.
2. **Alternative financial arrangements** which will enable us to continue to support orthodox Anglican ministry in good conscience and pay our voluntary parish share. This will enable our share to be used to support only local churches who stand with us in the historic Anglican and biblical position on sexual ethics.

As we have already said, these are temporary arrangements and the PCC is looking to do more. The CEEC will be offering a wider number of provisions to orthodox churches as the situation develops. Fuller details can be read at [CEEC.info](http://CEEC.info).

In addition, we will continue to pursue with Bishop Sarah and the wider Church of England permanent, structural provision that will deliver:

- **Alternative orthodox diocesan episcopal oversight** including licensing and admission, support and accountability from bishops who uphold Scripture as the sole authority that guides our lives;
- **Membership in a deanery and diocese** that uphold an orthodox position;
- **Theological freedom** to identify false teaching in the CofE, and those who teach it, and to partner with orthodox churches on gospel projects;
- **Financial freedom** so that our common fund contributions are used to support orthodox Christian ministry;
- **Legal protection** and support for clergy when challenged for not using the blessings;
- **Secure selection, training and ordination pathways** for orthodox ordinands; and
- **Secure appointment processes** for clergy, ministers and other officers (eg PCC and wardens) to allow us to require candidates to hold an orthodox position.

We will continue to update you as the situation develops. For now, this is an incredibly painful and difficult position to be put in; we are grateful for the support, prayers and encouraging words from many of you, as well as from brothers and sisters around the world who share our convictions and sorrow.

Parochial Church Council, All Souls, Langham Place

