

Guidelines for DDOs and Bishops' Advisers about Candidates in Civil Partnerships

In July 2005, the House of Bishops issued *Civil Partnerships: A Pastoral Statement from the House of Bishops*. These Guidelines have been written in response to the *Pastoral Statement* as it applies to candidates for ordination who are in civil partnerships at the point of selection. The section in the *Pastoral Statement* which applies to clergy and candidates for ordination is quoted in the Appendix to these Guidelines.

Preliminaries

1. DDOs should inform the National Adviser for Selection or Panel Secretary facilitating the candidate's BAP as soon as possible.

Advice for Candidates (to be conveyed by DDOs)

2. Candidates in a civil partnership should not complete the married section of the Registration Form. Rather the civil partnership should be addressed in the significant events and relationships section of the Registration Form.
3. Candidates must be prepared to discuss the civil partnership at the BAP. Issues around whether the nature of the relationship is in line with the House of Bishops' Guidelines *Issues in Human Sexuality* will not be explored by Bishops' Advisers at the BAP. However the Pastoral Adviser is free to ask questions such as:
 - How has your relationship with your civil partner helped you to grow and flourish, and what will be its impact, if any, on your future ministry?
 - Have you experienced misunderstanding or even hostility to your civil partnership and how do you manage your response?

(These issues will no doubt have been explored by the DDO prior to a candidate attending a BAP).

Advice to DDOs completing Sponsoring Papers

4. DDOs need to address the issue of the civil partnership directly in their Sponsoring Papers.
5. DDOs will need to spell out explicitly:
 - How the diocese has addressed the issue of the civil partnership with the candidate
 - That the candidate is aware of the House of Bishops' Guidelines and has agreed that he/ she will live within them
 - That the candidate and their civil partnership have been discussed fully with the sponsoring bishop and that he is satisfied that the candidate's situation is in line with the House of Bishops' Guidelines.

Advice to Bishops' Advisers assessing candidates at a BAP

6. Candidates who are in civil partnerships can be sponsored for a BAP. In such cases the nature of the civil partnership and in particular whether it is in line with the House of Bishops' Guidelines will be explored thoroughly by the sponsoring diocese and evidence of that investigation will be outlined in the Sponsoring Papers.
7. Issues around whether the nature of the relationship is in line with the House of Bishops' Guidelines will not be explored by Bishops' Advisers at the BAP. However, the Pastoral Adviser is free to ask questions such as:
 - How has your relationship with your civil partner helped you to grow and flourish, and what will be its impact, if any, on your future ministry?
 - Have you experienced misunderstanding or even hostility to your civil partnership and how do you manage your response?
8. If evidence emerged at a BAP whereby Bishops' Advisers have serious concerns and are persuaded that a candidate is not prepared to live within the House of Bishops' Guidelines, the Bishops' Advisers can express their concerns in their report to the Bishop, which constitutes their advice to them.

Ian McIntosh, November 2017

Appendix

From Civil Partnerships: A Pastoral Statement from the House of Bishops (2005):

Those wishing to be in ordained ministry and to register a civil partnership

19. The House of Bishops does not regard entering into a civil partnership as intrinsically incompatible with holy orders, provided the person concerned is willing to give assurances to his or her bishop that the relationship is consistent with the standards for the clergy set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*. The wording of the Act means that civil partnerships will be likely to include some whose relationships are faithful to the declared position of the Church on sexual relationships (see paragraphs 2-7).

20. The Church should not collude with the present assumptions of society that all close relationships necessarily include sexual activity. The House of Bishops considers it would be a matter of social injustice to exclude from ministry those who are faithful to the teaching of the Church, and who decide to register a civil partnership. There can be no grounds for terminating the ministry of those who are loyal to the discipline of the Church.

21. Nevertheless, it would be inconsistent with the teaching of the Church for the public character of the commitment expressed in a civil partnership to be regarded as of no consequence in relation to someone in- or seeking to enter- the ordained ministry. Partnerships will be widely seen as being predominantly between gay and lesbian people in sexually active relationships. Members of the clergy and candidates for ordination who decide to enter into partnerships must therefore expect to be asked for assurances that their relationship will be consistent with the teaching set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*.

22. While clergy are fully entitled to argue, in the continuing debate, for a change in that teaching, they are not entitled to claim the liberty to set it aside, simply because of the passage of the Civil Partnerships Act. Because of the ambiguities surrounding the character and public nature of civil partnerships, the House of Bishops would advise clergy to weigh carefully the perceptions and assumptions which would inevitably accompany a decision to register such a relationship.