

HOUSE OF BISHOPS

**A meeting of the House of Bishops was held at Methodist
Central Hall on 20 January 2025**

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

- 1.1 Following opening worship led by the chaplains the CHAIR opened the meeting. She noted that this was the first meeting of the House in person since the publication of the Makin review and the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. She led the House in prayer for victims and survivors of Church-based abuse, and for the work of the Church of England and its clergy and lay leaders. She noted that the College was meeting next week to address relational matters.
- 1.2 Apologies had been received from the Bishops of Croydon, Hereford, Leeds, Newcastle, Huddersfield, Southwark, Warrington, Kirkstall and Assistant Bishop in Lichfield.
- 1.3 The minutes of the December meeting HB(25)M8 were approved.

2 STANDING ORDER 14

- 2.1 The CHAIR moved that the House meet as a Committee of the Whole House under Standing Order 14. The House AGREED, with three votes against and five abstentions to meet as a Committee of the Whole House under Standing Order 14.

3 WORK OF THE RESPONSE GROUP HB(25)01

- 3.1 The ARCHBISHOP OF YORK emphasised the importance of doing things differently in light of Makin, and demonstrating that the Church had changed. There were opportunities to make the governance of the Church of England more joined up, to use the new Clergy Conduct Measure to drive better case handling, and to demonstrate accountability and transparency. Many issues were not safeguarding issues but issues of conduct that should be managed through conventional Human Resources processes.
- 3.2 Continuing, he encouraged the House to reflect on what it expected from the new Archbishop of Canterbury, and offered reflections on how he had sought to respond to questions about his handling of the Tudor case in an undefended way.
- 3.3 The BISHOP OF LONDON explained that the Response Group to coordinate the response of the Church to the events since the publication of the Makin review and the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury continued to meet weekly. It considered at each meeting its membership, support for victims and survivors, the response to the Makin review, issues arising from the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, communications and risks. This would be replaced by Candlemas by a more strategic group that would include

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representatives from the House, the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners.

- 3.4 The case review process was well under way with independent professional support and she continued to hope that the work would be complete by the General Synod. The work raised questions of accountability and responsibility, whether for dealing with behavioural issues the Clergy Conduct Measure process was sufficient, and on who led in the Church between the Archbishops' Council, House of Bishops and Church Commissioners. She emphasised the importance of developing relationships within the House especially when members disagreed. And, as a people of hope, she reminded the House that many parishes will have had a good Christmas and it was therefore important for the Church to pay attention to what God was saying through current events.
- 3.5 In discussion the following points were made:
- 3.5.1 The House should be aware that the Redress Project Board, advised by survivors, had decided to do more work on the design of the scheme in light of the Makin review and come back to the General Synod in July;
- 3.5.2 It was important to have a clearer process for establishing independent reviews, especially given the cost of Makin;
- 3.5.3 Transparency of the work of the Response Group, and how people were appointed to it and other groups, was essential;
- 3.5.4 The process for reinstatement of those for whom permission to officiate (PTO) had been withdrawn needed to be objective and clear;
- 3.5.5 There was work to be done on individual and corporate responsibilities;
- 3.5.6 There were still questions to be answered in the Tudor case, including around the renewal of his term as Area Dean;
- 3.5.7 It would be important for communications to be proactive and imaginative;
- 3.5.8 The rebuilding of trust would be enhanced by greater transparency, including of the work of the Response Group;
- 3.5.9 The case reviews would focus on the new information identified in the Makin review about the abuse by Smyth and the subsequent cover-up. This raised questions about what happened in relation to information that had already been in the public domain;
- 3.5.10 That a climate of fear and blame was unhealthy for safeguarding;
- 3.5.11 That it was important to be clear on the consequences of failing to follow process, for example under the new managing allegations policy;
- 3.5.12 The data on the performance of the current safeguarding system from the reviews undertaken by Ineqe needed to form part of the evidence base;
- 3.5.13 That the House needed to give a pastoral response to the Church of England to Makin including repentance and prayer. Parishes were looking for spiritual

