

House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests

Summary

In 2014, the General Synod passed legislation enabling women and men to be ordained to all three orders of ministry. The House of Bishops' Declaration, containing the Five Guiding Principles, was also approved by the Synod at this time. The Declaration aimed to support mutual flourishing and was built on the concepts of simplicity, reciprocity and mutuality. The full text of the House of Bishops Declaration is attached at Annex A.

In 2018, a group called the "Implementation and Dialogue Group" was set up to look at how the Declaration was being experienced across the Church. The Group presented its Report at the July 2021 Group of Sessions in a take note debate. The Report included a number of recommendations, including one to ensure that Synod members are educated and informed about the Declaration as part of the induction process for newly elected or appointed members (specifically recommendation ten). Hence the production of this short note for Synod members.

There are various resources which Synod members may wish to refer to in order to understand the House of Bishops Declaration and its consequences. First, there is the Declaration itself. Secondly, the The Faith and Order Commission has produced [a resource for study](#) on the Five Guiding Principles to help aid understanding and engagement with the 2014 Declaration.

Thirdly, new members of Synod may also find it useful to read the background paper to the report of the Implementation and Dialogue Group, which was written by Bishop James Langstaff, the chair of the Group, and was put to the Synod for its debate in July 2021. That background paper is attached below as Annex B.

It is important that new members understand the context of the Declaration, because as time passes, there is less understanding of the debates, negotiations, hurt and rejoicing associated with the passage of the legislation and the development of the Declaration. The Declaration made it clear that the three orders of ministry are open to all, and alongside that decision, it was clear that those who could not in theological conscience accept the ministry of women as priests and bishops continued to have an honoured place within the life of the Church.

GENERAL SYNOD WOMEN IN THE EPISCOPATE

House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests

Introduction

1. The character and calling of the Church of England are set out in the Preface to the Declaration of Assent, which all clergy are required to make at ordination and subsequently on admission to any office. As part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church it is called to proclaim afresh in each generation the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds.
2. Those who serve the Church of England in holy orders are required to affirm their loyalty to this 'inheritance of faith' and bring 'the grace and truth of Christ to this generation.' Bishops have a particular responsibility to gather God's people and build up the Body of Christ. We have each promised at our consecration to promote peace and reconciliation in the Church and to seek to unite its members in a holy fellowship of truth and love.
3. The opening of all orders of ministry equally to women and men is a significant moment in the long history of this part of the Church Catholic. It brings with it new opportunities for building up the Body of Christ and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.
4. It also brings with it a particular responsibility for us, as a House of Bishops. As well as seeking to channel and nurture the energy and renewal that will flow from this development we have a duty to ensure that the welfare of the whole Church of England is sustained in all its theological depth and breadth. We accordingly commend this declaration to all members of the Church of England so that the good gifts that God has given to all His people may be used to His glory.

Statement of guiding principles

5. 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:
 - a. **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;**
 - b. **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;**
 - c. **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;

- d. 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**
- e. 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.**

Simplicity, reciprocity and mutuality

6. The House believes that the outworking of these principles needs to be accompanied by **simplicity, reciprocity and mutuality**.
7. The **simplicity** of the legislation now agreed by the General Synod is reflected in the fact that it makes no changes to the structures of the Church of England, leaves unaltered the position of each diocesan bishop as Ordinary and preserves the historic requirement for canonical obedience to the diocesan bishop 'in all things lawful and honest' and for the taking of oaths acknowledging this duty.¹ The practical arrangements to be made for parishes which, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the priestly or episcopal ministry of women need to be made with the same principle of simplicity in mind.
8. **Reciprocity** means that everyone, notwithstanding differences of conviction on this issue, will accept that they can rejoice in each other's partnership in the Gospel and cooperate to the maximum possible extent in mission and ministry. There will need to be an acknowledgement that the differences of view which persist stem from an underlying divergence of theological conviction.
9. In particular reciprocity will mean that those of differing conviction will do all within their power to avoid giving offence to each other. There will need to be sensitivity to the feelings of vulnerability that some will have that their position within the Church of England will gradually be eroded and that others will have because not everyone will receive their ministry.
10. Now that the Church of England has admitted women to the episcopate there should within each diocese be at least one serving bishop, whether the diocesan or a suffragan, who ordains women to the priesthood. This has a bearing on the considerations that the Crown Nominations Commission and

