

**In the Matter of a Complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003
Before the Bishop's Disciplinary Tribunal for the Diocese of Chichester**

Respondent: The Reverend Paul Meier

Counsel: Mr Adrian Iles (*Designated Officer*)
 Mark Hill QC (*for the Respondent, instructed by Lee Bolton Monier
 Williams*)

JUDGMENT

1. Allegation

- 1.1 It is alleged that: “the conduct of the respondent the Reverend Paul Meier, currently Priest-in-Charge of Horsmonden, was unbecoming or inappropriate to the office and work of a clerk in Holy Orders within section 8(1)(d) of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 in that, whilst he was Storrington Deanery Youth Missioner, he had an adulterous relationship with the complainant between about January 2008 and August 2008 when she was 18 and 19 years old and living with him and his family, and who had previously attended church youth groups in Hildenborough and Storrington which the Respondent had run.”
- 1.2 The allegation is admitted.

2. Facts

- 2.1 Upon exchange of the statements, it appeared that there may be factual disputes which it might have been necessary to determine by the calling of evidence. However the parties have, following discussions, reached an agreement as to the facts upon which we should proceed to penalty. The tribunal is most grateful for the work done by the parties in reaching that agreement. It is appropriate to incorporate that agreement into this judgment. We have incorporated the agreed basis as it was provided to us, so that anyone reading this judgment knows the position from which we were working.

2.2 An agreed outline of the facts is as follows:

- In August 2007 Mr Meier started in post in Storrington, Sussex, as the Deanery Youth Missioner.
- The following month, at the age of 18, the complainant began a University course close by. Mr Meier was 43 years old.
- Mr Meier and his wife Saskia had been good friends with the complainant's family for about 6 years prior to his move to Storrington – he had been a curate in their church from 2001 to August 2007 at Hildenborough, near Tonbridge. The complainant had attended the church youth group which he ran.
- Mr Meier and Saskia agreed to look after the complainant whilst she started university, so the complainant joined their evening youth group in Storrington. On occasions the complainant stayed overnight with them at the weekend.
- Near the end of her first term in December 2007, Mr Meier gave her a lift back to her student accommodation. Mr Meier contends that kissing and some sexual intimacy took place, whereas the complainant says she rejected his advances. Whatever happened (i.e whether the complainant's account of this incident is true or Mr Meier's account is true) Mr Meier accepts that he needed to apologise to the complainant, and he therefore arranged to meet her in Tonbridge after her term had ended so he could apologise face to face.
- The complainant's first (and only) term at university was unhappy. She decided not to return after Christmas. In January 2008 Mr Meier suggested to the complainant that she could come to live with his family, because it would be easier for her to get work in the Brighton area. Saskia agreed to the idea because she wanted to help the complainant – she knew nothing about the incident in December 2007. If Mr Meier's account of the earlier incident in December 2007 is true (i.e. that sexual intimacy took place and that there was a mutual sexual attraction) then his invitation to the complainant to live with his family is quite astonishing – either he hoped for further sexual intimacy, or he willingly ignored the obvious risks.
- January 2008 the complainant moved in with Mr Meier, Saskia, and their two young daughters. At first the complainant helped to look after the girls. All was normal, and the complainant was happy.
- Mr Meier began to be tactile towards the complainant, although not acting overtly inappropriately. One day he kissed her and a full sexual relationship between them developed. It lasted for the rest of the time that the complainant lived with Mr Meier and Saskia.
- Mr Meier told the complainant he wanted to leave Saskia and be with the complainant. Saskia did not know of her husband's adultery at that time, but his attention towards the complainant distressed her.

- The complainant became mentally disturbed, as evidenced by attempts to self-harm, and she acted bizarrely e.g. she locked the family out of the house one evening. Mr Meier admits the complainant self-harmed herself and that she told him about it. Mr Meier says: “*My response (which I can’t remember) may not have been very intelligent...* ”. His actual response was to carry on his affair with her, despite her obvious mental health problems.
- During summer 2008 matters reached breaking point. Saskia wanted the complainant to leave. Early September the complainant moved out, and resumed living with her parents; she was immediately admitted to a psychiatric unit – she received treatment, and slowly began to recover.
- The sexual relationship ended when the complainant moved out, but Mr Meier continued to see her. In November 2008 he told Saskia about his adultery with the complainant, that he was still seeing the complainant, and that he was thinking of leaving Saskia .
- Some time later the complainant received a text from Mr Meier saying he was going to leave Saskia. She replied telling him to leave her alone.
- The Meier marriage survived. Saskia Meier stated:- “*Wanting to give him lots of space and a break I advised him to go on a two week holiday to think things through by himself. He came back just about willing to stay, and our relationship has grown steadily over the years, with a lot of hard work and forgiveness”* .
- The sexual relationship that developed between the complainant and Mr Meier from January/February to August 2008 was consensual, but Mr Meier accepts there was a pre-existing pastoral relationship in his capacity as assistant curate in Hildenborough, and then deanery youth missionary in Storrington. He acknowledges that he was in a position of trust and responsibility towards the complainant.

2.3 It is upon that agreed factual basis that we move to consider the appropriate penalty.

3. Penalty

3.1 We take as our starting point the document “Clergy Discipline Commission – Guidance on Penalties”. That document specifically addresses the issue of adultery as follows:

3.2 *Adultery is destructive of marriages, and is hurtful and disturbing for the children of the families affected. If the adultery is with a person within the cleric’s area of pastoral responsibility, that can be an aggravating factor because issues of vulnerability, exploitation and abuse of position arise. Removal from office and prohibition, either for life or for a limited time, are usually appropriate in cases of adultery. It does not, however, follow that*

sexual misconduct falling short of adultery should automatically attract a lesser penalty.