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- leadership and the Church could pray in repentance for humbling and grace;
- 3.5.14 That the Church would need to reflect on the Makin review and understand its assessment of the work and its implications;
- 3.5.15 There were challenges for bishops as they faced personal attacks and behaviour on social media which could be regarded as bullying;
- 3.5.16 The rationale for proceeding towards greater independence needed to be considered carefully;
- 3.5.17 That it was important to counter the public narrative that the former Archbishop of Canterbury had been engaged in the abuse;
- 3.6 Responding the BISHOP OF LONDON noted that:
- 3.6.1 It was important to set up robust response arrangements before crises akin to GOLD arrangements at national and local government;
- 3.6.2 It was important to demonstrate consistency of actions and to do so on the basis of risk assessment.
- 3.6.3 On communications, the Church did not have a corporate view on many issues and it had been telling that many bishops had been unwilling to speak into the debate. The Response Group was considering a more proactive and forward-looking communications approach;
- 3.7 Continuing ALEXANDER KUBEYINJE (DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL SAFEGUARDING TEAM) reminded the House of the four-stage review process, which needed to be assessed against the legislation in force at the time, and that the Code of Practice on Safeguarding Practice Reviews would improve the quality of reviews in future. Once stage 4 had been concluded the National Safeguarding Team would write to those criticised, their DSO/As and the relevant bishop and then be public and transparent on the decisions made and why. A review had been commissioned on learning the lessons from the Tudor case. WILLIAM NYE (SECRETARY GENERAL) agreed to send a note on appointments, particularly to the House of Bishops Standing Committee. ALEXANDER MCGREGOR (CHIEF LEGAL ADVISOR) explained that the Church Commissioners had a discretionary power to support bishops with legal costs but there was no power to provide support to retired bishops.
- 3.8 The BISHOP OF STEPNEY (Lead Bishop for Safeguarding) reminded the House that work had already been done on the recommendations of the Makin review. A provisional report would be taken to the National Safeguarding Steering Group this week. But it was important not to respond without the input of victims and survivors. The draft Synod paper on Future of Church Safeguarding had been shared with the House and she would welcome feedback to the jayresponse@churchofengland.org address. She reported on the meeting with the Charity Commission who had explained the seriousness of the situation and their willingness to act. She would present a balanced picture

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to the Synod. The General Synod would have before it a motion for model 4 but she would welcome an amendment to enable it to consider 3 so that the General Synod could own the way forward. She briefed the House on the communications plan.

- 3.9 She noted that the audits had highlighted inconsistencies between dioceses and that the final version of the paper would include more on the financial impacts, though the true cost of safeguarding in the current system was not clear. She also noted that the costs of safeguarding failures for the Church were high, both financially and in reputation terms.
- 3.10 The BISHOP OF LONDON and HANNAH HOWARD (DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS) reassured the House that the Response Group was coordinating communications, but the media were not yet wanting to hear positive stories from the Church. The media advisory circulated to bishops and others on Fridays provided key talking points and bishops were encouraged to contact the communications team in the event of any approach from the media.
- 3.11 Concluding, the House was reminded of the importance of being trauma-informed in all it did and to be open to hearing the hard things it needed to hear. Summing up the CHAIR REMINDED the House to have victims and survivors at the heart of their response, THANKED national and local safeguarding teams for their work, THANKED the Bishops of London and Stepney for their response, and AGREED to carry forward the relational matters to the College meeting the following week.

4 **STANDING COMMISSION ON THE FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES** **HB(25)02/03**

- 4.1 Introducing the papers, the BISHOP OF LICHFIELD reminded the House that the Commission was a Committee of the House of Bishops. The first paper related to the report of the Independent Reviewer in March 2024. This was the first such report from the Independent Reviewer since the establishment of the Standing Commission and made four recommendations. He sought the House's engagement on the paper, and with the recommendations, and agreement to use a public statement along the lines of that suggested at paragraph 20. In his view the actions proposed in paper HB(25)02 were a proportionate response to the questions raised by the Independent Reviewer.
- 4.2 In discussion the following points were made:
- 4.2.1 The proposal for theological reflection on impairment, including on what it means to be a Church that embeds impaired communion within its structures, was a helpful way of phrasing the question that did not make women a problem – the issues were for all bishops. But it was important to allow time for the theological work to be done properly;
- 4.2.2 It was important not to unpick the Declaration – the proposals reflected a deep and wise conversation;