¹ Canon C 1.3 provides that "According to the ancient law and usage of this Church and Realm of England, the priests and deacons who have received authority to minister in an diocese owe canonical obedience in all things lawful and honest to the bishop of the same ... ". By way of acknowledgement of that duty, under Canon C 14 clergy are required on various occasions to make or reaffirm the Oath of Canonical Obedience to their diocesan bishop. But we are advised that, in the light of the decision of the Privy Council in *Long v Bishop of Capetown* (1863), the duty of obedience does not require the cleric to comply with any and every direction given by the bishop; rather, it requires the cleric to obey such directions as the diocesan bishop is authorised by law to give.

- diocesan bishops will need to take into account when considering diocesan and suffragan appointments.
11. In addition, dioceses are entitled to express a view, in the statement of needs prepared during a vacancy in see, as to whether the diocesan bishop should be someone who will or will not ordain women. In dioceses where the diocesan bishop does not ordain women he should ensure that a bishop who is fully committed to the ordained ministry of women is given a role across the whole diocese for providing support for female clergy and their ministry.
 12. All bishops have a shared responsibility for the welfare of the whole Church of England. It will be important that senior leadership roles within dioceses continue to be filled by people from across the range of traditions.
 13. **Mutuality** reflects the Church of England's wider commitment to sustaining diversity. It means that those of differing conviction will be committed to making it possible for each other to flourish. All should play a full part in the lives of the deaneries and dioceses and be prepared to engage with the diocesan bishop whoever he or she is.
 14. Equal treatment, for example in relation to resource issues and the discerning of vocations to the ordained ministry, is essential irrespective of convictions in relation to gender and ministry. In discerning vocations bishops will continue not to discriminate on the grounds of a candidate's theological conviction on his issue. In addition, ordination services for deacons and priests should be planned and conducted in a way that is consistent with the five guiding principles set out in paragraph 5 above.

Arrangements for parishes

15. The House is committed to enabling parishes in one part of the country to receive broadly comparable and consistent arrangements to those provided in another, notwithstanding differences in the culture and ethos of particular dioceses or the approach of the relevant diocesan bishop.
16. The practical outworking of the arrangements may vary according to local circumstances but the approach commended in the following paragraphs will, in the view of the House, enable all dioceses and parishes to act consistently with the guiding principles set out above and the requirements of the law, including the Equality Act 2010.
17. The responsibility for signalling that a parish wishes to take advantage of arrangements available to those whose theological conviction leads them to seek the priestly or episcopal ministry of men rests with the relevant parochial church council ('PCC').²
18. A meeting of a PCC to consider a motion seeking arrangements of this kind should either be one held under section 11 of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 or one for which the secretary of the PCC has given members at least four weeks' notice of the place and time of the meeting and the motion to be considered. Given the importance of the issue such a motion should have been passed either (a) by a majority of those present at a meeting at which at least two-thirds of the members of

² In the case of a guild church designated and established under section 4 of the City of London (Guild Churches) Act 1952 the responsibility rests with the guild church council and what is said in paragraphs 16 to 29 applies to guild churches and guild church councils as it applies to parishes and PCCs, with the necessary modifications.

