

GENERAL SYNOD

House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests – Guidance note for Bishops and Parishes

Paragraph 22 of the draft Declaration, prepared by the Steering Committee in October and now coming to the Synod following consideration by the House of Bishops in December, says that the House will provide guidance for bishops and parishes to help facilitate the conversations that will be necessary following the passing of a resolution by a PCC.

I attach a copy of a draft of the guidance which has now been considered by both the House of Bishops and the Steering Committee. It has not yet been signed off by the House since the text of the Declaration-which the Synod is to debate in February-, will need to be settled first. The House will therefore be returning to it in May. But Synod members may find it helpful now to see a copy of what has been prepared.

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Secretary General
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House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests – Guidance note for Bishops and Parishes

1. In [2014] the General Synod approved legislation enabling women to become bishops and removing all gender distinctions in the canons of the Church of England in relation to the ministry of bishops, priest and deacons.
2. As part of the package of proposals of which the legislation was part, the House of Bishops agreed a *Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests* designed to sustain the diversity of the Church of England and the mutual flourishing of its constituent parts. The Declaration embodies five guiding principles which have been endorsed by the General Synod. A copy of the five principles is attached.
3. The Declaration acknowledges that some PCCs may wish to pass a resolution to take advantage of arrangements available to those who, on grounds of theological conviction are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests .
4. Where a PCC has passed the requisite resolution it is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to put the arrangements in place after consultation with the PCC. The purpose of that consultation is to enable the diocesan bishop to ascertain the nature of the theological conviction underlying the resolution so that the resolution can be implemented effectively.
5. This guidance note, promised in paragraph 22 of the Declaration, is designed to help facilitate those conversations between bishops and parishes where resolutions have been passed.

Passing a resolution

6. Under paragraph 19 of the Declaration a resolution should be passed at a meeting held under section 11 of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 or at a meeting of which the secretary of the PCC has given members at least four weeks' notice of the place and time of the meeting and of the motion to be considered.
7. A decision to pass a resolution has significant consequences for the exercise of ministry in the parish. It is good practice, therefore, for the PCC to enable members of the wider church community to submit views before any meeting at which a resolution is to be considered.
8. The recommended form of the resolution is:

'This PCC requests, on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests.'
9. Under the terms of the Declaration any resolution should have the support of either (a) a majority of those present at a meeting at which at least two-thirds of the members of

the PCC who are entitled to attend are present or (b) a majority of all the members of the PCC.

10. It is important to note that the resolution should be founded on theological conviction in relation to gender and ordained ministry. Considerations such as the personality or theological stance of the diocesan bishop, social conservatism or a desire to distance the parish from the policies of the diocese- for example in relation to pastoral reorganisation, parish share and the deployment of clergy- are not relevant.
11. In considering whether to pass a resolution it is for each PCC member to consider what weight to give to his or her own theological conviction as against the conviction of others in the church community including the incumbent. If a resolution is passed the PCC needs to be able to articulate for the bishop the nature of the conviction which, in its view, underlay the decision.
12. In accordance with paragraph 20 of the Declaration, a copy of any resolution passed should be sent to the diocesan bishop, archdeacon, diocesan registrar and registered patron.

Conversations between the bishop and the PCC

13. In its Declaration the House of Bishops acknowledged that the needs of parishes would vary, depending on the nature of the theological conviction that had prompted the PCC to pass the resolution. Thus, for example, in some cases the issue will be one of 'headship' and the need will be for ministry from a male incumbent / priest in charge or bishop. With PCCs where the theological conviction reflects Traditional Catholic concerns there will be additional considerations. It is for the PCC to nominate one or more people to articulate on its behalf to the bishop the particular needs of the parish in the light of the theological conviction that underlies the resolution, so that the resolution can be implemented effectively.
14. In relation to episcopal ministry, it is for the diocesan bishop to decide who should minister to a parish where a resolution has been passed. In accordance with the principles set out in the House of Bishops' declaration the diocesan bishop will seek to ensure that pastoral and sacramental ministry is provided in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing.
15. He or she will choose the bishop from among those who are members of the House of Bishops of one of the diocesan synods of the Church of England - in other words, from among serving rather than retired bishops.
16. It is for the diocesan bishop, in the light of the five guiding principles and following consultation with the bishop, to determine the precise extent of the ministry to be entrusted to the latter in relation to a parish where a resolution has been passed. The aim will be to ensure cooperation in a variety of ways so as to contribute to the welfare, resourcing and mission of the parish and its relationship with the diocese. The position of the diocesan as Ordinary and chief pastor is unaltered.

17. In relation to priestly ministry, the responsibility for appointments rests with a range of people depending on the nature of the post (incumbent, priest in charge, assistant curate) and the identity of the patron. The Declaration urges them all to do everything possible to achieve an outcome that does not conflict with the nature of the theological conviction underlying the PCC's resolution.
18. Paragraph 25 of the Declaration acknowledges that, when it comes to decisions about the appointment of clergy to multi-parish benefices, the needs of parishes that have not passed a resolution should be weighed alongside those of any parish that has.
19. Given the diversity of situations in multi-parish benefices it is not possible, nationally, to give guidance that will cover all situations. The aim should be to explore options that will avoid, on the one hand, a single parish being able to frustrate the wishes of the others in the benefice and, on the other, that parish being denied the pastoral and sacramental provision that the PCC has sought.
20. Where a resolution is passed by a parish in a multi-parish benefice, the diocesan bishop will consult with representatives of the other parishes in the benefice in relation to the practical arrangements that need to be made to give effect to the resolution.

Review

21. Under paragraph 21 of the Declaration a PCC that has passed a resolution is expected to review it from time to time especially when a vacancy arises in the benefice. The process for convening a meeting with a view to rescinding a resolution and the majority required are the same as for passing the original resolution (see paragraphs 6-9 above).

Disputes

22. Where a PCC that has passed a Resolution considers that the diocesan bishop has not responded consistently with the terms of the House of Bishops' Declaration it may bring a grievance to the Independent Reviewer appointed under the Regulations for the Resolution of Disputes.
23. If a patron is minded to offer an appointment inconsistently with a resolution the parish representatives are entitled to look to the diocesan bishop to use his or her powers under the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 to withhold his or her consent rather than having to do so themselves.

Statement of guiding principles

1. The House reaffirms the five guiding principles which it first commended in May 2013 when submitting legislative proposals to the General Synod for the consecration of women to the episcopate and which the Synod welcomed in its resolution of 20 November 2013. They need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively:
 - **Now that legislation has been passed to enable women to become bishops the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those whom it has duly ordained and appointed to office are the true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy and thus deserve due respect and canonical obedience;**
 - **Anyone who ministers within the Church of England must be prepared to acknowledge that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on the matter;**
 - **Since it continues to share the historic episcopate with other Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and those provinces of the Anglican Communion which continue to ordain only men as priests or bishops, the Church of England acknowledges that its own clear decision on ministry and gender is set within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God;**
 - **Since those within the Church of England who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures; and**
 - **Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England will be made without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England.**