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- 4.2.3 In considering the specific case the Independent Reviewer had acted beyond her remit;
- 4.2.4 It was important for there to be joined-up thinking on the ecclesiology of the Church of England and the role of a shared episcopate;
- 4.2.5 Women's perspectives on mutual flourishing varied, with some thinking that it was working well at present
- 4.3 The BISHOP IN EUROPE, as chair of the Faith and Order Commission, noted that FAOC had agreed to undertake further work on episcopacy, including ecumenical reflections. He noted that considerable theological work had been undertaken in this space but the gap was around the pastoral issues.
- 4.4 The House AGREED following the discussion of the recommendations of the Independent Reviewer:
 - 4.4.1 To commission more theological work on the appointment of diocesan bishops with some sacramental impairment;
 - 4.4.2 To ask the Standing Commission to undertake further work on the pastoral implications of appointments of diocesan bishops; and
 - 4.4.3 The draft public response to the report.
- 4.5 Continuing the BISHOP OF LICHFIELD introduced the proposals for diocesan plans in HB(25)03. This was designed to help bishops think through the patterns of episcopal ministry, and drew from evidence from a visit to the Diocese of London. The proposal would request each diocese to have a plan in place by July 2026 following the framework set out in the annex.
- 4.6 The House considered the proposal carefully, noting the following points:
 - 4.6.1 That this was being developed in parallel with the emerging proposals from the Living in Love and Faith work for delegated episcopal ministry on a regional basis, and it was important that the work understood that some parishes were refusing to engage with dioceses on the basis of perceived theological convictions around use of the Prayers of Love and Faith;
 - 4.6.2 That dioceses were very different with different cultures. A single framework could be excessively regulatory or a disproportionate response for those dioceses where only a small number of parishes were under alternative oversight;
 - 4.6.3 That it would be better to resolve matters of trust through relationships rather than formal structures. The new generation of Provincial Episcopal Visitors were sharing in episcopal leadership through trust rather than structural solutions. Institutionalising provision in this way could be unhelpful and would not lead to mutual flourishing;
 - 4.6.4 That the defence to parishes who complained of subjectivity in their treatment was clarity of position and a bespoke plan for each diocese would

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be helpful. Different dioceses received the ministry of Provincial Episcopal Visitors in different ways and clarity over that would help their mission.

- 4.7 In response to questions the BISHOP OF LICHFIELD explained that the request to produce a plan would not be a duty and dioceses would not be expected to follow the pattern of the London Plan. The plan would be a framework within which the relationships that were baked into the work of the Commission could then operate, delivering consistency.
- 4.8 There were 12 votes in favour of the proposal, 16 against and 7 abstentions. Accordingly the House DECIDED against asking dioceses, at this stage, to design and implement diocesan plans along the lines of the guidelines in the paper by July 2026. The House recognised the importance of developing relationships in establishing how this ministry was delivered, and the need to think further about timing given the emerging proposals around Living in Love and Faith.
- 4.9 The House broke for Midday Prayer, led by chaplains, and fellowship over lunch.

THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER IN THE CHAIR

5 LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH HB(25)04

- 5.1 The BISHOP OF LEICESTER introduced the papers containing the draft report to the General Synod. Some had asked him to stop the process, particularly during a vacancy in the See of Canterbury. Some had asked him to slow down the process until all aspects were agreed. His message was that the House should stick to the process and aim to bring a package of prayers for use in bespoke services, guidance and arrangements for pastoral reassurance to the July 2025 General Synod.
- 5.2 He explained that the proposals included a detailed specification for Delegated Episcopal Ministry (DEM). There was no unanimous agreement to either the principle or detail, and this was explained in the commentary. However he had been struck by the level of engagement with the proposal even for those for whom the proposal was insufficient. The theological undergirding for this would be ready for May.
- 5.3 The plan was for a presentation to the General Synod with questions. Then dioceses would be consulted with a view to gathering feedback on the practicalities, rather than a vote. He hoped there would be an additional meeting of the College before the House met in May to enable a wider set of episcopal voices to be heard. The proposals were not perfect. Some argued that the need for structural provision as envisaged in DEM was unnecessary and this could be managed by relationship alone. However, given the scale of the division and the Gospel imperative of reconciliation in his judgment formal provision would be necessary to support this.
- 5.4 The BISHOP IN EUROPE, as Chair of the Faith and Order Commission,

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introduced the theological materials. These included the nine theses on the doctrine of marriage which had now been endorsed by the Episcopal Reference Group, and a 300-page compendium of sources. These identified a stable core to the doctrine of marriage over time. The work so far had reached the point that the text of the Prayers of Love and Faith were consistent with the doctrine of marriage, but that the context for such prayers mattered and could raise doctrinal matters, especially in the context of bespoke services, and therefore this would need wider engagement across the Commission. The proposals for DEM had not yet been scrutinised but now would be, and the work on the Prayers of Love and Faith would be complete for May.