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

19. The recommended form of the resolution to be passed by the PCC is as follows: “***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.***” A PCC which has passed a resolution should send a copy of it to the diocesan bishop, archdeacon, diocesan registrar and registered patron.
20. Parishes which have passed a resolution may rescind it at any time. The same procedures as are set out in paragraphs 18-19 should apply in relation to a PCC meeting which is to consider a motion rescinding a resolution. Parishes which have passed a resolution should review it from time to time, especially when a vacancy in a benefice arises.
21. The House recognises that the nature of the theological conviction on the ordained ministry of women which underlies a decision to pass such a resolution will vary according to the tradition of the parish concerned. Where a resolution has been passed, and before clergy are appointed to the parish or a bishop chosen by the diocesan bishop to provide oversight, there will, therefore, need to be consultation between bishop and parish to ascertain the nature of that conviction so that the resolution can be implemented effectively. The House will provide guidance for bishops and parishes to help facilitate these conversations.
22. Anyone involved in making appointments to ordained parochial roles, whether of incumbents, priests in charge or assistant curates, or in exercising the power conferred by Canon C 8.2(a) to allow occasional ministry in a parish, should do everything possible to achieve an outcome that does not conflict with the nature of the conviction on this issue underlying the PCC’s resolution. Where a clerk in holy orders is the registered patron of a benefice in right of his or her office, he or she should not limit his or her selection of candidates to those of a particular sex except in circumstances where a parish has passed a resolution.
23. In the event that any difficulties arise between a patron and a parish following the passing of a PCC resolution, the diocesan bishop should do all in his or her power to achieve an outcome that respects the declared view of the parish and protects the parish representatives from having to resort to their own power of veto under the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986. The archbishop of the province should also seek to achieve such an outcome in the event of the right of presentation lapsing to him or her under the 1986 Measure.
24. In the case of multi-parish benefices the needs of parishes in the benefice that have not passed a resolution should be weighed alongside those of any parish that has when decisions are taken about appointments to the benefice.
25. The choice of a bishop to undertake ministry in respect of a parish which has passed a resolution is for the relevant diocesan bishop to make, again with a view to avoiding conflict with the theological conviction on this issue underlying its resolution. In all cases the choice should be made from among the male bishops who are members of the House of Bishops of the diocesan synod of that or another diocese of the Church of England.
26. As noted in paragraph 16, parishes which pass a resolution in one part of the country are entitled to expect equivalent treatment to that provided in another. In all cases the diocesan bishop should seek to ensure that

pastoral and sacramental ministry is provided in accordance with the guiding principles set out in paragraph 5 above.

27. In addition the diocesan bishop and the bishop invited to minister to the parish should explore how they can best cooperate in a variety of ways to contribute to its welfare, resourcing and mission and in its relationship with the diocese.
28. The precise extent of the ministry entrusted to the bishop is for the diocesan to determine and is likely, for practical reasons to vary according to the pattern of episcopal ministry in that diocese and the extent of the bishop's other commitments. But the expectation is that there will be many similarities with the range of responsibilities carried by any suffragan bishop within a diocese.

The College of Bishops

29. The House affirms the importance of there continuing to be consecrations of bishops within the Church of England to enable such ministry to be provided. The fact that the sees of Ebsfleet and Richborough in the diocese of Canterbury and Beverley in the diocese of York remain in existence will provide one of a range of means by which the Archbishops will ensure that a suitable supply of bishops continues where it would not be secured in other ways. The House also accepts that the presence in the College of Bishops of at least one bishop who takes the Conservative Evangelical view on headship is important for sustaining the necessary climate of trust.

Arrangements in relation to other places of worship

30. The cathedral is the seat of the bishop, who has the right to officiate there in accordance with the cathedral's constitution and statutes. It is for this reason that, while some cathedrals are also parish churches, the House does not believe that the arrangements set out in the preceding paragraphs for the passing of resolutions can apply to cathedrals.
31. The House does not believe that gender or theological conviction in relation to the ordained ministry of women should be an obstacle to appointment as dean or cathedral canon. What matters is that all appointed to cathedral ministry are willing to work together in close partnership and with the highest possible degree of communion in the interests of the institution that they serve.
32. Given the great variety of non-parochial places in which regular worship and ministry take place it is not sensible to try and generalise about the arrangements that should be made in relation to them beyond affirming that the guiding principles set out in paragraph 5 above are of as much relevance to them as to the rest of the Church of England.

Oaths

33. At ordination and on taking up any office in the Church of England priests and deacons are required under Canon C 14 to swear or affirm that they will "*pay true and canonical obedience to the Lord Bishop of C and his successors in all things lawful and honest.*" Bishops are similarly required to take an oath of due obedience to the archbishop of the province. Clergy and bishops also take an Oath of Allegiance to the Queen and make the Declaration of Assent.

