

HOUSE OF BISHOPS

**A meeting of the House of Bishops was held at High Leigh on
22 and 23 October 2024**

MINUTES

22 OCTOBER 2024

THE BISHOP OF DOVER IN THE CHAIR**1 WELCOME, APOLOGIES, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 1.1 The meeting opened in prayer.
- 1.2 The CHAIR passed on apologies from the Bishops of Birmingham, Bristol, Chelmsford, Chichester, Edmonton, Gloucester, Huddersfield, Jarrow, Kensington, Leeds, Lichfield, Loughborough, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, Sherborne, Shrewsbury, Southwark, Warrington and Willesden, together with Shemil Matthew and Revd Chigor Chike. She welcomed the Bishops of Sodor and Man and of Fulham to their first meetings, and welcomed the Chaplains. She explained that the Bishops of Chelmsford, Dover, London and Peterborough had been added to the panel of chairs for the House. The SECRETARY GENERAL confirmed that under the standing orders the quorum for the House was one fifth of the members of the House and therefore notwithstanding the absences that requirement was met.
- 1.3 The minutes of the July and September meetings (HB(24)M5 and M6) were approved. The House of Bishops Standing Committee would meet on 6 November to discuss the question of what form of minutes would be published, in line with the decisions of the House communicated to the General Synod.

2 STANDING ORDER 14

- 2.1 The CHAIR moved that the House meet as a Committee of the Whole House under Standing Order 14. Members noted that it was important that the House made progress on transparency of minutes before the General Synod in February and noted that by choosing a venue with no public facilities the decision of the House had, in effect, been pre-empted. The House AGREED to meet as a Committee of the Whole House under Standing Order 14 with four against.

3 LEAD BISHOPS

- 3.1 MARGARET CAVE explained that the arrangements for lead bishops had grown organically over time with the result that the Governance Review had concluded that there was "little clarity about the role of the lead bishop". In the short term she had been seeking to bring greater transparency to the process by sharing more details of current responsibilities and offering opportunities to take on roles. But there was more to do to respond to the challenges in the Governance Review that such roles should be better supported and defined.
- 3.2 Analysis suggested that 19 bishops who would retire in the next 5 years

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covered 29 per cent of roles; that 11 bishops had 5 or more roles covering almost a third of all roles; that 10 per cent of roles were in ecumenical or inter-faith contexts; and that one in four bishops – principally suffragans – had no lead responsibilities. There was a need for a proper process for appointing, resourcing, inducting and supporting bishops in these roles. The proposal was for a working group, involving bishops, to answer these questions.

- 3.3 Bishops were supportive of this work, noting that the process was currently unclear, that there were different categories of roles and that the appointment process needed streamlining. It was noted that some diocesan bishops encourage suffragan bishops not to take on a national role for the first two years of their ministry.
- 3.4 Responding, MARGARET CAVE said that lead bishop roles needed to feed into conversations about wellbeing and episcopal MDRs, and encouraged bishops to engage in this work.

4 FINANCE HB(24)31A-C

- 4.1 Introducing the item, the CHAIR explained that this would give the House the opportunity to engage with three items – the Triennium Funding Working Group process, the Diocesan Finances Review and the work of the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board. She welcomed ROSIE SLATER-CARR, JO WOOLCOCK and DEBBIE CLINTON to the meeting.
- 4.2 Introducing the first part, the BISHOP OF LONDON explained that the Triennium Funding Working Group was the process by which the Church Commissioners, Archbishops' Council and House of Bishops together determined funding allocations for 2026 to 2028. Two diocesan secretary participant observers had been brought into the group. The work would provide an interim report to the General Synod in February before presenting work to the General Synod for approval in July. The Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council would also need to approve proposals. The work was looking to invest in priority ministry, including to children and young people, and to take into account the work of the Diocesan Finances Review, the work on stipends and pensions, and other issues such as the future of church safeguarding. She was creating space for innovation within a broadly standard process.
- 4.3 In discussion the following points were made:
- 4.3.1 That there was a perception that the work was focused on funding projects to deliver the vision and strategy rather than the core parochial system, and it would be better to redistribute resources to sustaining parochial ministry;
- 4.3.2 That it was important to understand that dioceses know best how to grow and further ministry locally;
- 4.3.3 That it was important to address a number of historic injustices such as inequity in allocation of assets, stipend levels and the challenges of rural ministry;

