

Case Studies

The difference it makes 'on the ground' to have passed a resolution

St Thomas', Kidsgrove – Lichfield Diocese

Iain Baker, Vicar

I am very grateful for the support of a Bishop who shares my convictions in ministry and Biblical authority. It's great to be able to seek the counsel of someone who understands what we are trying to do here, and to be able to talk without treading on eggshells fearing I use the wrong words or having to translate what I hear! Rod has led a confirmation here (sadly the last service before lockdown) where he preached faithfully and evangelistically. I am grateful that he has been made available to us, and is willing to serve us in this way.

St Philemon, Toxteth – Liverpool Diocese

Brian Elfick, Vicar

St Philemon's passed its resolution in 2017. In the short term it was disruptive: a few congregation members left and the two other churches in the team sought a pastoral reorganisation. Four years on, however, we wouldn't want it any other way.

We are in the Diocese of Liverpool where, as well as being egalitarian, our Bishop is a vigorous advocate for same-sex marriage. Passing a resolution has helped us in five substantial ways.

(1) Clarity over the issue of complementarianism

We don't want to be talking about the roles of men and women endlessly – we want to be talking about Jesus. But we do believe that everything the Bible says is true, beautiful and life-giving, and so we want to be confident about applying all of it to all of church life. A resolution nailed our colours to the mast.

(2) Pastoral care and accountability

What a joy for our clergy to have MDRs with Rod! Because we trust him to handle with care the fine china of our lives, we want to speak candidly ourselves and we want him to hear the honest reflections of our co-workers. When he speaks, we want to listen.

(3) Quality sermons and content at key events in church's life

When Rod (or one of his pastoral advisors) comes to preach, what we get is a wise and biblically rich sermon. And when he leads a confirmation or licensing service, he explains everything in ways that are truly helpful to unbelievers and outsiders. Occasions about which we had some reticence have become highlights of the year for us.

(4) External point of reference for our congregation

It couldn't be more important that people in our church family have somewhere outside the church they can go to with concerns. We have full confidence in the Diocesan Safeguarding services, but there are some concerns people might have that do not meet that threshold – 'soft' concerns about the culture of the church. We are delighted that Rod's working group will be making recommendations about how to enable this better in the future, so that the process is independent of local church leadership.

(5) Basis of partnership with other churches

As a church we have adopted [the ReNew Agenda](#), but it takes a movement of churches to reach a region. In October we hosted a dinner for the two other churches in the diocese who have (or soon will) pass a resolution and it was immediately obvious that we all wanted to work together for the lost. So, passing a resolution has ultimately got us looking not inwards but outwards, with others who share our understanding of the shape of gospel ministry.

All Souls, Langham Place – London Diocese

Charlie Skrine, Rector

I've recently moved roles so I've seen the benefits of a resolution in a variety of ways. In my work as an ADDO the clarity in the London Plan around Rod's significant role in the BAP process was totally transformative. For resolution parishes, or for candidates from elsewhere who wish to opt-in personally, Rod functions as if the Bishop of London -the DDO consults with Rod as we write the papers, and the report from the BAP is addressed to Rod. That gives enormous confidence to candidates and parishes and helps when decisions are complicated or disappointing.

The same dynamic is very important for parishes in vacancy - my move from St. Helen's also meant moving from being 1 day per week Priest-in-Charge at St. Michael's, and I've been disappointed to see that role kept vacant by the Diocese. In that disappointment it is very helpful for the parish to know that Rod has an understood and guaranteed place in the consultations about the future because we had passed a resolution. Everyone understands that Rod can't change the decision every time, but his involvement gives confidence in the process and helps with communication and understanding.

At All Souls we were able to see Bishop Sarah and Bishop Rod operating as a double act twice, only a month apart; once at my installation and once at the Maidstone ordinations which we hosted. It has helped All Souls hugely to see how obvious it is that they get on well and operate the London Plan happily together. On both visits they modelled courtesy and respect; at the installation they were able to publicly rehearse together the benefits of mutual flourishing and the London Plan. Their good working relationship has enabled us to reassure those in the church family for whom complementarianism is very important that Rod's role is clearly understood and secure, while also reassuring others that passing a resolution doesn't cut us off from the wider Diocese, or introduce any lack of clarity into those many matters that remain with Bishop Sarah under the London Plan. That has been particularly important in regard to safeguarding in the light of some of the recommendations in the 31:8 report commissioned by Emmanuel Wimbledon about the risks of a damaged relationship with Diocesan safeguarding. Passing a resolution in a Diocese where the London Plan gives total clarity on delegated functions protects good working relationships and good episcopal oversight.

St Mary's, Maidenhead – Oxford Diocese

Will Stileman, Vicar

Although there was no pressing reason as we had a male bishop whose oversight we were happy with, we passed the House of Bishops' Resolution, in 2016. We reasoned that if we and other like-minded churches didn't make use of the Bishop of Maidstone's ministry, we might lose it in the future.

While seeking to contend faithfully for the gospel, I have always sought to maintain good relationships with the diocese and its bishops. Nevertheless, it has been a joy to come under the spiritual oversight of Bishop Rod. Here are some of the reasons why:

1. It has been a joy to have a bishop who truly understands and is fully supportive of my ministry and that of the church. It has been refreshing to have a bishop who responds to emails and phone messages promptly and appropriately.
2. In the last five years there have been two specific occasions when I have sought Rod's wisdom and support about a complex/problematic situation. I was able to approach Rod with confidence knowing that I would get sound advice and appropriate support. In both cases I was not disappointed.
3. In the last couple of years there have been three folk from St Mary's who have embarked on the ordination process and it has been good for them to have Bishop Rod sponsoring them for the selection process. It has enabled these prospective ordinands to make a stand and have the courage to follow their convictions.
4. It's been wonderful to have Confirmations and Ordination services at St Mary's, which have been thoroughly evangelical and Anglican in their proclamation of the gospel.
5. Because of Rod's appointment as an Assistant Bishop in the Oxford Diocese and because we are a Resolution parish, it is a great comfort for me to know that when it comes to my time to leave St Mary's the Bishop of Maidstone will be the diocesan representative in appointing my successor.

I am sure I could think of more but the above are enough reasons why I am glad that the St Mary's PCC passed the House of Bishops' Resolution.