

In the matter of a Complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003
Before the Bishop's Disciplinary Tribunal for the Diocese of Lichfield in the Province of
Canterbury

Leeds Combined Court
The Courthouse
1 Oxford Row
Leeds LS1 3BG

Date: 9th December 2008

Before:

His Honour Judge S P Grenfell, chairman of the Tribunal
The Revd Rosemary Enever
The Revd Simon Hill
Canon Beverly Fraser
Mr Andrew Robinson

Complainant: Mrs A

Respondent: The Reverend Dr Patrick Otosio Okechi

Mr Adrian Iles (the Designated Officer) for the complainant
Mrs Nicola Harding of Tunnard & Co Solicitors for the respondent

Hearing date: 9th December at Leeds

Approved Determination on Penalty

I direct that copies of this version as handed down may be treated as authentic.

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His Honour Judge S P Grenfell

His Honour Judge Grenfell, chairman:

1. We have already given our determination on the complaint this morning and it now falls to us to consider the appropriate penalty.
2. Very high standards are required and expected of clergy. As a tribunal we have to bear in mind the wider picture as opposed to the individual concerns of the clergy involved in a complaint. The tribunal must have regard to the interests of justice for all who are affected by the faults or failings or shortcomings of the clergy, and must support the collective good standing of all clergy so that they continue to be worthy of the great trust that is put in them as ordained ministers.
3. We have been referred by Mr Iles to the case of *Bolton v Law Society* [1994] 1 WLR 512 and, in particular, to a passage from the judgment of Sir Thomas Bingham MR at page 519, in the context of the necessary considerations, where he identified "... the essential issue, which is the need to maintain among members of the public a well-founded confidence that any solicitor whom they instruct will be a person of unquestionable integrity, probity and trustworthiness." That applies with equal force, if not more so, to clergy.
4. We are assisted by the guideline on penalties issued under The Clergy Discipline Measure 2003, although the guidance is simply the starting point for our consideration of the penalty that is appropriate for the facts of the individual case. No two cases are precisely similar. Nevertheless, consistency as between tribunals is an important aim. It is for this reason that we have considered penalties that have been imposed by other tribunals, in particular, where the determination involved conduct of a sexual nature.
5. The factors which we regard as important in this individual case are as follows:
 - the breach of trust where as here a parishioner approaches her parish priest for support
 - the length of time over which a sexual affair has been found to have existed
 - the fact that during much of the time Mrs A was employed by the church
 - the fact that Dr O was being unfaithful to his wife and betraying the trust of his children
 - the fact that Dr O attempted to accuse Mrs A of harassing and stalking him whilst in fact the affair was going on

- the fact that he maintained his denial, requiring Mrs A to give evidence before the tribunal
6. Sadly the denial affects the starting point for rehabilitation.
 7. On the other hand, Mrs Harding has rightly drawn our attention to a number of factors which we have also taken into account when deciding on the appropriate penalty:
 8. Undoubtedly this is a personal tragedy for Dr Okechi. We bear in mind what he had actually achieved in the relatively short time of his ministry at the Church of the Good Shepherd. He had changed the situation as from September 2002 when there was a large debt to what we are told was a relatively financially secure church. He had increased the congregation by twofold. That also was reflected in baptisms and confirmations. Particular attention was drawn to the social inclusion group which he had initiated and resulted in 4 persons being baptised. He had encouraged curate to be priested.
 9. This is a particularly tragic case for Dr Okechi.
 10. Although this was not urged on us today, we do bear in mind, that our findings were that Dr Okechi's marriage had for some time been going through difficulties. We hasten to add that can never be an excuse for unfaithful behaviour in a clergyman.
 11. Undoubtedly the determination will have a severe effect on Dr Okechi. There will be huge distress suffered by his family and in many ways the effect will be even more severe on his wife and children.
 12. One further matter. Whilst ordinarily the tribunal would not take account of time on suspension, in this case the huge delay of 28 months has meant that that time has been far in excess of what we would understand by the term 'interim' because suspension is meant to be solely on an interim basis.
 13. Therefore we feel that we should take the delay into account albeit not necessarily in proportion. That is because in the circumstances of this case the effects of delay went beyond the mere fact that Dr Okechi had accommodation and pay whilst he was suspended. The delay of some 28 months must have had a very serious effect on him. Sadly we were told that there was very little support for him during that time.
 14. We come to the final consideration. We do consider there is a realistic prospect that Dr Okechi, with appropriate pastoral and other support, could in the future resume normal duties of ministry. However, this was a serious breach of trust and we have come to the conclusion that there must be removal from office and a prohibition for 10 years from exercising any of the functions of his Orders.

THE BISHOP'S DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL FOR THE DIOCESE OF LICHFIELD

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

COMPLAINANT: MRS A

RESPONDENT: REVD DR PATRICK OTIOSO OKECHI

PENALTY IMPOSED BY THE TRIBUNAL

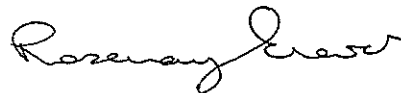
We order that:

1. The Respondent be removed with immediate effect from holding office as incumbent of the benefice of The Good Shepherd with Saint John West Bromwich in the diocese of Lichfield and cease to hold this or any other ecclesiastical office or appointment which he may currently hold, under s 24 (1)(c) of the Measure; and
2. The Respondent be prohibited for the period of 10 years from exercising any of the functions of his Orders, under s 24(1)(b) of the Measure; and
3. The Respondent's name be forwarded to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York for inclusion on the List maintained by them under s 38 of the Measure

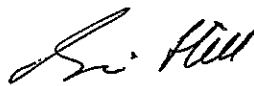
**HH Judge Simon Grenfell
(Chairman)**



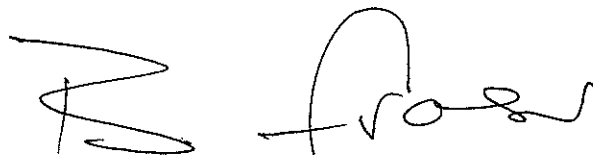
Revd Rosemary Enever



Revd Simon Hill



Canon Beverly Fraser



Mr Andrew Robinson