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- 4.3.4 That although finances within the Church needed a reset it was important to do so well and through the Triennium Funding Working Group process, understanding that the Church Commissioners were simply fulfilling their roles and the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board was simply delivering what the House had asked it to do and was allocating the resourcing in response to diocesan priorities;
- 4.3.5 That there was a case for extending Lowest Income Communities Funding (LInC) to a broader range of dioceses;
- 4.3.6 That it was important to reflect on what rural ministry looks like and to accept that it would need greater numbers of priests per capita than urban contexts;
- 4.4 Responding, the BISHOP OF LONDON noted that the challenges were well-understood and encouraged bishops to support the work of the TFWG as it sought to be collaborative across the Archbishops' Council, Church Commissioners and the House of Bishops.
- 4.5 Introducing the Diocesan Finances Review the BISHOP OF SHEFFIELD explained that the work was being led by a group comprising NCI staff, diocesan secretaries, bishops and finance directors. It was doing so on the basis of the BDO audit which meant it could model the impact of options on individual dioceses. The emerging package was set out at paragraph 5 of HB(24)31B and included a substantive increase in and standardisation of stipends, support for dioceses to address deficits over 6-9 years, uplifts to LInC, scrapping apportionment for votes 2-5 and a new ministry training fund for vote 1, and a continued Diocesan Investment Programme. Responding to questions he explained that the DFR work would feed into the TFWG to make decisions.
- 4.6 In discussion the following points were made:
- 4.6.1 The House should continue to test assumptions about what works for the mission of the church;
- 4.6.2 It was important how relative wealth was assessed and for transparency around any redistributive mechanisms;
- 4.6.3 There was a danger of using resources to support the maintenance of unsatisfactory mission models;
- 4.6.4 That it was important to note that some richer areas of the country may carry higher costs both for clergy and for dioceses in terms of the cost of property;
- 4.6.5 That the work should also consider the parish share process;
- 4.6.6 That it was important to examine the legal constraints on using particular resources for other purposes within the diocese;
- 4.6.7 That it was important that the principles at national level mirrored the principles applied at diocesan levels including in terms of seeking assurance of plans for sustainability;

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- 4.6.8 That the focus on stipends was welcome because the morale of clergy was essential to the mission and ministry of the church;
- 4.6.9 That there were a number of Diocesan Synod Motions that the General Synod may need to discuss in February;
- 4.7 Responding, the BISHOP OF SHEFFIELD noted that some standardisation of stipends could counter the drift of stipendiary posts to London and the South East. He encouraged dioceses to engage with the national giving team. He noted that the proposals would not be implemented until 2026 because they required Synod agreement and therefore that the Archbishops' Council was looking at options for shorter term support for clergy.
- 4.8 Staff added that the overall impact of the package for individual dioceses needed to be considered. Some elements might produce adverse distributional results – abolishing apportionment would disproportionately benefit wealthier dioceses – so other elements were designed to offset this, hence the idea that the ministry training fund contributions might be a function of both assets and numbers of clergy. However assessing wealth was difficult. There was often more opportunity for flexibility than appeared at first sight and the Charity Commission was open to proposals for engagement.
- 4.9 It was noted that in Europe chaplaincies pay stipends, not the diocese, in the same way as much of the Anglican Communion. There were advantages in terms of the relationship between the congregation and the minister.
- 4.10 The BISHOP OF CHESTER briefed the House on the work of the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board as a member, but not chair, of SMMIB. The Board had achieved much, but it raised many questions and the SMMIB was focused on learning and improving. The BISHOP OF KIRKSTALL, as a member of SMMIB, explained that there was no proforma and decision-making was dependent on diocesan proposals. Bids had been highly creative, encompassing missional design, wellbeing and other matters. The team were taking an increasingly relational approach recognising pressures on dioceses and were bringing learning from past projects to SMMIB. The Church Support Hub was now available to share that learning.
- 4.11 In discussion the following points were made:
- 4.11.1 The process of applying for funding from SMMIB was frustrating with multiple points of contact, unclear process, much paperwork and the criteria appeared to move. However once a grant had been made it had been very easy to work with and all investment had actually been in parish ministry;
- 4.11.2 Engagement had been a constructive process to refine the thinking about the mission – it was not about investment in new projects but supporting parishes in culture change;
- 4.11.3 That there was a perception that SMMIB was shifting resources from rural to urban ministry;