34. These Oaths and the Declaration are important because they each involve recognition that a person does not exercise ministry in isolation or on their own authority but within a framework of relationship with others and within the tradition of faith as the Church of England has received it. The House acknowledges that the taking of the oath to the diocesan bishop or the oath of due obedience to the archbishop may, in future, raise issues for those who, for theological reasons, remain committed to a male episcopate and priesthood.
35. Nevertheless, the House believes that all ministers of the Church of England will be able, in good conscience, to take the oath. Doing so adds nothing legally to the duty of canonical obedience, which already exists in law. Rather, it is a recognition of the pattern of relationships which underpins the exercise of ministry by those who make and receive the oath. It follows from the guiding principles set out in paragraph 5 above, and the spectrum of Anglican teaching and tradition which they acknowledge, that the giving and receiving of the oath does not entail acting contrary to theological conviction.

Grievances and mediation

36. Canon C 29 requires the House to make Regulations prescribing a procedure for the resolution of disputes arising from the arrangements for which this declaration makes provision. In accordance with that requirement the House has made the Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests (Resolution of Disputes Procedure) Regulations 201-, the text of which is set out in the Annex to this declaration. Participation in the procedure is mandatory for those clerical office holders against whom a grievance may be brought under it.

Providing assurance

37. This declaration has been prepared in connection with legislation to admit women to the episcopate, proposals for which have been the subject of extensive debate in the Church of England over a number of years. It flows from the House's desire to establish a climate of trust within which there can be mutual flourishing, notwithstanding the differences of conviction which will continue to exist on this issue.
38. The present members of the House, like the members of the General Synod, cannot give binding commitments which would prevent their successors from considering matters afresh in the light of experience and new developments. Nevertheless, the House accepts its responsibility for creating and sustaining the necessary confidence that the arrangements set out in this declaration can be relied on and will prove durable.
39. Adjustments may prove necessary in the light of experience and be uncontentious. But the House undertakes that, should it be minded to propose changes to this declaration, it will consult the General Synod and will not proceed with its proposals unless they command two-thirds majorities in all three Houses.

Transitional provisions

40. The intention is that the repeal of the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993 and the rescinding of the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993 will have effect on the day that Amending Canon No 33 is promulgated – from that day PCCs will no longer be able to pass

resolutions A or B or petition for extended episcopal ministry under the 1993 Act of Synod.

41. Instead, it will be open to PCCs to pass resolutions under the terms of this Declaration. Since such resolutions are not made under legislation, PCCs do not have to wait for the coming into force of the Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure and Amending Canon No 33 before passing them: they can do so from the point at which this Declaration is made. However, as the new arrangements will not take effect until the Amending Canon is promulgated, any resolution will not be acted upon until the Canon is promulgated; and, similarly, any resolutions under the 1993 Measure or Act of Synod will continue in force until that point.
42. Additionally, the House of Bishops acknowledges that PCCs may want some time to consider the options open to them. To allow for an orderly transition the House has agreed, therefore, that resolutions passed under the 1993 Measure or petitions made under the 1993 Act of Synod should be treated for two years after the date on which the Amending Canon is promulgated as if they were resolutions passed under paragraph 20.

Annex B: Background paper by Bishop James Langstaff (from GS 2225, July 2021

1. It is now over six years since the General Synod gave final approval to the [*Bishops and Priests \(Ordination of Women\) Measure*](#) making possible the changes to the Canons whereby women and men could be ordained to all three orders of ministry. Two months before that, the House of Bishops had made its [*Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests*](#) which included the Five Guiding Principles and a range of related arrangements and protocols. There has, therefore, now been a significant passage of time since those decisions were made, and a good many of those now in ordained and lay leadership within the Church of England were not part of those earlier decisions which included consideration in every diocese.
2. The immediate trigger for the forming of the Implementation and Dialogue Group (IDG), which has produced [this report](#), was the Independent Reviewer's report into matters around the appointment of the Bishop of Sheffield. The Reviewer asked the House of Bishops to commission the work of such a group. Even without that impetus, however, the passage of time since 2014 means that it would anyway have been good to undertake some review of how the Measure and more particularly the Declaration have been received and put into practice. The report is the result of that review.
3. It is important to recall that the background to this is the clear and unequivocal decision made through General Synod that all three orders of ministry be open to all, both women and men. The fruit of that decision has been widely and joyfully received within our church in the form of the diaconal, priestly and episcopal ministries of both women and men.
4. Alongside that clear decision, the Church of England also declared that those who could not in theological conscience accept the ministry of women as priests and bishops continued to have an honoured place within the life of the church. We thus set ourselves to do something which few other ecclesial communities have been able to do. That is, to enact a significant change in our ecclesial polity, while at the same time continuing to hold a place for those opposed to that change – and that not just for a limited period. To many this may have seemed to be an impossible aspiration, but that aspiration is what led to the Declaration, the Five Guiding Principles and the various arrangements flowing from them.
5. In arriving at what is sometimes referred to as the '2014 Settlement', an important principle was to be relatively light on law and regulation and to focus rather on that which is relational. Thus, for example, arrangements made under the Declaration come about as a result of conversations between bishops, clergy, parishes and others. There is language of requests and responses, rather than resolutions and rigid structures.
6. In reviewing how the Measure and Declaration have been implemented in practice, it was probably inevitable that the group commissioned by the House tended to hear more from those who have had questions or issues with how things have been working over these last 6 years. This is not least because, while the provision of the Measure is for the whole church, the arrangements under the Declaration have a particular relevance for those who have wished to request such arrangements. But it is important also that the whole

