



Geoff Crawford: Church of England

General Synod has voted in favour of a motion asking the Archbishops' Council to bring forward legislative proposals to allow lay officers found guilty of bullying to be disqualified from holding office.

The motion brought by the Ven Mark Ireland, Archdeacon of Blackburn, sought to address an imbalance of accountability in relationships where lay volunteers currently face no significant consequences if found to have exhibited bullying behaviour.

An introductory paper explained that, whereas clergy are subject to the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) process, there remains no proportionate and accessible means by which laity can be held to account for their actions.

The paper cited the impact upon mental health, physical health and sense of Christian Community of a parish when a churchwarden or lay officer is exercising controlling or bullying behaviour.

It highlighted that bullying behaviour is not tolerated in other areas of society, with other organisations that rely on both paid workers and volunteers having in clear policies and procedures in place for when instances of bullying and harassment do occur.

This motion is separate to an earlier motion agreed by General Synod on Saturday to explore a [Code of Conduct for Parochial Church Council \(PCC\)](#) members and lay volunteers.

Introducing the motion, the Ven Mark Ireland (pictured) said: "Bullying and harassment are unacceptable behaviours in any environment – and especially in the Church, a community bound together by the command of Christ, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.'

"Yet since I first raised this difficult and sensitive issue I have been inundated with stories from victims and survivors, stories which have moved me sometimes close to tears.

"I know many are listening to our debate today.

"Synod, this situation is unjust and must be remedied if we are to call ourselves the Body of Christ."

The General Synod motion, as shown below, was clearly carried with votes recorded as follows:

Vote of whole house: 273 in favour, 15 against, 22 abstained.

Motion

That this Synod, recognising:

- that bullying is unacceptable behaviour within the Church of God, whether by clergy or lay people, and where it exists needs to be addressed; and*
- b. *the serious pastoral problems and unfairness that arise while clergy can be subject to penalties for bullying that include prohibition and removal from office but there is no means of disqualifying a churchwarden, PCC member or other lay officer who is guilty of bullying from holding office;*
- c. *request the Archbishops' Council to bring forward legislative proposals which would enable a churchwarden, PCC member or other lay officer who was found to have conducted him- or her-self in such a manner to be disqualified from holding office.'*

More information

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