

GUIDING STATEMENTS *regarding same-sex relationships*

A. Background summary

During the early part of 2025, in response to the Church of England's publication for trial use of the *Prayers of Love and Faith*, the PCC and Leadership Team at St Mary's took part in a process which we called 'Discerning Inclusion'. This season of prayer, study and listening to each other led to the formulation of these Guiding Statements.

The question we were seeking to discern God's leading on was:
*Could committed same-sex relationships, which are sexual in nature,
honour God and reflect His love to the world?¹*

We concluded that St Mary's is a church where a range of perspectives are held and respected concerning this question. In order to ensure that St Mary's is a safe, welcoming space for everybody, regardless of sexual orientation, the following guidance has been formulated in relation to our practice as a church.

B. Relating to one another in love

At St Mary's church we promote a culture of being a family of believers who interact with each other from a foundation of Christian love. Within every family there will be differences of opinion about many matters, and the church is no exception.

In light of this we all seek to model loving disagreement in the following ways:

- By affirming that every human being is equally loved by God and invited to be part of His family, the church, through their saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- By extending a generous welcome to all, seeking to reflect the diversity of the global church and by acknowledging that we all daily fall short of the glory of God.
- When disagreements arise within the church we move towards each other in love, seeking first to find points of unity and common ground.
- When sharing our own perspectives, particularly around sensitive topics, we do so with humility and respect, remembering that, as fallible human beings, we can never completely know the mind of God.
- We encourage one another to engage prayerfully and deeply with the Bible, when seeking God's guidance and teaching on all matters relating to the Christian faith.

¹ In this context we defined 'committed same-sex relationships' as those which are intentionally lifelong, with commitments being made formally and publicly via a civil ceremony.

C. Additional expectations of people in leadership roles

Leadership roles at St Mary's include:

- Licensed Clergy (including those with Permission to Officiate)²
- Licensed Lay Ministers
- Ordinands and Ministry Experience Workers
- Employees
- PCC and Leadership Team members
- People involved with youth and children's ministry
- People involved with leading worship (band members and choir leaders)
- Small Group leaders
- Prayer Ministry Team members

Leaders³ at St Mary's need to pay particular attention to the power dynamics at play when sharing personal perspectives relating to matters about which there is significant disagreement amongst Christians.

The PCC and Leadership Team have acknowledged that within the church a range of perspectives are held and respected concerning this question:

Could committed same-sex relationships, which are sexual in nature, honour God and reflect His love to the world?

Therefore, leaders must be mindful of how they share their own perspective regarding this matter, ensuring that what they write or say is not presented as the 'official' or 'Christian' view on this subject, when in fact a range of views are held by Christians within our church family.

Also, in order to respect people's right to privacy, and comply with the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, leaders are urged not to ask intrusive questions about a person's sexual orientation and/or the nature of their relationships. In exceptional circumstances the Vicar of St Mary's may need to raise these matters privately with an individual in order to determine suitability for particular roles within the church, either locally or more widely.

The PCC and Leadership Team have reached the following conclusions about our practices as a church in relation to this matter.

Eligibility for leadership roles

Guidelines already exist which help the Vicar of St Mary's to determine people's suitability for various roles within the life of the church. For example, new people should be regular worshippers for six months before taking on most roles; some roles are subject the Safer Recruitment process, require a DBS and/or further training; and some roles require people to be established in their Christian faith. PCC membership is also subject to an election process.

² At the time of writing, Clergy and Ordinands in same-sex relationships are currently required by the Church of England to agree to celibacy.

³ Going forward the word 'leaders' is used in this document to encompass people who hold any of these roles listed.

The PCC concluded that people in same-sex relationships are subject to the same criteria as everyone else when determining suitability for any role at St Mary's.

Teaching during public worship

The PCC concluded that at St Mary's we uphold the teaching of the Church of England, which includes the doctrine of marriage as being between one man and one woman. When teaching on Bible passages which are relevant to the question above (in purple), preachers are permitted, but not compelled, to teach their own perspective within the context of public worship, so long as they do so with humility and respect, publicly acknowledging that other faithful Christians hold different views. Those whose conscience doesn't allow them to teach in this manner should delegate relevant sermon(s) to the Vicar or refrain from offering a view.

