

Special Agenda IV – Diocesan Synod Motions Clergy Job Sharing: Diocese of Bath & Wells

It is resolved that the following motion be brought before the General Synod under Standing Order 5(c) at the formal request of the Bath and Wells Diocesan Synod:

“That this Synod, having regarding to:

(a) the benefits to be gained from job sharing arrangements in the parochial deployment of ordained ministers, in particular married couples where both parties are ordained;

(b) the absence at present of any effective provision for job sharing in the ordained parochial ministry;

requests the Archbishops’ Council to bring forward legislative proposals for the making of such job sharing arrangements.”

In early 2007 a clergyman and his ordained wife came to a benefice in Bath and Wells diocese to which the patron’s right of presentation had been suspended in anticipation of specific pastoral reorganisation. They wished to work as equals on a job share basis. However, because Church law does not recognise or facilitate the concept of job sharing, it was necessary to adopt the rather artificial device of one being appointed as priest in charge and the other licensed as assistant curate, “with the status of priest in charge”.

Two years later the pastoral reorganisation was concluded, the benefice in question being united with a neighbour. The intention had always been that the cure of souls should be for whoever had been responsible for the first benefice. Consequently it was necessary once more for one of the couple to become priest in charge and the other licensed as assistant curate, with the status of priest in charge. But this time a further stratagem has been necessary to come as close to equality as the law permitted. Even though the pastoral reorganisation had been completed, the patron’s right of presentation to the new benefice was nonetheless suspended from the outset. For otherwise the only legal possibility would have been for one to be rector and the other an assistant curate, thereby further widening the perceived gulf between the two.

The Diocesan Board of Patronage, co-patron of the united benefice, considered that this was an unsatisfactory and inequitable state of affairs at a time when job sharing is possible in most other walks of life in this country and making the opportunity available is widely regarded as good practice.

Subsequently the Bishop’s Council and Diocesan Synod Standing Committee considered the issue and agreed that the Diocesan Synod should debate a motion calling upon General Synod to effect the necessary legislation to permit job sharing in cases such as this in the Church of England. Following advice from the Diocesan Registrar and Diocesan Chancellor as to wording and process, the matter was debated and the above resolution was passed (*nem. con.*, with 3 abstentions) by the Bath and Wells Diocesan Synod at its session on 6 March 2010.