- 5.5 Continuing he explained that the thinking on the doctrine of marriage would inform the discussion on whether clergy should be permitted to enter into same-sex marriages. The nine theses paper would be issued as a GS Misc for the General Synod. At this stage it was not clear that the argument that there was a distinction between civil marriage and holy matrimony was sustainable since both were marriages.
- 5.6 The House THANKED Jessica Martin and Tom Woolford for their contribution to this work.
- 5.7 In discussion the following points were made:
- 5.7.1 It was important to consider what an apology to LGBTQI+ people would look like;
- 5.7.2 The proposal for DEM would not work in some parts of the country where there were not recognised regional structures such as London and the South East. In other parts of the country it might work in practice, but made no logical sense;
- 5.7.3 That there remained insufficient consensus to provide a basis for proceeding. The only way to deliver such a consensus was through a liturgical approval process under Canon B 2;
- 5.7.4 The proposals raised questions of the ecclesiology of the Church of England. If parishes could choose the bishop from whom they sought pastoral oversight on the basis of whether to use the prayers that raised questions which may lead to further fragmentation and evolution;
- 5.7.5 The proposals for a shared *episcope* in a regional college may be helpful;
- 5.7.6 That there was demand for the full package – including the provisions to allow the clergy to enter into same-sex marriages and the bishops’ statement – to be kept together;
- 5.7.7 That the arrangements under which a parish might seek DEM needed further work to reduce inconsistency and decisions less on theological difference than on the relationship with the bishops;

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- 5.7.8 That the proposal for DEM required further theological and ecclesiological consideration and examination. It ran the risk of being a practical solution without any underpinning theological thought;
- 5.7.9 That the question of the position of ordinands in same-sex marriages was now pressing;
- 5.7.10 That there was a risk of offering a blessing that did not feel like a blessing and left clergy with less discretion than now;
- 5.7.11 That if trust in bishops was high and parishes were in a stable position it might be possible to introduce DEM without formal arrangements, but in the current environment a more structured provision was needed – but at the moment it may be too much for dioceses to bear;
- 5.7.12 That there was a case for being open with the General Synod that the House was wrestling with the issues raised by the topic. It was important to continue to show the House’s workings;
- 5.7.13 Some regions had begun to think through the issues and thought that DEM could work – but that it might be more relational than formal;
- 5.7.14 There was a risk that the scale of the crisis – in vocations, in trust, for the reputation of the Church – was not properly understood with a consequent impact on the mission of the Church. The best way of restoring trust and confidence was to stick to established processes;
- 5.8 The House was reminded that the test for any new liturgical material to be commended by the House was, under Canon B 5.3 that “All variations in forms of service and all forms of service used under this Canon shall be reverent and seemly and shall be neither contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter”.
- 5.9 The House received a proposal that delivering the package for the July Synod was now overambitious. It would be better to refer the proposals to dioceses in July and bring back to the General Synod in 2026. Some work, in particular that on permitting clergy to enter same-sex marriages, was insufficiently mature at this stage. It would be wiser not to introduce DEM until the arrangements for permitting clergy to enter into same-sex marriages were resolved. The House was reminded that the published Outline of Business for the General Synod included time for a presentation and questions, not a decision, and that the papers for General Synod would be published on Thursday 23 January.
- 5.10 Responding, the BISHOP OF LEICESTER noted the risks of telling stakeholders and the General Synod that the House of Bishops had changed its mind again, fearing the consequences for trust. He was confident the House would have enough material, in particular on the theology, to make a decision on the way forward in May. He encouraged

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the House not to overplay the significance of DEM – it involved a theology of partnership and how to do shared episcopacy. The BISHOP IN EUROPE reminded the House that it would not have the ecclesiological thinking on DEM by May.

- 5.11 The CHIEF LEGAL ADVISOR reminded the House that the approval of forms of service cannot change doctrine – they must conform to existing doctrine, and that there is no single specific mechanism for changing doctrine but the courts have held that doctrine can be affected or changed by legislation.
- 5.12 The House discussed the two timetables, reflecting on the pros and cons including the views of stakeholders. The House DECIDED in favour of the alternative proposal that there would be a report to the General Synod in February, a further report in July, that there would be consultations with dioceses, before proposals incorporating a way forward on clergy and same-sex marriage would be brought together for February. The House AGREED that this revised timetable should be communicated through the post-meeting press notice. ACTION: Hannah Howard: [completed: [House of Bishops meeting – January 2025 | The Church of England](#)]

6 CROWN NOMINATIONS COMMISSION: UPDATE: HB(25)07

- 6.1 The BISHOP OF LONDON briefed the House on progress. There had been a request for the House to meet to consider options for the Crown Nominations Commission. It had done so in September. Since then there had been consultation with the central members of the CNC. Not all proposals found support with the central members. The proposals would now be taken to the General Synod in February.

