

HOUSE OF BISHOPS

**SECOND ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
STANDING COMMISSION ON THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS' DECLARATION**

Introduction

1. The terms of reference for the Standing Commission require it to make an annual report to the House of Bishops. This paper forms the second annual report of the Standing Commission from July 2023 – July 2024.

Overview

2. The report is made up of the following sections:
 - a. Introduction;
 - b. July 2023 – July 2024 report;
 - c. Membership;
 - d. General comments; and,
 - e. Plans for 2024 – 2025.

Actions

3. The House is asked to note the report.

+Michael Ipgrave, Chair
On behalf of the Standing Commission
July 2024

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Introduction

1. The Standing Commission on the House of Bishops' Declaration was set up in June 2022. In the first annual report sent to the House of Bishops in June 2023, the House was informed that much of the first year had been about focusing on membership and defining modes of working. Two focused pieces of work were also proposed and begun: a reflection on the London plan, and PEV guidelines (original title of project).
2. The first annual report also proposed the following aims for the Standing Commission's second year:
 - a. Continue the reflection on the London Plan;
 - b. Continue work on PEV guidelines (original title); and,
 - c. Meet with the new Independent Reviewer (IR) and discuss a working relationship between the IR and the Standing Commission.
3. The Standing Commission was cautious in confirming any other focused pieces of work between July 2023 and July 2024 given the number of competing demands on time of the members and staff supporting the Standing Commission, and the focus of the House of Bishops on LLF, specifically in the autumn/winter 2023/2024. It also wanted to leave space for responding to any work coming from reports of the Independent Reviewer.

July 2023 – July 2024 Report

4. In this period, the Standing Commission met 3 times in July and November 2023, and in February 2024. It will also meet in July 2024 just after the House of Bishops meeting.
5. Regarding the aims as set out in paragraph 2 above, the following report can be given:
 - a. A reflection on the London Plan was submitted to the House of Bishops in the autumn 2023 – *HB(23)52*. The Standing Commission also wrote a letter to the Bishop of London with some private reflections for her to consider;
 - b. Following continued discussion around the PEV Guidelines in Standing Commission meetings and following consultation with the College of Bishops in January 2024, the Standing Commission agreed to change the nature of this project. Rather than solely focusing on guidance for PEVs, the Standing Commission is keen to build up a library of guidelines on different areas within the House of Bishops' Declaration. Having heard examples of areas which require guidelines, the Standing Commission has begun work on these and will report back to the House of Bishops in due course. Some areas already identified are: appointments processes in resolution parishes, and setting up diocesan plans for working with resolution bishops (such as

- the London Plan). Any proposed guidelines will be sent to the House for the House to comment on and, if approved, circulate more widely to all episcopal colleagues;
- c. The Chair has met with the Independent Reviewer twice; once with the Vice-Chair and staff, and once with staff only. The Independent Reviewer (IR) also attended part of the Standing Commission's meeting in November 2023. During this meeting, the IR gave an outline of the work she had done since becoming IR and gave an update on current submissions. The IR also invited the Standing Commission to consider whether the current role of the IR, as a place of redress solely for those holding the minority view on the ordination of women, was appropriate, and notified members that more would be said of this in her report on the submission from WATCH regarding the appointment of diocesan bishops. The IR and the Standing Commission also discussed its online presence and agreed that more work could be done to collaborate on this. It was agreed that the IR and the Standing Commission would continue to meet, and that the Chair and IR would have regular catch up meetings.
6. In January 2024, Bishop Helen-Ann, as acting Chair, presented to the College of Bishops on the Commission's role, remit, membership and its work so far. The other episcopal members also reflected their experience of being members of this group. The Revd Kate Massey, a clergy member of the Commission, was also asked by Lambeth Palace to reflect the experience of women from the perspective of a Dean of Women's Ministry.
 7. There was also an opportunity for the bishops to reflect on areas on which the Standing Commission might focus and share any concerns about the outworking of the House of Bishops' Declaration. From this, a huge number of projects could have been begun. The Standing Commission considered these carefully and distilled which areas it might focus on as follows:
 - a. 'Telling the Story' – looking at ways to help those who were not around in the journey to 2014 to understand what happened and why;
 - b. A suite of guidelines for bishops and dioceses – as noted in paragraph 5b, the Standing Commission is committed to producing a suite of guidelines and will begin with looking at the appointments processes in resolution parishes, and setting up diocesan plans for working with resolution bishops (such as the London Plan);
 - c. Balancing provision for all within the House of Bishops' Declaration – a theological and ecclesiological reflection on what provision might be made for women within the House of Bishops' Declaration. This also addresses the concerns raised by the IR. It is not intended that this will suggest a proposal for changes to the role of the IR, but will offer a broader perspective on the current role and the limitations this places on concerns raised by those holding the majority view on women's ordination. The Commission

hopes that such a reflection would be helpful for the House of Bishops in considering the question of balancing provision.

8. In March 2024, Bishop Michael and Elise Sandham attended a meeting of the Dioceses Commission at the invitation of the Chair, Caroline Spelman, with a view to allowing the two bodies to understand each other's work and consider areas of shared learning and joint working. Both Bishop Michael and Caroline presented on the work done by their respective commissions and then there was a time for discussion. It was agreed that the two commissions would continue to stay in touch, especially to think about areas relevant to both bodies.

