

**In the matter of a complaint under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003**

**Before the Bishop's Disciplinary Tribunal for the Diocese of Leicester**

**23 and 24 March 2017**

**Complainant**    **The Venerable Timothy Stratford, Archdeacon of Leicester**

**Respondent**    **The Reverend Timothy Blewett**

**Summary of decision and reasons**

This is the hearing of a complaint brought by the Archdeacon of Leicester against The Reverend Timothy Blewett ('the Respondent') under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003, arising out of allegations made by Ms X of inappropriate sexual conduct towards her by the Respondent in 2011-12.

The allegation referred to this tribunal by the Deputy president of Tribunals is as follows:

*'That the conduct of the Respondent 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 from about March 2012 to about September 2012 he, a married man, had an improper sexual relationship (which included adultery) with Ms X, a married woman, whom he had met in November 2011 while serving as Warden of Launde Abbey, a Christian retreat centre that Ms X visited and to whom he gave spiritual guidance acting as her spiritual director.'*

The legal and procedural framework for these proceedings is provided by the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 and the Clergy Discipline Rules 2005 (as amended).

The burden of establishing the complaint rests on the complainant and the standard proof is that which applies in civil proceedings, namely that issues of fact are to be determined on the balance of probabilities.

This case turns primarily on the factual issues arising from the evidence of the parties in relation to the alleged misconduct and the surrounding circumstances.

We have received oral evidence from Ms X, from the respondent and from the Respondent's wife. We have also read documentary evidence presented by each party and a number of witness statements presented on behalf of the Respondent.

In reaching our decision we have carefully considered and taken account of all of the evidence and of the submissions made by the Designated Officer and the Respondent.

Ms X has maintained a clear account of the relationship which she says there was between her and the Respondent, but on more detailed examination we consider that there are significant inconsistencies in her evidence and inherent improbability in aspects of her account.

Except for the alleged incident on 11th March 2012, Ms X has not, until very recently, been able to identify any specific instance, and those which she has now identified are contradicted by the surrounding evidence. We recognise that it is a feature of allegations of this nature that specific

dates and instances may be difficult to identify and that supporting evidence may not readily be available. However, overall we are not satisfied that Ms X has given a reliable account of events and the complainant has not been able to offer any other evidence supporting her account.

We have found the account given by the Respondent of the factual matters and events to be clearer and more consistent than that of Ms X and it is supported in significant respects by the evidence of his wife and in some respects by the statements his witnesses.

We consider that the Respondent may have underplayed the depth of his friendship with Ms X, but that does not itself enable us to infer that there was an improper sexual relationship. We may wish to say more in our written reasons about maintaining appropriate boundaries as a spiritual director.

In relation to the key incident alleged to have occurred on 11th March 2012, we consider Ms X's account to be inherently improbable and we accept the evidence of the respondent and his wife in that respect. Taken as a whole we prefer the evidence of the Respondent to that of Ms X and we consider that his account of events is more reliable and more likely to be accurate.

In those circumstances, we are not satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent had an improper sexual relationship with Ms X as alleged and we have unanimously concluded that the complaint is not made out.

Accordingly the complaint is dismissed.

Our written reasons will follow in due course and the time for any appeal is extended to run from the date of delivery of the written reasons.

We direct pursuant to rule 50(4) of the CD Rules that the name and other identifying details of Ms X be omitted from the written determination, as it is desirable to do so to protect her private life. We do not consider it appropriate to omit the name of the Respondent from the determination.