- 3.3 It is common ground in the current case that removal from office and prohibition is appropriate.
- 3.4 Returning to the Guidance on Penalties, we note:
- 3.5 *Prohibition for life: this is the most serious penalty that can be imposed. It prevents the respondent without limit of time from exercising any functions as a member of the Church of England clergy. It should be imposed only where there appears to be no realistic prospect of rehabilitating the respondent back into ministry because the misconduct is so grave.*
- 3.6 *Limited Prohibition: this prevents the respondent from exercising any functions as a member of the clergy for a specific period of time. It is suitable for serious cases where there is a realistic prospect that the respondent, with appropriate pastoral and other support, could in the future resume normal duties of ministry.*
- 3.7 We have considered a number of previous decisions of tribunals, and appeals from tribunals. We gain guidance from these decisions but note that the facts of each case are so different that we feel we only receive general assistance as to principle rather than guidance as to specific penalty.

Aggravating features

- 3.8 There is no doubt that in the course of her youth there was a pastoral relationship which continued when the complainant moved to university, and the respondent was in the Chichester diocese. It is important to note that the relationship was also with her family and by his subsequent actions, he further breached their trust.
- 3.9 There was an incident in December 2007. It does not form part of this allegation. We have to proceed on the basis of the version of events the respondent advances. However, even on that version, we find it astonishing that he would invite the complainant to move into his family home, and the subsequent events in the family home add another layer to the breach of trust, that trust which he owed to his family.
- 3.10 We find that at the time the complainant moved in she was vulnerable. She was unhappy, her life had little structure and she was reliant on the respondent and his family for a considerable amount of care and support.
- 3.11 This was not a single, immediately regretted incident. The adultery took place over a period of months. The respondent even sought to continue contact after the complainant left his family home, maintaining his suggestion that he might desert his wife and family.

3.12 The relationship continued even after the respondent knew that the complainant was self-harming. Rather than cease his misconduct and provide her with the support she needed and deserved, he allowed things to continue unchanged.

4. Mitigating features

4.1 There are no previous findings against him.

4.2 We have no doubt from the material placed before us that the respondent has shown considerable gifts in his ministry. We are grateful to all those who have taken the time to put their thoughts in writing and have considered those matters with care. This must be balanced against the harm done and the need to protect the standing and reputation of the church as a whole.

4.3 We note that there has been a delay in this matter coming to the tribunal. We are dealing with matters which took place over five years ago. We have to note that although the respondent told his wife, he did not himself bring these matters to the attention of the church authorities. It is, however, to his credit that he has sought to rebuild his marriage and to continue an effective ministry.

4.4 Of course any penalty must impact upon the respondent's wife and daughters, who are wholly innocent but that is a sad consequence of his misconduct. We cannot fail to observe the dignity and grace with which Saskia Meier has dealt with the betrayal in her marriage and are moved by the depths of her forgiveness.

4.5 We are satisfied that before the tribunal, he has shown contrition and repentance.

5. Conclusions.

5.1 It is clearly a case for prohibition. Applying the guidance given, we are not satisfied that it is appropriate that the order should be one of prohibition for life. We consider there are realistic prospects that with appropriate pastoral support, he may be able to return to active ministry in the future.

5.2 However we are unanimous in the view that this is a particularly serious case of misconduct for the reasons we have set out above. There must be removal from office and a limited prohibition. Taking into account the aggravating features and giving as much weight as we feel able to the mitigation the appropriate period of prohibition is one of eight years.

HHJ John Lodge

Revd Robert Burles

Mr. David Drew

Revd Dr Jessica Martin

Mrs. Gillian West

24 October 2013

**THE BISHOP'S DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL FOR THE DIOCESE
OF CHICHESTER**

**IN THE MATTER OF A COMPLAINT UNDER THE CLERGY DISCIPLINE
MEASURE 2003**

RESPONDENT: THE REVEREND PAUL MEIER

THIS MATTER having come before the Tribunal on the 24 October 2013

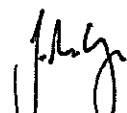
AND upon the Respondent's admission of misconduct as set out in the Agreed Statement of Facts

IT IS ORDERED by way of penalty that:

- (1) The Respondent be removed from office with immediate effect; and
- (2) He be prohibited from the exercise of any of the functions of his Orders for the period of eight (8) years from today; and
- (3) His name be entered on the Archbishops' List in accordance with Section 38 of the Measure.

Dated this 24th day of October 2013

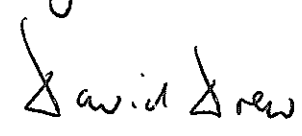
HH Judge John Lodge (Chair)



Revd Robert Burles



Mr David Drew



Revd Dr Jessica Martin



Mrs Gillian West



**THE BISHOP'S DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL FOR THE DIOCESE
OF CHICHESTER**

**IN THE MATTER OF A COMPLAINT UNDER THE CLERGY DISCIPLINE
MEASURE 2003**

RESPONDENT: THE REVD PAUL MEIER

**ORDER BY THE TRIBUNAL CONCERNING THE IDENTITY OF THE COMPLAINANT
AND HER FAMILY**

We **order** that the actual name, and any identifying details of the person who laid the complaint in this matter described in our Decision as 'the Complainant' or any member of her family must not be published or otherwise made public, being satisfied under rules 49 and 50 of the Clergy Discipline Rules 2005 ("the Rules") that this is desirable to protect the private life of the Complainant.

HIS HONOUR JUDGE JOHN LODGE (Chairman)

For and on behalf of the members of the Bishop's Disciplinary Tribunal

Certified copy of the Order made on 24 October 2013



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Provincial Registrar