

Synod voted today to take note of the report: [Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy](#) (note: this links to the most recent version). These are not a legal code but a set of draft guidelines, commended by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, describing what is desirable in the professional conduct of clergy.

They are a revised version of 2003 guidelines reflecting changes in church life and wider society including the introduction of the Clergy Discipline Measure and increased use of social media. The final guidelines will now go back to the working party - with an invite to MACSAS ((Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors)to attend - and will then need to be approved by the Convocations consisting of the Houses of Bishops and Clergy of the Synod.*

The vote followed a debate introduced by the Ven Christine Hardman, who said: "The Guidelines are not a rule book but express an aspiration for the very highest standards to be expected of those who serve as deacons, priests and bishops in the Church of God.

At the same time as preserving the principles of the Guidelines there was a recognition of the urgent need to take account of the changing context in the world and in the Church. "

She also pointed out that Section 3 of the draft entitled 'Reconciliation', touches on "the sensitive area of the absolute confidentiality of the Confessional".

"The Working Party was well aware of the tensions between the traditional understanding of the absolute confidentiality reflected in the Canons and the responsibility of the Church to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm.

"It's really important to remember that the Guidelines can only express the law as it currently stands. The Guidelines cannot change Canon Law - but what the Working Party has done is to take advice from the legal officers of the Synod and done its best to reflect the legal position as it stands in a way it believes is more helpful than the 2003 version.

Most importantly, you will see that Section 3 is qualified by a note referring to the decision of the Archbishops' Council to initiate further theological and legal work on the relevant Canon governing the ministry of absolution, in consultation with the House of Bishops."

Synod were also told that there will be a further meeting of the Working Party to take account of points raised in today's debate and representatives of MACSAS will be invited to attend.

ENDS

Notes

Christine Hardman is Prolocutor of the Lower House for the Convocation of Canterbury

The latest guidelines can be found [target="_blank">here](#).

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