7 TRIENNIUM FUNDING WORKING GROUP AND DIOCESAN FINANCES REVIEW: HB(25)05/06

- 7.1 CARL HUGHES (Chair of the Archbishops' Council Finance Committee) and ROSIE SLATER-CARR (Chief Operating Officer, Church of England Central Services) joined the House.
- 7.2 The BISHOP OF LONDON explained that the Triennium Funding Working Group was attempting to bring together proposals for future financial plans. At this point it was in receipt of bids worth £2.1 billion in comparison with resources available of £1.3 billion, so tough decisions would be required. She sought the engagement of the House on the questions of prioritisation and encouraged the House to think creatively about the differences between one-off and long-term resource commitments.
- 7.3 Continuing, ROSIE SLATER-CARR explained that the Bishops of London, Salisbury, Sheffield, Chester and Oxford represented the House on the Triennium Funding Working Group and encouraged members to complete the online survey. She reminded the House that returns on investments

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since 2021 had been lower than previously and therefore it was unlikely that the Church Commissioners would be able to provide a further significant uplift in resources and therefore prioritisation was required.

- 7.4 In discussion the following points were noted in relation to the Diocesan Finances Review:
- 7.4.1 That although the proposals offered a useful simplification, they would only help dioceses for a couple of years;
 - 7.4.2 That although an increase in the stipend was the right decision, it would mean that dioceses could afford fewer clergy and it was important to understand how many fewer they would be;
 - 7.4.3 That the proposals did not offer a substantial transfer of resources to dioceses and instead, through relying on the Diocesan Investment Programme, represented a centralisation of funding;
 - 7.4.4 That there was a risk that diocesan finances were dependent on the effectiveness of the diocese in negotiation with the centre;
 - 7.4.5 The output for each diocese was different and clarity on individual impacts was needed;
 - 7.4.6 That the shortage of numbers of clergy meant there was increasingly a supply-side problem rather than demand side. Accordingly an increase in stipends could enhance wellbeing and create a supply-side response;
 - 7.4.7 There continued to be great need in rural communities for ministry and support;
- 7.5 CARL HUGHES reminded the House that dioceses faced underlying deficits of £50 million. The proposals, incorporating the additional time-limited support proposed, would reduce this and give time for dioceses to grow attendance and giving through effective mission. The stipend increases had been modelled and, in the round, and assuming the package was funded in full, should not lead to further reductions in clergy. The Hereford motion was not the right way forward because it did not address the underlying financial weaknesses in dioceses and reduced the Church's ability to provide support in future. The BISHOP OF BATH AND WELLS would present this motion in the General Synod and the First Church Estates Commissioner would respond.
- 7.6 Commenting on the overall priorities for the Triennium Funding Working Group, bishops noted that:
- 7.6.1 The priorities should be stipends, Lower Income Communities Funding and diocesan funding;
 - 7.6.2 That there was evidence of good impact for funding by the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board but that it needed to demonstrate it was supporting and nurturing the parish system, including in rural areas;

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- 7.6.3 That it was important to remember that investment took time to deliver results;
- 7.6.4 There was work under way to consider the requirements of the Theological Education Institution sector, both in the short and medium terms;
- 7.6.5 That there was a risk of continuing with a more narrow and outdated understanding of mission rather than incorporating social justice within mission;
- 7.6.6 That net zero should not be regarded as a separate issue but as resources that helped buildings to be fit for mission and support sustainability, together with helping relationships within the Anglican Communion;
- 7.7 Responding, CARL HUGHES noted that there was a need to improve communications around the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board because of misunderstanding. The bulk of its investment had been in parishes for growth, including in rural parishes. Nevertheless it was important for the church to pay attention to where the population was. Evidence was clear that intentional investment delivered the best results rather than general funding.
- 7.8 Continuing the BISHOP OF LONDON said that members of the House on the Triennium Funding Working Group would have heard the messages and encouraged the completion of the survey. She reminded the House that the Triennium Funding Review could not of its own solve all the challenges of the Church of England.

8 CLOSE

- 8.1 The Chair thanked the BISHOP OF ST EDMUNDSBURY AND IPSWICH for his service to the House.
- 8.2 The chaplains concluded the meeting in prayer and worship.

SECRETARIAT

28 January 2025