

# Passing a Resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration – A PCC guide

## What is this for?

This booklet contains information that PCCs need to know about passing a resolution under the **House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests** to express evangelical and complementarian convictions. It will:

- ❖ Help explain what is in the Declaration and its accompanying Guidance
- ❖ Identify some of the reasons a PCC might have for passing a resolution
- ❖ Help PCCs frame the right resolution for their church and then explain the practical steps to take to implement it
- ❖ Help PCCs follow up their resolutions in a constructive way
- ❖ Identify sources of further information for further support

## The House of Bishops' Declaration

When the Church of England introduced women bishops, it also arranged to continue to accommodate those who believe the Bible teaches that while men and women are equal, their roles in the Church and family are different.

The arrangements are set out in the *House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests*<sup>1</sup>. These arrangements are designed not to separate parishes from their dioceses but to enable them to continue to play a strong part in them. They are based on "Five Guiding Principles" (*para 5 of the Declaration*) which stress that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on all orders of ministry being equally open to both sexes, but at the same time recognises and wishes to accommodate those who disagree, as their position remains recognisably Anglican. The aim is to enable 'mutual flourishing' across the whole Church of England.

The provisions of the Declaration can only be activated when a PCC passes a resolution to request a Diocesan Bishop to make appropriate arrangements for them. He or she is then required by the Declaration to achieve an outcome that does not conflict with the PCC's theological convictions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Full references to the 'Declaration' and the accompanying 'Guidance Note' are given at the end of this booklet.

# Why Pass a Resolution?

There are various legitimate reasons a PCC may pass a resolution...

## **To reflect the views of a significant number in the congregation**

The first reason for passing a resolution is that a significant theological understanding exists within the local church that final oversight responsibility should rest with men, amidst the diversity of a leadership team. It may be that a clear majority believe this, but it could be only a minority (the Declaration does not specify a minimum proportion). The PCC can tailor their proposed resolution to meet their particular circumstances and convictions.

## **To enable a church to advertise for a male incumbent in a vacancy**

Without a resolution, clergy posts have to be open to both men and women.

## **To help preserve congregational unity**

Some PCCs decide to pass a resolution because a significant proportion of their members have theological objections to the presbyteral and episcopal ministry of women and they are keen to preserve church unity. A resolution can help to ensure that an appointment will not lead to a church dividing.

## **To ensure that the church receives male episcopal ministry**

Lastly, where a PCC is theologically convinced that it would be inappropriate to receive the ministry of women as bishops, passing a resolution will result in male bishops being provided. In those dioceses where the Bishop of Ebbsfleet is an Assistant Bishop, parishes may well be offered his ministry. He may also minister in other dioceses when requested by their Diocesan Bishops. These decisions are in the hands of the Diocesan Bishops but the possibility of receiving ministry from the Bishop of Ebbsfleet may be more likely where PCCs say that the theological conviction for which provision needs to be made is that those who teach in the church should be able to share the 'complementarian' convictions that underlie the resolution.

Please note that being offered the ministry of another bishop does not mean that relations either with a Diocesan or Suffragan Bishop are damaged. It is still open to clergy to invite them for services or other events in the parish. Indeed, passing a resolution need not result in any immediate change in episcopal oversight if current arrangements are in sympathy with the convictions of those for whom the resolution seeks to make provision.

## When should a PCC Pass a Resolution?

A resolution can be passed at any time, provided that some preliminary consultation has taken place and appropriate notice has been given to PCC members (see below).

In dioceses where there is a male bishop, some PCCs have not felt an immediate need to pass a resolution. However it is worth noting that waiting until a vacancy arises or a woman bishop is appointed will, inevitably, raise extra issues for a PCC to consider. If a resolution is passed earlier rather than later, if a woman bishop is subsequently appointed, the PCC will be able to demonstrate that it is simply continuing its existing tradition and not doing something in opposition to her personally.

## How should a PCC Pass a Resolution?

### Preparation

Normally any request to a PCC to pass a resolution is preceded by teaching, discussion and information provision. This may involve the whole congregation(s) through sermons and house group studies. PCCs may want to consider the theological issues at special presentations or on PCC away days. If requested, the Bishop of Ebbsfleet will be delighted to attend such meetings or to recommend other speakers.

### Consultation

The House of Bishops published a **Guidance Note** in 2014 to accompany its Declaration. The **Guidance Note** says that *“it is good practice... for the PCC to enable members of the wider church community to submit views before any meeting at which a resolution is to be considered”* (para 7). Exactly who is in ‘the wider church community’ is not specified so it is a matter for the PCC itself to judge. Generally, the practice seems to be that of making a short paper available to a congregation and then inviting anyone to submit views. It is important to remember, however, that a PCC must still take its own decision. The **Guidance Note** says that it is up to individuals to make up their own minds as to how much weight to give their own theological convictions compared with those of others in the church community (para 11).