'Settlement' continues to work for all within the church, and especially that the priestly and episcopal ministry of women is affirmed and that any continuing barriers are acknowledged and dealt with.

7. The IDG finished most of its work in 2019 and a first draft of the report came to the House of Bishops for discussion in December 2019. As a result of that discussion, some further work was undertaken and some remaining strands of research were also completed, leading to the attached version of the report which came to the House of Bishops in July 2020. The disruption we have all faced over the last year and the need to focus on immediate concerns of the pandemic, meant a delay in bringing the report back to the House and subsequently to Synod. This means that, certainly since the IDG began its work and even since much of its research was undertaken (now some three years ago), further developments have emerged and questions been raised.
8. Thus, for example, we have a growing number of male clergy who have been ordained by female bishops and this has raised questions in some places, along with uncomfortable experiences for some. We also have an increasing number of diocesan bishops who are women, and we need to learn from their experience and that of their dioceses. Meanwhile the ministries of the Bishop of Maidstone and the Provincial Episcopal Visitors continue to develop on the ground with the need to respond to that experience. We do not, therefore, stand still and further work will be needed beyond this report. In particular, there will be the need for ongoing review, monitoring and theological consideration as new developments arise and the House has now agreed a means whereby this may happen.
9. The House, having received the IDG's report, is very grateful to the group for all of its work. The report reflects upon the evidence received by the report, identifies a number of key issues and makes a number of recommendations for various people and groups to consider. The report itself is clear that one member was not able to support certain recommendations, and indeed most recommendations will have had varying levels of support within the group itself. Discussion in the House has also reflected that reality and formally the House has neither accepted nor rejected the recommendations either as a whole or individually.
10. One of the recommendations is that the Standing Committee of the House be charged with monitoring the implementation of the group's recommendations. After discussion, the House has decided to strengthen this recommendation by establishing a Standing Commission on the House of Bishops Declaration ('the Standing Commission') which, unlike the Standing Committee, would be focused solely on the good working of the Declaration and related processes now and in years to come. Initially the Standing Commission will work on the detailed recommendations of the IDG's report, working with others as appropriate. It will also sit alongside the continuing work of the Independent Reviewer, giving to the church a means whereby recommendations of the Reviewer may be considered and implemented.
11. Among the most important of the IDG's recommendations are those which touch on the need for continuing communication of both the content and the spirit of both the Measure and the Declaration. As previously mentioned, what the Church of England has sought to put in place through these may to

some have seemed impossible but has the potential also to be fruitful and indeed life-giving. And the group heard testimony to how this has indeed been the case in so many places. If that is to continue, then we need to make sure that succeeding generations within our church, and especially of those in leadership, understand the spirit and form of what we have put in place.

12. What we have brought about through the Measure and the Declaration is not just a set of arrangements whereby our own common life and order may be sustained. It also constitutes an act of witness in a world which seems to find it increasingly hard to hold differences in a good, creative and mutually respectful way. Clearly we do not ourselves manage to do that all of the time. But it continues to be our conviction that what the Synod and the House put in place in 2014 offers a framework within which that may happen. How fully it can do so has always been and continues to be down to how we individually and corporately choose to inhabit that framework. And that is about how we relate to one another and to God.

Rt Revd James James Langstaff,

Bishop of Rochester

June 2021