

Special Agenda IV – Diocesan Synod Motions

Clergy Job Sharing: Diocese of Bath and Wells

A response from the Chairman of the Deployment and Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee of the Archbishops' Council.

1. The Diocesan Synod Motion from the Diocese of Bath and Wells requests that the Archbishops' Council bring forward legislative proposals for making clergy job sharing arrangements. It draws particular attention to the desirability of job sharing arrangements for clergy couples.
2. The motion, passed by the Bath and Wells Diocesan Synod on 6 March 2010, reads as follows:

That this Synod, having regard to:

the benefits to be gained from job sharing arrangements in the parochial deployment of ordained ministers, in particular married couples where both parties are ordained;

the absence of any effective provision for job sharing in the ordained parochial ministry;

requests the Archbishops' Council to bring forward legislative proposals for making such job sharing arrangements.
3. The proposal, as described in the explanatory memorandum from the Diocese of Bath and Wells, arises from one particular situation of a married clergy couple who came to a benefice in 2007 in the hope of exercising a joint ministry. Because the right of presentation had been suspended one was appointed to be priest in charge and the other as an assistant curate, whereas it had been the hope of the couple that they could have shared this ministry jointly and equally on a job share basis. When the time came to reinstate the appointment of the incumbent, because pastoral reorganization had by then been completed, the Diocesan Board of Patronage decided not to do so because this would have exacerbated – with one necessarily appointed as rector and one as assistant curate – the hierarchical distinction between them. The diocesan motion is therefore calling upon the Archbishops' Council to produce legislative proposals that would make job sharing on an equal basis possible.
4. The background paper from the Diocese of Bath and Wells focuses on the situation of a clergy couple and is motivated by an understandable desire to establish an equal and joint way of a couple ministering together. The scope of this motion is not, however, confined to 'job-sharing' between clergy who are married to each other. This paper, therefore, explores the wider context of shared parochial ministry, analyses the particular implications of the office-holder status of clergy and addresses some particular issues that arise in relation to clergy couples.
5. The motion asserts that there is at present no effective provision for 'job-sharing' in the ordained parochial ministry. If by job-sharing is meant two people holding

a single office then it is true that that is not legally possible. But there is in practice a great deal of scope for effective collaborative arrangements.

6. The General Synod has recently approved, with large majorities in all three houses, the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) legislation which explicitly preserves the status of clergy as office-holders rather than making them employees. It remains the case that an ecclesiastical office cannot be held by more than one person.
7. Certain ecclesiastical offices are recognised in law as corporations sole, which carry with them property rights in perpetual succession. In the context of parochial ministry, the office of incumbent is a corporation sole, and the church and the parsonage house are vested in this corporation. The office of incumbent also carries with it primary responsibility, under the bishop, for the cure of souls in the benefice.
8. The technical difficulties involved in formulating legislation for the office of incumbent to become a corporation aggregate rather than a corporation sole would be substantial. The work of a parish priest does not easily lend itself to tidy boundaries and discrete areas of responsibility that can readily be divided up. Given that the bishop does not direct the work of parochial clergy in the same way as an employer, there are question of how duties of the office be divided and disputes be resolved. It is difficult to see what would happen if one of the joint office-holders resigned or was removed from office under disciplinary or capability proceedings.
9. Given the requirement that an incumbent should reside in his or her parish, it would not be clear what would happen if the office of incumbent were shared by two clergy not married to each other and whether this would mean two parsonages would need to be provided. Furthermore, creating the legal facility to share an office would endanger the distinction between clergy as office-holder and employer recently reaffirmed by the General Synod.
10. It is in the nature of any office that it is a self-contained responsibility – whether it is full or part-time. The notion of sharing it with another person is conceptually difficult: to take non-parochial examples, it would be difficult to imagine two people sharing the office of Dean of the Arches and Auditor or the office of Bishop of Bath and Wells.
11. In relation to a clergy married couple who wish to share a job, as well as the obstacles outlined above, there are further issues. The Church of England, and the nation as a whole, has experienced over the last 25 years the faithful ministry of many clergy couples, working in a wide range of permutations, covering parochial and specialist ministries, senior posts, part-time and full-time.
12. In order to address this new context, in 2008 the Archbishops' Council's Deployment, Remuneration, and Conditions of Service Committee (DRACSC) asked a working group to develop up to date technical guidance relating to clergy couples. The group prepared guidance which sets out the key points and signposted further detailed guidance on specific issues. The guidance was

approved by DRACSC in September 2009. This was published by the Archbishops' Council in 2009 as Clergy Couples Guidance.

13. The information given in this guidance incorporates the provisions of the terms of service legislation. The guidance builds on the accumulated experience and reflection of clergy couples and those who have particular responsibilities towards them and was attempt to provide accurate and informative guidance in the light of changing circumstances. By setting out a good deal of information, much of it technical and prescribed by law, the guidance seeks to help the management of expectations of all those, not least the couples themselves, who seek to promote and enrich this particular configuration of ordained ministry.
14. The National Association of Diocesan Advisors in Women's Ministry (NADAWM) intends to produce in 2010 a complementary resource on the opportunities and pitfalls for clergy couples. The Archbishops' Council's Deployment, Remuneration, and Conditions of Service Committee has agreed to circulate this in due course.
15. In general terms, a great deal of flexibility already exists. As the dioceses' explanatory memorandum itself describes, one such way of achieving joint working is for one of the couple to be appointed as incumbent or priest in charge and the other as an assistant curate. Also, there are already many examples of clergy couples working together within team and group ministries, within neighbouring benefices or in the same general locality with one of the couple ministering in a parochial setting and the other as a sector minister or diocesan or deanery adviser.
16. It is also the case that because of questions concerning the challenge to maintain ministry boundaries and confidentiality, as well as the perception sometimes gained by parishioners that too much power is sometimes focussed in the parsonage, many couples have found it helpful, both for themselves and those to whom they minister, for each to hold offices in different benefices, or different parishes in a multi-parish benefice or, alternatively, for one to exercise ministry in a separate role (for example, as a chaplain or in a diocesan role), while the other has a parochial office.
17. DRACS recognises the concerns underlying this diocesan synod motion and acknowledges that there are cases where it will be sensible for clergy couples to minister together in the same locality. But it believes that a great deal of flexibility is already available and is not persuaded that the benefits to be gained by embarking on the complex process of legal change that would be needed to turn incumbent posts into corporations aggregate outweigh the difficulties. DRACS would, therefore, advise the General Synod to resist this motion.

**The Rt Rev John Packer,
Bishop of Ripon and Leeds
Chairman of the Deployment, Remuneration and Conditions of Service
Committee of the Archbishops' Council.**

**Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
and on sale at the Church House Bookshop,
31 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BN**

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