

GOOD STEWARDSHIP – principles for unpausing parish share

Following the proposals in February 2023 concerning commended Prayers of Love and Faith, many churches responded to the ensuing uncertainty that created by pausing the payment of parish share. The reasons for that at the time varied, reflecting uncertainty about what was being proposed and what provisions might be made to accommodate conscience, and also the visceral response of church members concerned that their giving could be used inappropriately. However the original timetables for developing clear conscience provisions have been extended and the original intention of a pause, to clarify what provision would be necessary, has become overlong; so this paper is offered to encourage churches that have ‘paused’ to review the principles that may lie behind this as an appropriate response, and suggest ways that will allow them to ‘unpause’ their giving in line with them. I would recommend that parishes consult with the diocesan treasurers as part of this process, and that arrangements are handled in a formal manner.

1. PRINCIPLE 1: The support of other Churches is intended to be a good expression of generosity and fellowship, and should not be used punitively.

The biblical principles for giving generously and freely to brothers and sisters in need (eg 2 Cor.8-9) are viewed positively not negatively in Scripture. Using financial support punitively, that is, for the purpose of hurting people or an institution, is not justifiable, as it undermines the grace with which we are called to share resources, and contradicts Paul’s teaching about exercising discipline in a godly way (eg 1 Cor 6:7ff). Where share contributions have only been paused for the sake of clarification about how to respond to PLF, that is legitimate; but it is important to not do so to create pain, but rather to plan and enact solutions, which it is hoped this paper will help with.

2. PRINCIPLE 2: Contribute the costs of the ministry you receive as a minimum.

Parish share is a voluntary contribution from a PCC to contribute to the costs of ministry across a diocese. There is no formal or legal requirement to give it. However there is a strong ‘moral’ pressure to pay something when there is a stipendiary minister in post, as their stipend is required to be paid whether or not a parish pays anything. Paying for the ministry you receive is doing nothing more than expressing fellowship/giving to your local minister, and you have a responsibility for their welfare (eg 1 Cor 9:1-12). If your ‘share’ is less than the cost of the ministry you receive, pay as much as you can, and perhaps explore partnerships with others in the light of Principle 3 below.

While it is true in some dioceses that the figure for ministry costs may seem inflated or that it may fail to have regard for historic resources designated for ministry, nevertheless in a particular diocese the principles of equity and generosity apply if these are being applied to all parishes in a diocese, and it is through involvement in the legal structures of the diocese (eg diocesan synod or finance committees) that those assumptions or policies maybe rightly challenged, rather than through unilateral action.

3. PRINCIPLE 3: Faithful stewards of God’s resources should not give to those who they understand to be unfaithful.

PCCs have a charitable status and obligation, to the Church and to the Charity Commission, to be good stewards of the money that is given them. At the moment, the C of E retains a basis of faith and teaching that is explicitly seeking to be faithful to Scriptures – on that basis, redistributing resources to other churches, which is what Parish share schemes do in theory, should not be a problem. However, PLF brings the possibility of some churches actively and publicly promoting something that is, in the legitimate judgement of a ministry and a PCC, against the moral teaching of Scripture. The Anglican standard of what is moral or not is

not a subjective judgement, it is at least determined by Article 7¹, which includes OT moral laws² and NT moral condemnations³. Despite general ‘uncertainty’ in the denomination, there is a duty to give according to what a minister and PCC are certain about in moral matters.

4. **PRINCIPLE 4: Designate your PCC giving of Parish Share to orthodox⁴ churches only** (or ‘NOT to unorthodox ones’).

Because of PRINCIPLE 2, as a charity, you can argue that your giving to a diocese is only faithful to your charitable objects insofar as it redistributes your resources faithfully to the biblical and canonical basis of the Church. If that is in question or ‘uncertain’ there are two ways you might legitimately oversee the redistribution yourself:

- a. Partner with a parish that can’t pay its way, and top up their income so that they then can afford to pay their ministry costs. This has the advantage of making your giving to others personal and hopefully prayerful too. A variation of this may be to create or support a ‘Good Stewards Trust’ that can help organise the partnering for you – although this may create a slightly less personal link.
- b. Simply designate your giving of the Parish Share to particular categories of parishes retaining ‘orthodoxy’ (*perhaps those who will declare themselves not to be using the PLF – as there is likely to be some formal process which will generate this information*⁵) – and let the diocese have the hassle of working out who that is – although then you’d have the admin of chasing them to make sure they did that! I strongly recommend having a very broad definition of ‘orthodoxy’ here – ie not just resolution churches or just those who are complementarian – we need to keep open the possibility of people being called to serve churches outside of our constituency, and this may be one way of supporting those called to that sort of ministry.

A suitable statement for such a submission could be: *“This contribution of Parish Share is given as a restricted gift from our PCC only for use to support the ministry costs of those Anglican churches or ministries who hold that the teaching of Scripture and the Church properly excludes the blessing of those in same-sex relationships.”*

5. **PRINCIPLE 5: Consider what areas of ‘central’ diocesan activity are appropriate to support if a diocesan bishop does not uphold ‘orthodoxy’, and fund that proportionately.**

The proportion of a Parish share that funds central diocesan services varies considerably in different dioceses, but details of the central funding should be publicly available. Some functions of a diocese are entirely proper and important to support, and relate to legal functions such as safeguarding or upkeep of clergy properties or clergy counselling or legal and HR advisors. It is appropriate to fund such areas, as they do not relate to spiritual oversight. Some functions may relate to spiritual ministry promoted by a bishop, such as lay ministry training (if they are sponsoring those who undermine biblical faithfulness), or wider ministry support (various officers and advisors who may or may not uphold ‘orthodoxy’). These might then be considered inappropriate to support.

These principles are intended to help guide parishes as they reflect on the policy they have adopted. Should further clarification of these principles or personal support from the Ebbsfleet Network team be desirable, contact the Ebbsfleet Office.

Yours in Christ,



Rt Rev Dr Rob Munro

¹ Article 7: “The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, **no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.**”

² Eg Leviticus 18 sets moral boundaries for sexual activity

³ Eg Romans 1:24-27 describes activities flowing from sinful desires

⁴ “Orthodox” is being used in this paper as a short-hand term to describe the traditional biblical and historical view on human sexuality and marriage summed up by Canon B30 and including the view that heterosexual marriage is the only proper place to express sexual intimacy.

⁵ It is important that the criteria used to determine this are objective not subjective; that is, a parish which has declared its support for PLF blessings on its website or via a PCC resolution.