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- 4.11.4 That it was important for the team to listen to places where SMMIB had not worked and where it was felt that dioceses had not been listened to, especially rural dioceses. Where bids had been rejected this had caused huge damage;
- 4.11.5 That it took considerable diocesan time and energy to produce a bid and that dioceses lacked the capacity to do this;
- 4.11.6 That it was important that SMMIB became a genuine learning community;
- 4.11.7 That there were challenges around communications with dioceses and hard-pressed diocesan staff;
- 4.11.8 That it was important to resolve these issues before the Synod;
- 4.11.9 That there were theological tensions between the accountability for resources required with the subsidiarity of allowing diocesan investment in local priorities;
- 4.12 Responding the BISHOP OF CHESTER and BISHOP OF KIRKSTALL explained that the SMMIB was focused on learning and how to share that learning across dioceses and parishes. It was important dioceses understood the inconsistencies with how LInC funding was used. SMMIB was keen to support rural ministry and could offer capacity funding for dioceses to develop proposals. Staff explained that the principal programmes funded by SMMIB were parish revitalisation.
- 4.13 Closing this item the CHAIR thanked bishops and staff for the discussion, noted that the House was travelling in the right direction and had learned from the engagement, and asked staff and relevant bishops to take away the points raised in the discussion.
- 4.14 The House adjourned for midday prayer.

THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER IN THE CHAIR**5 TERMINALLY ILL ADULTS (END OF LIFE) BILL**

- 5.1 The BISHOP OF LONDON briefed the House on the work to respond to this Bill and welcomed the staff team. She explained that the proponents of the Bill were focused on local campaigning and engagement with MPs and it was therefore important that the Church did likewise. She had shared briefing and encouraged bishops to make contact with MPs using the draft letters and to encourage their clergy and churches to do likewise. There would be no national letter or statement for now; many letters would have more impact than one letter with a large number of signatories. The team would resource bishops to speak into local media. The debate was emotional and passionate and it was important for the Church to provide a forensic, evidence-based response to MPs that explained that:
- 5.1.1 Most people die well and that for those who do not the solution is better palliative care, only 25 per cent of which is funded through the NHS;
- 5.1.2 There are unintended consequences of such a change. Even in Oregon, which

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is thought to have the best legal framework, 43 per cent of those seeking assisted dying did so because they perceived they were a burden to families;

- 5.1.3 The most vulnerable did not have a choice – for seriously disabled people choices would be made for them;
- 5.1.4 All experience was that legislation could not create a secure framework.
- 5.2 In discussion the following points were made:
 - 5.2.1 That it may be helpful nearer the Second Reading debate on 29 November to have a letter from faith leaders, but not now;
 - 5.2.2 That the evidence from other countries was sobering and shocking;
 - 5.2.3 That it would be helpful for bishops to play a role in convening those who speak for the vulnerable locally;
 - 5.2.4 That it would be helpful to have a clear approach to how church-based proponents were responded to;
 - 5.2.5 That it was important to tell stories as well as respond forensically given that proponents were also telling stories to make their case;
 - 5.2.6 That it was important that bishops did not tell people what to think and curated the space that allowed for them to be trusted conversation partners;
 - 5.2.7 That the draft legislation had not yet been published;
 - 5.2.8 That proponents were seeking to legislate for a perfect world but that families, doctors, and Parliament may fail and the Church should draw attention to these real-world scenarios;
 - 5.2.9 That it was important to pray for and be pastoral with MPs and their staff who were dealing with such an emotive issue;
- 5.3 Responding, the BISHOP OF LONDON noted that not all people of faith have the same view, but that this was a matter on which the Church of England had a settled position through Synod debates. It was important to focus on challenging incorrect assertions made in the debate. Staff noted that the Bill would receive its Second Reading on 29 November and would be published before then. Indications were that it would focus on those who were UK resident over the age of 18, who were mentally capable, and who had been diagnosed as terminally ill and in the last 6 months of their life.

