

1 Respect for lawful office-holders

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;

The Church of England is committed to admitting women to all orders of ministry, but this does not require its members to agree with the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate.

The distinction between office (diocesan bishop, archdeacon, incumbent) and order (bishop, priest, deacon) is important. If someone has been appointed to an office by due legal process, that office is not vacant. It is possible in good conscience to recognize the holder of that office as holding the legal responsibilities that belong to it. Such recognition does not necessarily involve recognizing him or her as a bishop or priest in the sacramental sense, or receiving his or her sacramental ministry.

Similarly, canonical obedience to an office-holder does not imply anything about the office-holder's sacramental status. Clergy owe canonical obedience to the holder of the office of diocesan bishop, whether or not he or she has been ordained to the order of bishop. (A diocesan bishop has episcopal jurisdiction, and is owed canonical obedience, from the point when his or her election is confirmed. His or her ordination as a bishop may occur days or even weeks later.)

All office-holders in the Church of England should be treated with due respect and courtesy. People cannot expect to be treated with respect and courtesy if they do not themselves show respect and courtesy.

2 A clear decision

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;

That the Church of England 'has reached a clear decision on the matter' is plainly the case.

A clear decision may not necessarily stand for all time, however. Acknowledgement of the decision may be coupled with hope and prayer that, in the fullness of time, the Church of England will come to recognize it to have been wrong.

This principle needs to be read in the light of Principle 3.

'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 this 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.'

House of Bishops' Declaration, para. 15

3 A process of discernment within the universal Church

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;

The reference to 'a process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God' embodies the concept of 'reception' – the idea that a doctrine enunciated by a council or synod may in the end come to be 'received' by the whole Church or to be rejected by the whole Church.†

The Church of England's decision regarding women's ordination may be clear, but it cannot be regarded as absolute because, as the Preface to the Declaration of Assent says, the Church of England is only 'part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'. Orders belong to the whole Church, and it is the whole Church that must ultimately decide on changes to them. Only the whole Church knows the whole truth.

†For further reading on 'reception', see: *Being in Communion* (GS Misc 418) (London: General Synod, 1993); P. Avis (ed.), *Seeking the Truth of Change in the Church: Reception, Communion and the Ordination of Women* (London: T & T Clark, 2004); R. T. Greenacre (ed. C. J. Podmore), *Part of the One Church? The Ordination of Women and Anglican Identity* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2015).

4 Those unable to receive the ministry of women as bishops or priests are within the spectrum of Anglican teaching and tradition and will be enabled to flourish

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;

Recognition of this position as one of ‘theological conviction’, that continues to be within the spectrum of Anglican teaching and tradition, complies with Resolution III.2 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. This called on the Anglican Communion’s churches ‘to affirm that those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to, the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans’.

It is because this is a legitimate theological conviction (in fact, of course, the classical Anglican position) that the Church of England is committed to enabling those who hold it ‘to flourish within its life and structures’.

Those in authority will need to be able to demonstrate (if necessary to the Independent Reviewer) that their actions are directed towards enabling those who hold this conviction not merely to exist but to flourish.

5 Pastoral and sacramental provision without limit of time; mutual flourishing

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.

Bishops ministering under the Declaration will exercise a pastoral ministry of ‘oversight’ (Declaration, para. 22) and a sacramental ministry (presiding at the Eucharist, Christian Initiation and Ordination).

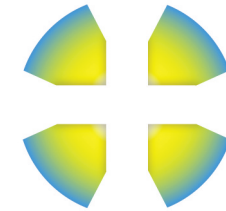
Provision is made ‘without specifying a limit of time’: it is not a transitional provision to allow the minority time to change their minds.

Provision is to contribute to ‘mutual flourishing’: our participation in the Church of England’s life will contribute to the flourishing of our church and all its members.

By calling on us to live in ‘*the highest possible degree of communion*’, this principle implicitly recognizes that *full* communion will not be possible, and that communion will be diminished (because the Church of England no longer has an episcopate or a priesthood that enjoys full mutual recognition). It challenges us to identify the highest *degree* of communion that will be possible.‡

‡ See ‘Communion and Catholicity in the Church of England: A Statement of Principles by the Council of Bishops of The Society’ (2015), section 3: www.sswsh.com/statements.php

The Five Guiding Principles: A Commentary



FORWARDINFAITH

The Five Guiding Principles appear in para. 5 of the House of Bishops’ Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests (which consists of 43 paragraphs in all).

They are introduced thus:

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 fuller commentary is available at www.forwardinfaith.com/Resources.php