Membership

9. Since the last report, there have been 2 resignations both of which have been due to changes in roles since those members were originally appointed as members of the Standing Commission and increased demands on time:
 - a. The Rt Revd Smitha Prasadam; and,
 - b. The Rt Revd Helen-Ann Hartley.
10. The Standing Commission has expressed its thanks to Bishops Smitha and Helen-Ann for their work as members, but also for their kindness and support. In particular, the Standing Commission would like to pay tribute to the huge effort that Bishop Helen-Ann gave as Vice-Chair of the Standing Commission and also as Acting Chair between September 2023 and January 2024 while Bishop Michael Ipgrave was absent from episcopal duties.
11. Bishop Smitha was initially a clergy member of the Standing Commission before her consecration and therefore the vacancy created by her resignation was for a clergyperson. In June 2024, the House of Bishops approved the nomination of the Revd Canon Roxanne Eversley, Canon Librarian and Dean of Cultural Diversity at Southwark Cathedral, as a new member of the Standing Commission replacing Bishop Smitha.
12. The process for appointing an episcopal member will commence in due course.

General Comments

13. More generally, the Standing Commission would like to offer the following reflections to the House of Bishops:
 - a. The Standing Commission is alert to the use of language around the Declaration and Five Guiding Principles and is careful to ensure that its language is well-thought through, clear and acceptable to those of differing views. There is the potential for this to become a project in itself, but the Standing Commission has assessed that other areas take priority and that a project around language could take a lot of time and resource, and perhaps never be resolved. However, the Standing Commission would like to highlight a few areas where they have either made a firm commitment to certain language or are considering their use of language:

- i. Resolution Bishops. The Standing Commission does not feel that PEV covers the range of roles undertaken by all of the bishops who provide extended episcopal care to resolution parishes and clergy. Of course, where a bishop is a PEV, they may be termed as such. But as a collective, the Standing Commission suggests that these bishops be termed 'Resolution Bishops'.
 - ii. Understanding that there is a desire from some women not to be known as female or women priests, but simply priests, the Standing Commission takes care to ensure that gender is only added to the descriptor of priest when absolutely necessary. There are some for whom 'priest who is female' is preferable to 'female priest', while others will have an alternative suggestion. The Standing Commission is always conscious of considering how to describe any individual or group and is committed to writing in a way which does not offend anyone, insofar as that is possible. In alignment with the first Guiding Principle, all members of the Standing Commission recognise that all those ordained as priest are the 'true and lawful holders of the office, without reference to gender'.
- b. Mutuality of flourishing. 'Mutual flourishing' is often used as shorthand to encapsulate the whole of the Five Guiding Principles, though it is only mentioned in the fifth Guiding Principle. However, it is a vital part of the Five Guiding Principles and the outworking of the House of Bishops' Declaration. Noting that oftentimes work around the House of Bishops' Declaration can be focused on ensuring the inclusion of those who hold the minority view on women's ordination, the Standing Commission is committed to ensuring that all of its work considers mutuality and, even when pieces of work are focused on a certain group, the flourishing of other groups is considered within this piece of work. This is something that the Standing Commission models in its own work and writing, but also wishes to highlight when looking at specific topics. An example of this can be found in HB(23)52, the reflection on the London Plan, in paragraph 21 where the Standing Commission recommends that '*Any plan should consider how to ensure the flourishing of female clergy in the diocese, as well as the flourishing of traditional catholic and complementarian evangelical clergy.*'
- c. Commentary on the House of Bishops' Declaration. The Standing Commission is aware that, 10 years on from the House of Bishops' Declaration, there is increased commentary on the place of the Declaration in today's Church of England. The Standing Commission does not wish to respond to this in detail since it has not discussed it fully, but does wish to highlight what appears to be a substantial amount of public discourse on the House of Bishops' Declaration and its current worth. The Standing Commission has reached out to some who have spoken publicly, and negatively, about the House of Bishops' Declaration, including members of

the House of Bishops. The Standing Commission will continue to monitor this and discuss any concerns.

- d. Workload and resourcing. There is no end to the amount of project work which the Standing Commission could consider carrying out and members are enthusiastic to do all they can to work out their terms of reference. However, competing demands on time, other live issues within the Church, and a small amount of staff resourcing, mean that the Standing Commission must prioritise its activities. The Standing Commission is, though, keen that the House of Bishops is engaged with its work and feels able to participate in it when asked.

Plans for 2024 - 2025

14. As noted in paragraph 7, there are three areas of focus for the Standing Commission as it begins its third year as an active body:

- a. 'Telling the Story';
- b. Beginning a suite of guidelines on aspects of working within the Declaration; and,
- c. Looking at the balance of provision for all within the House of Bishops' Declaration.

15. The Standing Commission will also discuss and formulate its response to the Independent Reviewer's report on the submission from WATCH and will deliver this to the House of Bishops at the earliest opportunity.

16. Some of this work has begun but this will be the main focus for 2024 – 2025. The Standing Commission intend to continue to allow space to be able to respond to any future reports of the Independent Reviewer, and to be able to connect with any other areas of work where there is cross-over and mutual learning.

17. Having met for the last two years within the margins of the General Synod, the Standing Commission has now made the commitment to meet for longer periods of time and therefore will meet outside of the General Synod. This will include at least one annual, in person, whole day meeting which will alternate between the Canterbury and York provinces. Other meetings will tend to be held on Zoom for half days.

Conclusion

18. I would like to end this report by thanking the members of the Standing Commission for their continued support and enthusiasm for this work, both during and between meetings, as well as the care they take in talking to, and working with, one another. We have endeavoured to model mutual flourishing in the way we work together, and I am encouraged by the progress we have been making towards this.

**Bishop Michael Ipgrave, Chair
On behalf of the Standing Commission
June 2024**