6 TRUST

- 6.1 The BISHOP OF ST EDMUNDSBURY AND IPSWICH briefed the House on the trust work that had been debated at the General Synod in July. The research was continuing and if any bishop would like to be interviewed they should identify themselves. There would be a further survey in January which would allow for a further update to Synod in February. The BISHOP OF PETERBOROUGH would take on this work after his retirement.

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7 SEAL OF THE CONFSSIONAL HB(24)32

- 7.1 The CHAIR explained that the purpose of the discussion was to enable the House to discern whether it wished to make a decision about mandatory reporting at this point, and if so, what such decision it considered was appropriate.
- 7.2 The BISHOP OF STEPNEY reported to the House as chair of the working group. The House had established the working group and it therefore fell to the House to decide what it wished to do. Since the initial discussion in May the group had consulted with the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC). The working group had said that the precise application of the recommendation on mandatory reporting would need to be framed in light of Government proposals but the new Government had yet to decide what it proposed to do. She also noted that four diocesan bishops were developing a proposal for training and licensing and that this was also being discussed in the charismatic tradition. But she noted that in such an area social work professionals, including those in the National Safeguarding Team and Diocesan Safeguarding Officers, would find it hard to work with this given their professional duties. She also advised that the House would need to consider publication of the report. Whatever it decided may need to be considered by the Archbishops' Council and, to the extent that it needed legislation, the General Synod.
- 7.3 Continuing REVD ISABELLE HAMLEY reflected on the theological work that had underpinned the report. It was hard to weigh up the question of whether change would improve the safety of children and vulnerable adults in the Church, and it was noted that whatever the Church did would send powerful signals to survivors, catholics, ecumenical partners and civil society. She encouraged the House not just to consider the report from an ideal perspective but from the reality of the human tendency to misuse and pervert, and how to manage risk within the reality of the human sinfulness. The practice did not exist in scripture and theology gave no specific answer but helped the House grapple with the issues.
- 7.4 The House reflected in groups on the questions of:
- 7.4.1 How important is the government's framing of its anticipated mandatory reporting legislation for the House's decision about the Seal of the Confessional ?
- 7.4.2 What can the House learn from taking forward the proposals about training and regulation of the Confessional and how could this help us to decide about the Seal ?
- 7.4.3 What is the feeling on the ground ? What views are members picking up from people around this subject ?
- 7.5 Feeding back from groups the following points were made:

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- 7.5.1 That it was important to have serious conversations with ecumenical partners, in particular the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches
- 7.5.2 That there was a risk that the greater good of the Confessional, which enabled matters to be brought to light, could be damaged;
- 7.5.3 That there were parallels with professional privilege in other professions;
- 7.5.4 That professionals would expect that where children and young people disclosed a problem to a responsible adult then action should be undertaken. It was therefore difficult to square the Seal with the Children Act and duties to put the welfare of a child first and duties to think of a young person's safety;
- 7.5.5 It was difficult to proceed in the absence of empirical evidence. In the absence of this it was not clear that breaking the Seal was more likely to protect children and young people than retaining it. The House should make its decisions on evidence, not perceptions, and with the paramount concern the protection of children and vulnerable adults;
- 7.5.6 The question was in part one of proportionality – there was a common desire to ensure abuse was brought to light and acted upon, but the question was whether breaking the Seal would lead to more or less disclosure – there was a case that proper use of the Confessional enabled greater management of the risks;
- 7.5.7 Given the difficulties of definition it may be wise to wait for the Government;
- 7.5.8 There was also the risk that abusers may feel that an absolution gives a continued license to abuse;
- 7.5.9 That it may be difficult to explain the House's position beyond the Church;
- 7.5.10 That there was a risk of unintended consequences, in particular into the use of the confessional around those close to death and the earlier debate on assisted dying;
- 7.5.11 That there were particular ways in which the Confessional was used, for example with those involved in security work, and there was a risk that this ministry would be damaged;
- 7.5.12 That there were questions about the use of the Confessional in areas that had less of a settled community and that it may be necessary to withhold absolution as part of the process of reconciliation;
- 7.6 The BISHOP OF BLACKBURN briefed the House on the work to develop a scheme for better training and regulation of the Confessional, building on the work of the Roman Catholic Church. He noted that there was a risk of driving the practice of hearing confessions underground. The proposals represented a common approach across four dioceses and had been developed with DSAs, DSAPs and with professional advisors:

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- 7.6.1 40 clergy had volunteered to join the project on the back of a letter defining what is the confessional;
- 7.6.2 In the New Year training will be run by professional advisors on how to hear confessions;
- 7.6.3 The diocesan bishop would give a license to hear confessions only to those clergy who had attended that training;
- 7.6.4 There would also be a penitents' charter so that penitents understood the issues and what they are engaging in;
- 7.6.5 Other ministers who have not been trained will be requested not to hear confessions;
- 7.6.6 The pilot would run for three years and then be subject to external assessment.
- 7.7 He hoped that this would allow the ministry of confession to be done better, and for the grace of God to flow.
- 7.8 The BISHOP OF STEPNEY was grateful for the contributions to the debate and noted that it was hard to weigh the benefits of the Seal against the harm to individuals, but still recommended that the House should agree to a form of mandatory reporting. REVD ISABELLE HAMLEY explained that ecumenical conversations had been undertaken as part of the work, including with groups who had other views such as the Methodists. It was important to understand that some offenders used confession as a disinhibitor that, through providing a safe space to talk, permissioned their ongoing offence.
- 7.9 The Director of the National Safeguarding Team noted that the professional advice of the NST would always be to take opportunities to prevent abuse. Since 2019 social workers in England had been subject to professional standards that required them – as set out in HB(24)32 – to report allegations and raise concerns of unsafe practices, and failure of social workers in the Church to observe these would lead to professional deregistration. There was no evidence that the Confessional was being misused in this way, but the principle of always taking action to protect children applied.
- 7.10 The BISHOP OF GIBRALTAR IN EUROPE confirmed that FAOC had reviewed the report and had no comments on the theology. It was not FAOC's job to decide on the recommendations.
- 7.11 Summing up the CHAIR noted that this had been a helpful, reflective and careful conversation. The House prayed. The House DECIDED not to move to a decision on mandatory reporting at this point but to defer such a decision with no members in favour of making a decision at this point and one abstention.

8 SAFEGUARDING: OTHER UPDATES

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- 8.1 The CHAIR briefed the House that the redress project had last week approved the tariff for levels of award. This would now need to be enshrined in the Measure. The scheme was on track to go live in 2025.
- 8.2 The Director of the National Safeguarding Team briefed the House that he had received the Makin Report into the abuse committed by John Smyth on Friday. Victims and survivors had been notified, as had relevant governance bodies. In line with victims and survivors' wishes there would be opportunities to read it privately before it was published at midday on November 13. The House PRAYED for victims and survivors, particularly in relation to this report.

9 SAFEGUARDING RISK ASSESSMENTS HB(24)33

- 9.1 The CHAIR explained that this item had been proposed by the Bishop of Blackburn in light of the File on Four report that highlighted the harm to survivors as well as the expense and damage caused through the process. The question for the House to consider is whether to accept the proposal "The House of Bishops mandates the National Safeguarding Team to revisit the recommendations made at paragraphs 30-41 of GS1941 and, working alongside the Legal Office, bring to General Synod within twelve months legislative proposals that would give a bishop or tribunal the power to remove a cleric from office if a professional risk assessment concluded there was a safeguarding risk".
- 9.2 The BISHOP OF BLACKBURN explained that the proposal centred on the status of independent safeguarding risk assessments. Where these showed a risk the bishop had often no power to act to remove a clergyperson from office. There were wider questions about clergy terms and conditions, but the two processes suggested in the paper for dealing with this – the capability process and restriction orders – were unsatisfactory. The proposal was accordingly for a new process – if there was shown to be a risk then a tribunal could be called to make a decision. This may appear expensive but, based on experiences in Blackburn, could be cheaper in the long run.
- 9.3 Continuing, the Chief Legal Advisor ALEXANDER MCGREGOR explained that the Blackburn case had been pastorally and legally challenging. As it stands a bishop can direct that a risk assessment is undertaken but has no enforceable duty to act on it. This was a conscious decision of the General Synod in 2014. The capability process was not widely used, partly because dioceses lacked the resource and expertise to use this. The restriction and suspension powers in the new Clergy Conduct Measure were not created in response to safeguarding requirements but non-compliance with those would be an offence. If the House did wish to allow clergy to be removed from office if there was a safeguarding risk that could not be managed, that would need a proper judicial procedure that assured all parties it was