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's team is happy to provide support for churches in this consultation stage, should personal visits or discussions be desired.

## Notice

The secretary of a PCC must give members at least four weeks' notice of the place and time of the meeting and the motion to be considered. If the resolution is being considered as part of the preparation for filling a vacancy, then the meeting to do this can be the 'Section 11' meeting – where issues such as the parish profile are also discussed.

## Voting

If at least two-thirds of the PCC members attend, a simple majority of those present is required. (NB it is a majority of the members that are present, not a majority of those who vote. Therefore, an abstention has the same effect as voting against the resolution.) If fewer than two-thirds of the PCC members attend, a majority of the total membership of the PCC is needed.

## After the vote

If a PCC passes a resolution, a copy of it must be sent to the Diocesan Bishop, Archdeacon, Diocesan Registrar and Registered Patron. This needs to include full voting details – numbers on the PCC and present at the vote and the size of the majority. The expectation is that the Bishop will then be in touch to arrange a meeting with representatives of the PCC (of whom the Vicar may of course be one) so that he or she can properly understand exactly what their theological convictions are and what arrangements need to be made. (This is covered in paragraph 22 of the **Declaration**. Please note that the House of Bishops' guidance does not envisage a meeting between the Bishop and the whole PCC, and that this conversation is not an occasion for seeking to persuade a PCC to change its mind.)

It is helpful (but not mandatory) for the Bishop to be sent a summary note (approved by the PCC) of the theological convictions for which provision is sought, to accompany the resolution. Such a note could also cover some of the practical steps the PCC would like to see taken. In some cases, this may make a conversation between the Bishop and PCC representatives unnecessary. An example of a statement of theological convictions can be found on the Bishop of Ebbsfleet's website (see below for details).

The **Guidance Note** refers to the situation of multi-parish benefices (paras 19-21). When a resolution is passed by one parish within a multi-parish benefice, the Diocesan Bishop will ensure that arrangements are made which meet the needs of the resolution parish while allowing the other parishes in the benefice to flourish in accordance with their own convictions.

## Reviewing the Resolution

There is no set period within which a PCC must review a resolution. The Guidance Note simply says *“a PCC... is expected to review it from time to time especially when a vacancy arises in the benefice”* (para 22). It should be noted that, if the PCC is happy with the resolution, reviewing it need entail no more than a PCC discussion resulting in a minuted decision that the PCC sees no need to take a fresh vote on the resolution. (If there is to be a fresh vote, the process outlined above should be followed.)

## What should go into a Resolution?

The Declaration recommends that resolutions take the following form:

**“This PCC requests on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the House of Bishops’ Declaration on the Ministry of Bishop and Priests”** (para 8).

This is a very general form of wording which leaves it open to PCCs to specify exactly what their convictions are and what arrangements they seek – either in a separate statement of theological conviction or in discussion with the Diocesan Bishop. It is worth noting, however, that this is only a ‘recommended’ form of wording. It is, therefore, open to PCCs to add in extra material. Some PCCs – particularly where there is a variety of views - amend the recommended resolution to read:

**‘This PCC requests on grounds of theological conviction, as well as the need to support its clergy and maintain congregational unity, that arrangements be made for it in accordance...’**

Such resolutions may result in widespread acceptance even where some members of the congregation are in favour of women presbyters and bishops.

## Monitoring

Once your PCC has passed a resolution, please let the Bishop of Ebbsfleet know by contacting his office (see below) – even when you are not looking to him for ministry at this time. It is vital that we keep a good up to date record of resolutions passed so that the Church of England as a whole can see how its unity is being preserved on this issue.

## Further Information

Church of England General Synod, ***House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests***, June 2014, GS Misc 1076. A full copy can most easily be found by searching for GS Misc 1076 on the website [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org) or from the +Ebbsfleet website

Church of England General Synod, *House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests – **Guidance note** from the House*, June 2014, GS Misc 1077. A full copy of this Guidance Note can be found by searching for GS Misc 1077 on the website [www.churchofengland.org](http://www.churchofengland.org) or from the +Ebbsfleet website

The Bishop of Ebbsfleet's website contains useful advice and guidance: [www.bishopofebbsfleet.org](http://www.bishopofebbsfleet.org) See especially the section on Guidance.

If you have any queries, please contact the Bishop of Ebbsfleet's office: [admin@bishopofebbsfleet.org](mailto:admin@bishopofebbsfleet.org) or on 07710 232423.

