

## A Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing

### An Act of Synod, and an update on progress

#### Summary

Following the passage of the Synod motion in July 2019 to adopt the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing, Synod is now invited formally to affirm and proclaim the Covenant as an Act of Synod.

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#### Progress update

1. At the July 2019 group of sessions, the General Synod voted to:
  - a. adopt the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing (GS 2133)<sup>1</sup> as a statement of its commitment to clergy care and wellbeing;
  - b. request the Business Committee, with the agreement of the Presidents, to make arrangements so that the Covenant can be affirmed and proclaimed an Act of Synod at the February 2020 group of sessions;
  - c. request the Clergy Wellbeing Working Group to oversee the transformation of the proposals contained in GS 2133 into actual practice, in particular by making the Shared Commitments and Big Conversation (at paragraphs 21 to 32 of GS 2133) available online in a way that enables their practical use by clergy, parishes, deaneries and dioceses by the end of 2019;
  - d. request the Appointments Committee to appoint members to a Clergy Care and Wellbeing Facilitation Group to encourage and evaluate progress in the field of clergy care and wellbeing across the Church of England, with a view to the Group reporting to the General Synod within the 2020-25 Quinquennium.<sup>1</sup>
2. Since July, the Communications Department has been working on developing resources from GS2133 which are separately addressed to clergy, local congregations, and bishops and the wider Church respectively. These resources take the commitments and questions offered in the Synod-facing report from July and adapt them to a more user-friendly format for their intended audiences. Synod members will be provided with copies of these documents in their mailings for the February 2020 Group of Sessions [see GS Misc 1246].
3. Meanwhile the Appointments Committee has decided to wait until after February 2020 Group of Sessions before appointing the Facilitation Group, chiefly because the work relates to that arising from the Act of Synod, but also in consideration of the elections to General Synod for the new Quinquennium and the need to include continuing members.
4. For the sake of clarity, the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing is not the entirety of GS 2133, but only the text at paragraph 20, viz:

**The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scripture and set forth**

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/GS%202133%20A%20Covenant%20for%20Clergy%20Care%20and%20Wellbeing.pdf>

**in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in every generation.**

**In its formularies, the Church of England recognises that God calls men and women to serve as deacons, priests and bishops to build up and equip the whole People of God.**

**Conscious that such a calling is both a privilege and a demand, we as the Church of England commit together to promote the welfare of our clergy and their households in terms expressed in the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing.**

**We undertake to work together to seek to coordinate and improve our approach to clergy care and wellbeing that ordained ministers flourish in their service of the mission of God within and beyond the Church.**

### **Why an Act of Synod?**

4. Mutual accountability is a hallmark of Christian life within the Church, and the mechanism of an Act of Synod enables the General Synod to express the mind of the Church on an issue. It should be noted that the intention of the Working Group from the outset of this project has been that *the whole Church* should own the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing and the work that flows from it, rather than it be seen as the work of any one group within the Church, be that the College of Bishops, dioceses, clergy themselves or the NCIs. It believes that the best way of demonstrating this is through an Act of Synod and that the work flowing from the Covenant is best owned nationally by the General Synod itself. We believe that the expression of the Covenant as an Act of Synod will mark the beginning of a culture change towards greater awareness of our shared responsibility to promote clergy care and wellbeing, and a significant move towards preventative alongside responsive care.
5. At the July 2019 Group of Sessions the Bishop of Willesden raised the question as to whether provision made by the Covenant would make the legal position of the parochial clergy closer to that of employees, rather than office holders, and whether proclaiming the Covenant as an Act of Synod would indicate that the Synod had adopted that direction of travel. Advice has therefore been taken from the Legal Office who have advised as follows
6. The substantive provisions of the Covenant are set within the context of a theological statement about the nature of the Church of England and its clergy. They involve–
  - a commitment by the Church of England’s members to promote the welfare of the clergy and their households; and
  - members of the Church of England working together to coordinate and improve their approach to clergy care and wellbeing.
7. Neither of these is indicative of a contractual relationship between the bishops, or any institutional bodies within the Church, and individual members of the clergy. The provisions of the Covenant do not purport to create legally

enforceable rights; rather they express a moral, religious obligation on the part of the Church's members towards its clergy. The commentary on the Covenant in GS 2133 at paragraphs 21 and following, based on the Ordinal and on the respective calling of the clergy and of all the baptised community, underlines the spiritual – rather than legal – nature of the commitments with which the Covenant is concerned.

8. Despite its name, an Act of Synod does not create legal rights or obligations. It is not the ecclesiastical equivalent of an Act of Parliament; the equivalent of an Act of Parliament is a Measure. An Act of Synod is an instrument or resolution that is “published formally as the embodiment of the will or opinion of the Church of England as expressed by the whole body of the Synod” (Standing Order 41). The provisions of an Act of Synod are of substantial moral weight; they do not have the force of law. Proclaiming the Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing accordingly gives its provisions moral weight; it cannot alter the legal status of the clergy or their legal relationship with their bishops or with institutional bodies within the Church of England.

### **Next steps**

9. The Working Group further proposed that General Synod invite various parties, including Diocesan Synods, to:
  - a. debate with a view to adopting the Covenant by the end of 2020;
  - b. invite PCCs and Deanery Synods to consider and adopt the Covenant themselves within a year of their Diocesan Synod debate and to subsequently engage in the Big Conversation;
  - c. ask each Diocesan Bishop to sponsor a Clergy Study Day on Care and Wellbeing within eighteen months of the Act of Synod being made (if not already held within the previous two years);
  - d. within three years of the Act of Synod being made each diocese, along with TEIs, the NCIs, and (should they wish) those working in the Third Sector, report to a new Clergy Care and Wellbeing Facilitation Group on developments and learning since the Report was agreed.
10. The mechanism of an Act of Synod requires the Covenant to be proclaimed in each Diocesan Synod. It also allows the Presidents to issue further instructions “which they shall determine following consultation with the Prolocutors of the Convocations and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the House of Laity.” (SO 41.5) It is envisaged that the invitations in paragraph 9 will form the basis of any such further instructions.

The Revd Canon Simon Butler  
On behalf of the Clergy Wellbeing Working Group  
January 2020

**Published by the General Synod of the Church of England  
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