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impartial and compliant with human rights law. He noted that such a decision would be undertaken on the basis of risk, not of any wrongdoing that had been committed.

- 9.4 In discussion the following points were made:
- 9.4.1 That it was possible to use the capability procedures, but they were time-consuming and slow and it may be better to consider improvements to this process;
 - 9.4.2 That it would be necessary in time to look at the broader question of clergy terms and conditions. There were unresolved issues about human resources policies and services for clergy and how these might overlap with questions of conduct;
 - 9.4.3 There were some restrictions on a role that would cast into doubt whether the clergyperson could perform their role at all;
 - 9.4.4 That a risk assessment could only ever identify options for managing, not eliminating, risks. The Church already acted on risk assessments in considering whether to authorise permission to officiate on return to ministry;
 - 9.4.5 Other professional services – such as hospitals – were able to take action on the back of a risk assessment and the Church was out of line with this. There were opportunities to learn from other professions, such as the work of the Teachers Regulation Authority;
 - 9.4.6 It would be important that such processes were swift as well as fair, and acknowledged that there were variabilities in the qualities of the risk assessments;
 - 9.4.7 It would be important to explore the detailed arrangements, including how best to ensure that tribunals rather than individuals made decisions, the length of any prohibition, the interaction with the Disclosure and Barring Service;
 - 9.4.8 There was a risk of making over-optimistic assumptions about how individuals might change their behaviour;
 - 9.4.9 It would be important to think about how to frame such a proposal positively so that clergy were engaged and saw the benefits of such a system.
- 9.5 Responding to the feedback, the Chair suggested, with the agreement of the BISHOP OF BLACKBURN, that the proposal might be alternatively framed as “The House of Bishops mandates the National Safeguarding Team to revisit the recommendations made at paragraphs 30-41 of GS1941 and, working alongside the Legal Office, bring to the House of Bishops within twelve months proposals that would give a tribunal the power to remove a cleric from office if a professional risk assessment concluded there was a significant safeguarding risk”. The House AGREED unanimously in favour of this proposal.

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9.6 The House ADJOURNED for the Eucharist.

THE BISHOP OF LONDON IN THE CHAIR

10 LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH HB(24)34

- 10.1 After Morning Prayer and introducing the discussion, the ARCHBISHOP OF YORK drew attention to the pain that the current situation caused – the House longed for the same thing but had profound difference on how best to achieve this, including on how best to live with the disagreements. For some the changes were just a prayer that fell far short of what they wanted and therefore could not understand why provision might be needed. For others a Rubicon had already been crossed and that this signalled a trajectory to a particular conclusion. It was therefore particularly important to listen to each other and to create spaces that would require all to give some things for the good of the Church in which all could flourish.
- 10.2 Continuing the BISHOP OF LEICESTER drew to the attention of the House the letters from the Alliance and Together networks that had been circulated to the House. Both groups had articulated their concerns that the House was not listening to them nor understanding them, and feelings were strong. The House was standing in the broken middle. The aim of today's discussion was to think through what might be said in the Bishops' Statement and Code of Practice to provide the right levels of reassurance that would enable large groups to remain within the Church of England, so that the working groups could have some parameters to work with.
- 10.3 The BISHOP OF TAUNTON reported on progress in the Prayers of Love and Faith working group, noting there were still concerns on what standalone services might mean for doctrine and legally. The emerging proposal was a process that enabled parishes to choose to opt into stand alone services alongside a process to choose to opt into reassurance. This would be tested over a three-year period. Some dioceses might be able to offer provision from within the diocese; others would require provision to be offered from a broader area.
- 10.4 Staff explained that the draft Bishops' Statement drew on past work and identified the elements that it was thought might needed to be covered as a commitment from the bishops to the church and each other. The Code of Practice would then set out the detail.
- 10.5 In initial discussion the following points were raised:
- 10.5.1 That there were concerns about the process for clergy in same-sex marriage given that there were clergy already in such marriages;
- 10.5.2 That the language on oversight, rather than the House's decision for specific and defined episcopal ministry, needed attention;
- 10.5.3 That it was important that the work on reassurance did not get fragmented

