

LLF - Hearing the Voices of CPAS Patronage Clergy

Introduction

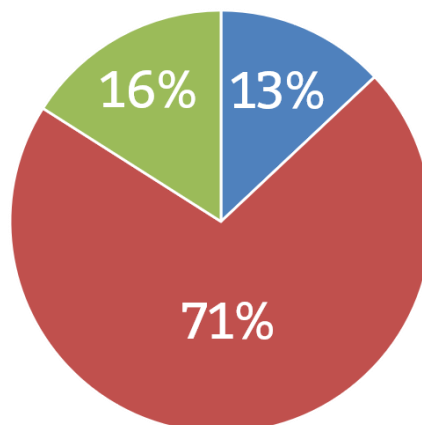
Following the introduction of Prayers of Love and Faith to General Synod, CPAS has conducted a survey with CPAS patronage clergy. This will be followed up by a series of online consultations and lead to a fuller report intended to be shared with those working on the Pastoral Guidance for General Synod.

The survey was sent to 580 CPAS patronage clergy currently in post (there are currently 120 vacancies in CPAS parishes) on 24th February. Within five days, we had received 240 responses. However, on the sixth day, we found that 60 responses came from non-patronage clergy using a Facebook link, after the survey link had evidently been shared with a progressive group, perhaps wishing to alter the findings of the survey. This in itself is indicative of the environment in which these conversations are being held. The survey was re-launched in a different format for the final week, and closed on Friday 10 March. In total, 283 responses were received from CPAS patronage clergy, a response rate of 49%.

Key Findings

Though there is diversity throughout the findings which reflects the range of viewpoints amongst CPAS clergy, there is a strong majority of 71% who believe that the commendation of the draft Prayers of Love and Faith at General Synod have gone too far.

To what extent do the General Synod's commendation of prayers for God's blessing on same-sex couples reflect your thoughts?

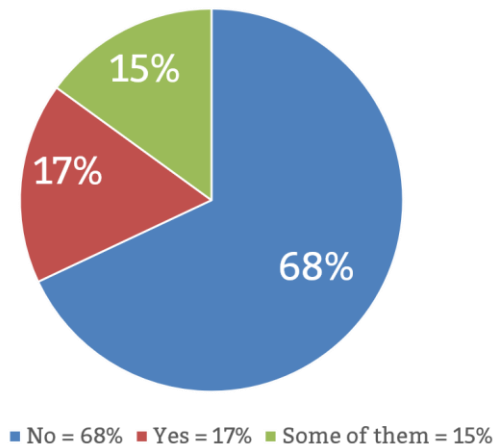


■ They are about right = 13%
■ They don't go far enough = 16%

■ They go too far = 71%

Amongst CPAS patronage clergy, 83% would feel unable to use some or all of the draft Prayers of Love and Faith.

Would you feel comfortable using the prayers in their current form?

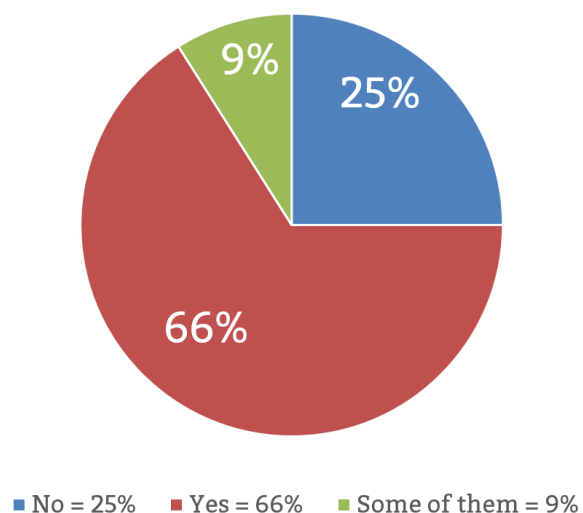


Through the Cornes amendment, General Synod committed to:

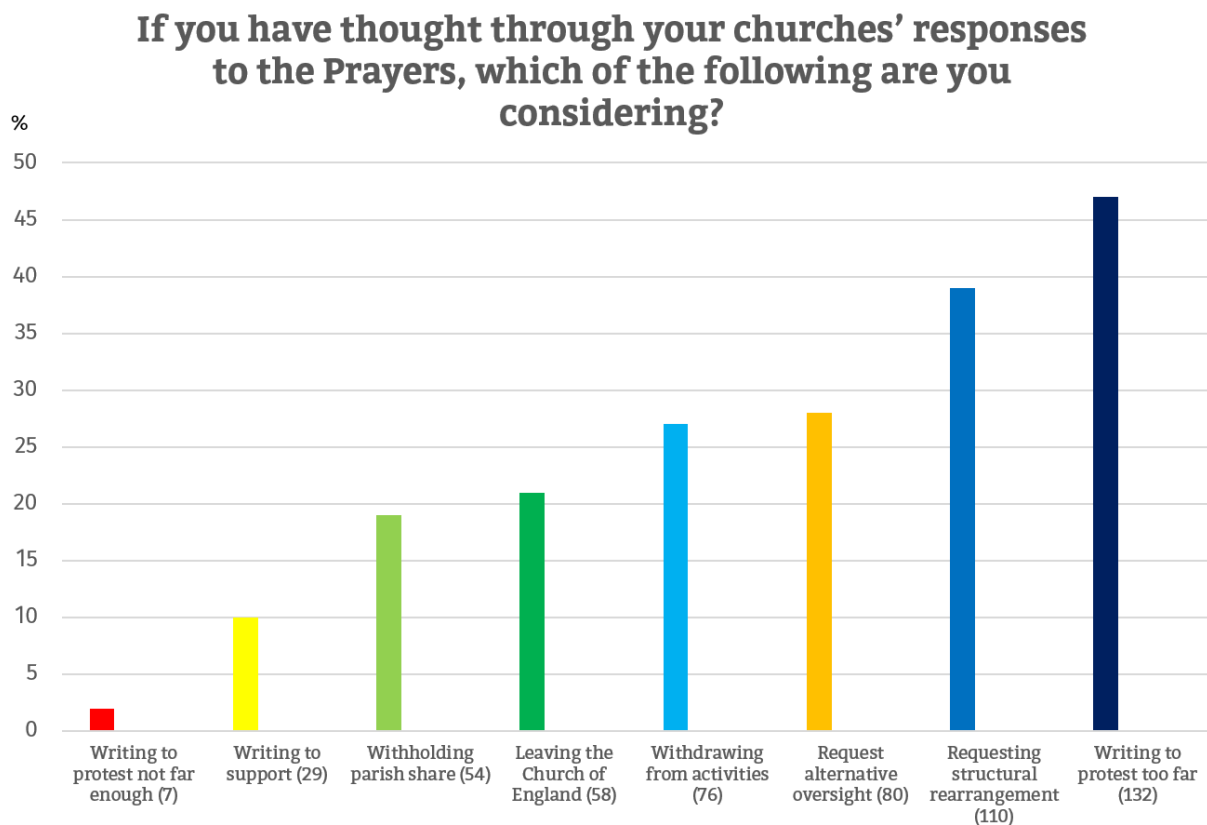
‘Endorse the decision of the College and House of Bishops not to propose any change to the doctrine of marriage, and their intention that the final version of the Prayers of Love and Faith should not be contrary to or indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England.’

However, 75% of CPAS patronage clergy believe that the prayers (or at least some of them) in their current form *are* indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England, and thus in contravention of General Synod’s commitment. The concerns here are as much about context and ceremony as about the texts, i.e. the way that the prayers will be used and perceived, despite the subtleties of the texts, as a quasi-wedding (rings, dress, proximity to a civil-marriage, etc).

Do you think the prayers are indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England?



If 75% of CPAS patronage clergy believe that the proposed Prayers of Love and Faith (or some of them) are indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England, then it is perhaps unsurprising that many of them are considering some form of principled protest:



Notable findings from CPAS patronage clergy include:

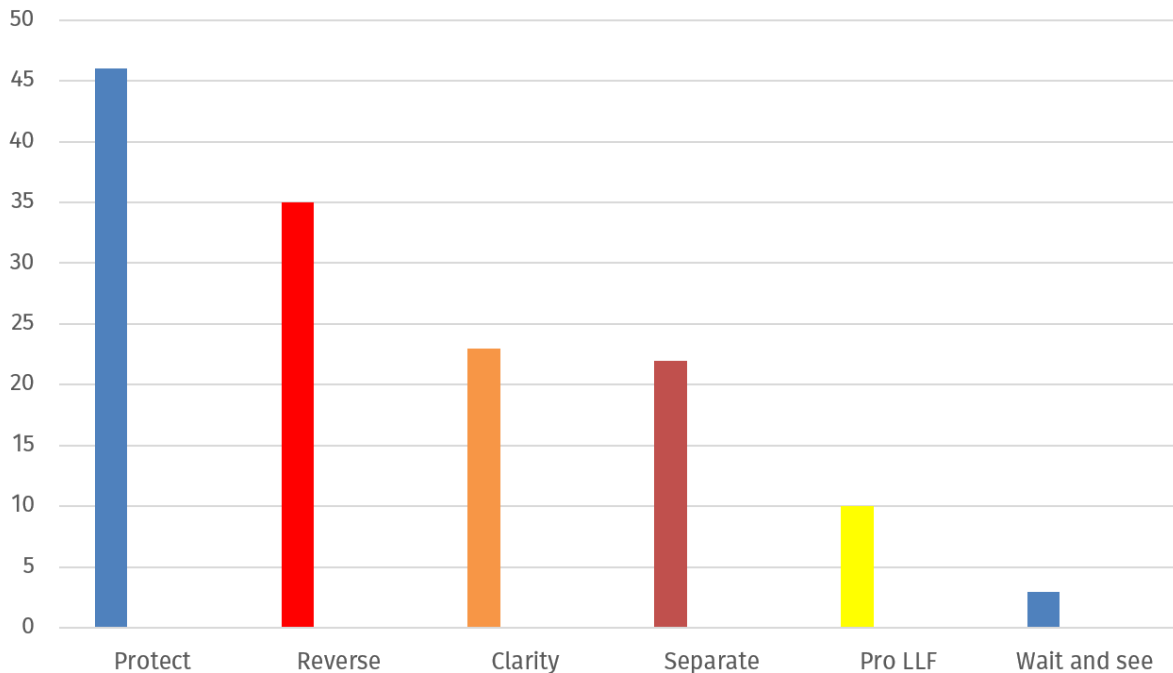
- 20% are considering leaving the Church of England.
- 28% desire alternative episcopal oversight, and
- 39% are looking for some form of structural re-arrangement or visible differentiation.
- 19% are considering withholding or redirecting parish share.
- 27% are considering withdrawing from deanery or diocesan activities, or relinquishing positions of influence, e.g. area dean, synod or committee membership.