Pastoral care and discipleship

In 1-2-1 and Small Group settings leaders seek to help everyone feel safe and valued, navigating conflict in a way that models loving disagreement (as defined in section B). The PCC concluded that when leaders are invited to offer guidance and/or teaching concerning same-sex relationships, they encourage prayerful engagement with the Bible, signposting individuals to a range of resources to help with this. In the context of small groups and 1-2-1 conversations, leaders can share their own perspective, so long as they do so with humility and respect, publicly acknowledging that other faithful Christians hold different views. Same-sex attracted individuals seeking pastoral support may be best served if this was offered by a leader who shares a similar perspective, and where possible we ensure that this is made available.

Prayer ministry

Prayer ministry is routinely offered at St Mary's services and in the context of 1-2-1 meetings and in Small Groups. The purpose of this ministry is to accompany one another as we speak to and listen to God. It is good practice for leaders to ask the individual to articulate their own prayer needs, which can then be prayed into.

If matters relating to same-sex attraction/relationships are raised in the context of prayer ministry, leaders listen carefully to the prayer requests articulated by the individual and they pray into those subjects. If the leader feels unable to pray with the individual, then they should ask a member of the clergy to do so. Leaders do not offer their own perspectives on this matter in the context of prayer ministry. Anything that could be construed as Conversion Therapy⁴ is not permitted within the Church of England. As with all pastorally sensitive matters, leaders may encourage individuals to reach out to a member of the clergy if they would appreciate further support.

⁴ A [briefing document](#) for the General Synod of the Church of England described 'Conversion Therapy' as a term used as an umbrella for a number of practices aiming to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. On 8 July 2017 the General Synod passed the following motion:

That this Synod:

- a. endorse the Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK of November 2015, signed by The Royal College of Psychiatrists and others, that the practice of gay conversion therapy has no place in the modern world, is unethical, potentially harmful and not supported by evidence;
- b. call upon the Church to be sensitive to, and to listen to, contemporary expressions of gender identity;
- c. and call on the government to ban the practice of Conversion Therapy.

Youth and children's ministry

Ministry with children:

At St Mary's we take a reactive approach to the subject of same-sex relationships with pre and primary school age children. This topic is never introduced by any leader, and any references to same-sex relationships made by children are handled sensitively and compassionately with an emphasis on God's love being for everyone. If this situation arises the leader should inform the child's parent(s) as to the content of that conversation, and also encourage the child to discuss this further with their parent(s) at home. It is vital that children feel safe and accepted in church settings, and so any conversations with children about this matter should be handled sensitively.

Ministry with young people (11+):

The PCC concluded that leaders involved with youth ministry offer appropriate opportunities to encourage dialogue about what the Bible has to say about same-sex relationships. When questions arise from young people (either 1-2-1 or in a group setting) leaders explain that different perspectives are held by Christians, outlining these in age-appropriate ways, and offering young people further resources, so they can come to their own conclusions. Young people experiencing same-sex attraction are not treated in a way that causes them to feel ashamed or unsafe.

D. The Prayers of Love and Faith

The *Prayers of Love and Faith*⁵ are a collection of liturgical resources which are currently available for use on a trial basis by ministers within the Church of England. *The Prayers* are intended to sit alongside (rather than contradict) the Church of England's doctrine of marriage, though there continues to be national disagreement as to whether this aim has been achieved. No ordained minister at St Mary's is required or expected to use *The Prayers*. The purpose of *The Prayers* is to enable clergy, when asked by a same-sex couple in a committed⁶ relationship, to pray for God's blessing on them as individuals.

The PCC have given consent for *The Prayers* to be used within public acts of worship at St Mary's as a way of celebrating with same-sex couples who have been part of the worshipping community for at least 6 months. Once permission has been granted by the General Synod of the Church of England the PCC have also given consent for *The Prayers* to be used by clergy privately with couples in their home; and in a stand-alone service at St Mary's, providing these do not look or feel like a marriage service, with couples who request them. Couples will be encouraged to come to St Mary's services prior to this.

Given that these decisions were not unanimous, the Vicar will give careful consideration to requests to use *The Prayers* with couples, approaching this in a pastorally sensitive way, seeking to preserve unity within the church as far as possible.

⁵ Hereafter referred to as *The Prayers*.

⁶ Intentionally lifelong, with commitments having already been made formally and publicly via a civil ceremony.