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across multiple groups;

- 10.5.4 That the House needed to acknowledge that some bishops would not be able to sign up to a statement and there were profound differences between bishops that could not easily be bridged;
- 10.5.5 That a significant number of bishops had expressed disquiet in General Synod with the direction of travel. It was not possible to write the Statement before the House had resolved on the destination. It would be better to conduct this through a B 2 process, otherwise the House was giving support to those who thought the House was not following the rules;
- 10.6 The House ADJOURNED for 15 minutes to consider prayerfully the best way of conducting the discussion before working in groups to consider the draft Bishops' Statement and Code of Practice in the paper HB(24)34.
- 10.7 Reflecting on the theological work, the BISHOP OF GIBRALTAR IN EUROPE noted that theology can help expand the areas of agreement. The Episcopal Reference Group to FAOC had been remitted by the General Synod to consider work on the nature of doctrine and marriage. To this had been added work from the LLF programme board on the nature of clergy in same-sex marriage. This would be brought together into a coherent whole for July 2025. Questions of ecclesiology and missiology would then need to be integrated into the work in 2025. The BISHOP OF LEICESTER explained that this work would equip the House in December to make a decision as to what timetable it wished to work towards.
- 10.8 Theological advisors briefed the House on the work on doctrine including what constitutes doctrine, whether and how it develops over time and at what point there is a change in doctrine. This included work on Canon B 30 and the question of whether something changed the nature of marriage, or allowed more exceptions to reflect the outworking in human life. They briefed the House on the analysis of marriage and how over time there had been changes in the emphasis of different elements of marriage (eg the emphasis on love rather than mystical union; the role of family life as opposed to procreation). He was considering questions raised by the College of Bishops including the power relationships within marriage, the blessing marriage might provide to society, the differences between Holy Matrimony and civil marriage, and the weight given to teaching on marriage as an indicator of orthodoxy.
- 10.9 He shared the group's preliminary analysis of the Prayers of Love and Faith that because they do not describe the relationship as forging a union and include no element of giving consent through mutual promises, there was a good theological argument that the prayers did not represent a departure from doctrine theologically.
- 10.10 In discussion members thanked the ERG and staff for the work, encouraged the group to reflect on questions of sexual intimacy and contextual

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aesthetics, and looked forward to the further discussions.

THE BISHOP OF GUILDFORD IN THE CHAIR

11 CROWN NOMINATIONS COMMISSION HB(24)36

- 11.1 The BISHOP OF LONDON briefed the House on the further work undertaken since the meeting in September. Further consultation, including with central members of the Crown Nominations Commission, was now under way with a view to bringing proposals to the General Synod in February via the Standing Orders Committee. Those proposals would be separate amendments but the group also wished to emphasise the importance of the proposals on pastoral support for members and the longer-term review, neither of which required changes to the Standing Orders at this point.
- 11.2 Members asked if the longer-term work would consider arrangements for by-elections where one member of a pair could no longer stand and on future scheduling of CNC meetings.