These are responses, which if not addressed, pose a substantial risk not only to the future mission of the Church of England, but also to the work of CPAS.

With regards to the forthcoming Pastoral Guidance, the responses ran to many pages of text. They reflect the experiences of hundreds of church leaders living with uncertainty, living with difference of opinion, and living with anxiety. The minority of respondents in favour of the prayers (10%) wanted to see the Pastoral Guidance make provision for the changes they hope for. But the great majority of responses were filled with a sense of lament, confusion, anxiety, and even betrayal.

As this is an initial summary of our findings, we will capture those responses more fully in the final report. But some clear trends could be discerned:

What needs to be addressed within the Pastoral Guidance to make you confident in ministry? (%)



Notable findings include:

- 46% were asking for robust safeguards for those unable to use the prayers, including protection from CDM, and overt backing from their bishops, e.g. in the case of a social media or media storm.
- 35% were calling upon General Synod and the College of Bishops to reverse the decision, and re-confirm the historic doctrine of the Church of England.
- 23% were asking for the House of Bishops to provide clear teaching to explain the integrity of offering prayers for blessing same-sex couples while affirming the historic doctrine of marriage.
- 22% were asking for the Pastoral Guidance to make provision for separation / differentiation / or alternative episcopal oversight.
- 10% were in favour of the proposed prayers, and 3% responded that they would wait to see what happens.

Conclusions

Here at CPAS, we are concerned by many of these responses from CPAS patronage clergy.

CPAS is committed to supporting the continued ministry of evangelical clergy (as well as others) *within* the Church of England if at all possible.

We would therefore respectfully ask that the College of Bishops and the working group on the Pastoral Guidance give proper consideration to these findings, and in particular:

1. Address confusion

Since 75% of CPAS patronage clergy believe that the draft Prayers of Love and Faith are indicative of a departure from the doctrine of the Church of England, and 83% believe that they cannot use some or all of the prayers, we believe that there is a need for:

- Clear theological teaching from the House of Bishops to explain and commend the decision to retain the church's historic doctrine of holy matrimony, in line with previous teaching from the House of Bishops.
- Strong theological rationale as to why the proposed Prayers of Love and Faith are not a departure from this retained doctrine.
- Re-assurance that the prayers in their final form will not be used to bless relationships which are sexually active outside of heterosexual marriage, in keeping with the Church's commitment to retain its historic doctrine of holy matrimony.

2. Make robust provision

With a number of CPAS patronage clergy contemplating forms of principled protest, including requesting alternative episcopal oversight, seeking structural re-arrangement or visible differentiation, or contemplating leaving the Church of England, we believe there is a need for the Pastoral Guidance to make provision for:

- Clarification over the relationship between incumbent, PCC, church building, and wider parish as to how a decision is reached about whether or not the Prayers of Love and Faith are to be used in a parish.
- Protection for those who cannot in conscience use the Prayers of Love and Faith. This includes:
 - protection from CDM's over this issue,
 - freedom to continue to teach the historic doctrine of the church and implement this in terms of local church leadership, and
 - support from their bishop in case of a controversy on social media or in the media, or if protests take place in the local community.
- Provision of new and innovative structures to enable visible differentiation / alternative episcopal oversight, which are at least as robust as that provided with the Five Guiding Principles which enabled the consecration of women to the episcopate.

3. Partner with those who disagree with the proposals

If CPAS patronage clergy are to be retained and enabled to flourish within the Church of England, their concerns need to be heard and addressed by the College of Bishops.

If CPAS can play a part by constructively engaging with the preparation of the Pastoral Guidance, then we would be more than willing to do so.