

What is the church's current official teaching and discipline?

In thinking about where we go at the end of the Shared Conversations it is important to begin by taking stock of where we are in terms of the current situation. The central features of the official teaching and practice of the Church of England remain as set out in the following key places over a period of nearly three decades, building on and appealing to earlier statements and especially relevant canons (notably B30) and authorised liturgies –

1987 [General Synod motion](#)

1991 House of Bishops document, *Issues in Human Sexuality* (key [final chapter on church practice available online](#))

2003 House of Bishops document, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (much of which is [accessible on Google Books](#) and [Chpt 1 available here](#)) which expounded and set out arguments for and against the 1991 statement but did not change it.

2005 [House of Bishops Pastoral Statement on Civil Partnerships](#)

2007 [General Synod motion](#) (with [more information on the background here](#) and [transcripts and audios of the debate](#) on Wed 28th Feb)

2011 [Civil partnerships and same-sex relationships – a statement by the House of Bishops of the Church of England](#)

2013 [House of Bishops Statement Regarding Clergy in a Civil Partnership as Candidates for the Episcopate](#)

2014 [House of Bishops Pastoral Guidance on Same-Sex Marriage](#)

The most significant elements of these various documents for the teaching and life of the church in relation to marriage and same-sex relationships can be summarised as follows:

Fundamental teaching and principles

1. “Homosexual orientation in itself is no bar to a faithful Christian life or to full participation in lay and ordained ministry in the Church” (2007 GS motion)
2. “That sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship; that fornication and adultery are sins against this ideal, and are to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion; that homosexual genital acts also fall short of this ideal, and are likewise to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion” (1987 GS motion).
3. In relation to marriage: “The Church of England's long standing teaching and rule are set out in Canon B30: *'The Church of England affirms, according to our Lord's teaching, that marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better for worse, till death them do part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for the procreation and nurture of children, for the hallowing and right direction of the natural instincts and affections,*

and for the mutual society, help and comfort which the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity’.” (2014 on marriage, para 1)

Lay Christians

4. Lay Christians who in good conscience enter committed sexual same-sex relationships should not be excluded from the life of the church (1991 Issues, 5.6) so that “lay people who have registered civil partnerships ought not to be asked to give assurances about the nature of their relationship before being admitted to baptism, confirmation and communion” (2005 on Civil Partnerships, para 23) and “those same sex couples who choose to marry should be welcomed into the life of the worshipping community and not be subjected to questioning about their lifestyle. Neither they nor any children they care for should be denied access to the sacraments” (2014 on Same-sex marriage, para 18).

Clergy

5. “The clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships” (1991 Issues, 5.17) and “candidates for ordination must also be prepared to abide by the same standards” (1991 Issues, 5.22, as set out in requirement E.5 of [Criteria for Selection](#))
6. Clergy are free to enter into a civil partnership but “members of the clergy and candidates for ordination who decide to enter into partnerships must [...] expect to be asked for assurances that their relationship will be consistent with the teaching set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*” ie that they are not sexually active (2005 Statement on CPs, para 19)
7. Clergy are not free to enter a same-sex marriage: “The House is not, therefore, willing for those who are in a same sex marriage to be ordained to any of the three orders of ministry. In addition it considers that it would not be appropriate conduct for someone in holy orders to enter into a same sex marriage, given the need for clergy to model the Church's teaching in their lives” (2014 on same-sex marriage, para 27).

Liturgy

8. In relation to prayers for same-sex couples, the bishops do not wish “to interfere with the clergy's pastoral discretion about when more informal kind of prayer, at the request of the couple, might be appropriate in the light of the circumstances” (2014 on same-sex marriage, para 20, summarising 2005 statement)
9. Clergy are not to provide services of blessing for civil partnerships or same-sex marriages: “it would not be right to produce an authorised public liturgy in connection with the registering of civil partnerships. In addition, the House of Bishops affirms that clergy of the Church of England should not provide services of blessing for those who register a civil partnership” (2005 Statement on CPs, para 17) and, in relation to same-sex civil marriages, “Services of blessing should not be provided. Clergy should respond pastorally and sensitively in other ways” (2014 on marriage, para 21).

[The Pilling Report](#) to the House of Bishops in November 2013 made a number of proposals which would modify elements of the position set out above although not in relation to fundamental teaching and principles. Although these are likely to now be the focus of deliberations, they have not been agreed or even commended by the bishops or by Synod which simply agreed and implemented the report's proposal for a period of conversations.

The wider context for the Church of England's discussion is the Anglican Communion whose fullest statement remains that set out in the [1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10](#) which has been frequently reaffirmed by the Instruments of Communion although disregarded by a number of provinces. Alongside this are the Communion's calls (in various forms since the [Windsor Report of 2004](#)) for moratoria on consecrating as bishop anyone in a same-sex union and on all public rites of blessing of same-sex unions. More recently the [Primates' statement in 2016](#) stated that "The traditional doctrine of the church in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds marriage as between a man and a woman in faithful, lifelong union" and "recent developments in the Episcopal Church with respect to a change in their Canon on marriage represent a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of our Provinces on the doctrine of marriage".

As regards the Church of England's own position and how it might develop in relation to the wider Communion it is also important to note the wording of the 2007 General Synod motion (originating in an amendment proposed by the Bishop of Gloucester on behalf of the House of Bishops). The Synod commended "continuing efforts to prevent the diversity of opinion about human sexuality creating further division and impaired fellowship within the Church of England and the Anglican Communion" and recognized "that such efforts would not be advanced by doing anything that could be perceived as the Church of England qualifying its commitment to the entirety of the relevant Lambeth Conference Resolutions (1978: 10; 1988: 64; 1998: 1.10)"