12 CLERGY FILES ETC HB(24)35

- 12.1 MARGARET CAVE briefed the House on the project on Clergy Files, formerly known as Blue Files. This work is important for safeguarding, safer recruitment and to underpin the National Clergy Register, and would respond to two recommendations from the Past Cases Review 2 work. The work also includes a pilot digitisation project. The work on the Clergy File policy, associated guidance, retention policy and privacy notice has taken longer than anticipated because of the need for it to be fit for purpose for hard files and digital files and will be brought to the House in May 2025 for final approval. The proposed final CCSL template attached to the paper reflected feedback from the pilot and comes to the House for approval with one outstanding question of whether the suffragan bishop must consult their diocesan bishop or note.
- 12.2 Staff presented on the pilot digitalisation project. The project intends to pilot a system which provides secure, controlled access, mitigates the risk of loss of information and enables clergy licensed in multiple dioceses to be managed effectively. The working group of staff supported by chaplains have developed proposals. It was noted that it would be a huge project to take across all Clergy Files and part of the pilot project will be to consider how this might work and be staged.
- 12.3 Bishops strongly welcomed the overall direction of the work and in discussion made the following points:
- 12.3.1 That it was impossible in practice for diocesan bishops to sign all CCSLs;
- 12.3.2 That it was important to establish clear ownership for ~Clergy Files where clergy have licenses in multiple dioceses;

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- 12.3.3 That there was an issue for CCSLs for clergy not moving to licensed roles, for example mission agencies;
- 12.3.4 That it was important to consider the question at point 9 about whether the bishop was approving a curate as being ready for incumbency. There was some evidence of curates using this as a loophole to secure roles in other dioceses despite concerns.
- 12.3.5 That it was important to consider the magnitude of the task of slimming down clergy files;
- 12.4 Following discussion, bishops agreed that the CCSL template should be amended to include not only evidence of the senior safeguarding training but also evidence of domestic abuse and safer recruitment training.
- 12.5 Responding, MARGARET CAVE noted these points and agreed to arrange for the CCSL to be amended as discussed. She was grateful for the encouragement on the direction of travel with the project.
- 12.6 The House AGREED with the draft CCSL template subject to amending the question at paragraph 6 so that whether the diocesan bishop needs to sign off a CCSL is in line with the scheme of delegation in that diocese, and delegated to MARGARET CAVE responsibility for finalising the CCSL template and guidance in light of the discussion.

13 CHALLENGES FOR MINISTRY TO THOSE IN LOWER SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS HB(24)37

- 13.1 The BISHOP OF CHESTER introduced the work, reminding the House of the *Let Justice Roll* report and noting that the House had unconscious biases including on class. The Church of England had an extraordinarily middle-class culture. The purpose of this discussion was to open up a conversation on nurturing ministry on behalf of the Ministry Development Board.
- 13.2 Continuing, staff explained that the research showed that those from a professional background are over-represented among ordinands and highlighted as potential issues the dominant academic paradigm in IME1; the financial stress; personal disconnection from the culture of the Church of England; linguistic usage that “othered” those from working class backgrounds; and presumptions about limitations on deployment.
- 13.3 The House reflected in groups and then in plenary on the questions set out in HB(24)37:
- 13.3.1 The House agreed that the issues raised in the report resonated with their experiences
- 13.3.2 On the question of the priorities, challenges and questions raised by reflection on the socio-economic diversity of the Church, members noted that the questions of assumptions made about capacity to finance activity

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were important; that the presence of vibrant ministry in working class areas was important to challenging assumptions (some richer deaneries had considerably more ministry than poorer deaneries); that it was important to set an agenda that reflected working-class concerns; that it may be possible to separate the educational and social formation of clergy so that could continue to be equipped with educational capability, but with less of the traditional social formation; that it was important not just to tend to the challenges of the working class but to challenge the structures of society that created space for the underlying issues to emerge; that social mobility by exception is un-Christian.

13.3.3 On the question of experiences of working to encourage, develop and nurture socio-economic diversity, members noted the importance of relational ministry; of intentionality; of accompaniment; of attending to stories and not prejudging;

13.3.4 On the question of key issues, particularly theological issues, under consideration, members noted that the relative roles of academic theology and relational discipleship may need to be reconsidered, that the heart of those from lower socio-economic groups for renewing, restoring and rebuilding the country was relevant, and that the dignity of all human beings was sensible.

13.4 The House AGREED it would like to return to these issues in more detail, asking staff to consider whether it could be done through bringing in voices from those of working class backgrounds.

13.5 The BISHOP OF CHESTER thanked the House for their engagement.

14 CLOSE

14.1 The Chair thanked chaplains and staff, thanked the Bishop of Crediton for her service to the House, and closed the meeting in prayer.

SECRETARIAT

24 October 2024