

# Questions on Prayers of Love and Faith

As a pastoral response for the +Ebbsfleet Network to the Prayers of Love and Faith having been commended from 17<sup>th</sup> December 2023, this is an attempt, from my own personal understanding of things, to answer some questions that may benefit various churches as they consider how to respond. I welcome additional questions, and so this list may expand as different concerns come to light.

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## A. What has PLF decided?

### 1. What has actually been ‘commended’?

PLF will allow set prayers including blessings for use with same-sex couples, at the discretion of the incumbent, in private or as part of an existing public worship service. Although in particular, it is noted that “*The PLF should not give the impression of simulating marriage.*” (Guidance 1.3.5).

Standalone services have not yet been authorized for experimental use, although guidance on this is expected in the Spring, but this would be on the basis that such experiments should eventually be subjected to the proper scrutiny of the General Synod (a ‘canon B2’ process).

Neither crucial Pastoral Guidance on the behaviour of clergy, nor properly formulated Pastoral Reassurance for those for whom this impairs fellowship, has been published - despite previous reassurances that this would be the case, which is an added failure of collective episcopal pastoral care which I deeply regret.

It should be noted that commendation of PLF does not give any formal authorisation or legal status to these prayers, they simply add to resources available for use at an incumbent’s discretion. Only “authorised” prayers become part of the official liturgy of Common Worship, “commended” prayers are understood to be additional resources useable with a minister’s discretion.

### 2. Has the Church of England changed its Doctrine?

Unlike in February, the synod papers agreed in November have a clear restatement of the biblical and historical understanding of marriage. “...*Holy Matrimony is a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman, blessed by God in creation and pointing to the love between Christ and the Church; a way of life which Christ makes holy. It is within marriage that sexual intimacy finds its proper place.*” (Guidance p.3). That marriage is for one man and one woman for life and that the proper place for sexual intimacy is marriage only, remains Anglican doctrine. That is significant.

However the November synod resolution proposes that a ‘*pastoral provision*’ in a ‘*time of uncertainty*’ may still allow prayers for couples in same-sex relationships. The proposal does acknowledge that this has some impact on the teaching of the Church, because it was necessary the phrase that these prayers will not impact doctrine ‘*in any essential matter*’. However, following the teaching of Eph.5:3 to avoid even ‘*a hint of sexual immorality*’, I believe it is a serious error to allow as an option in liturgy something that at best confuses people and more seriously risks misleading them about issues of sin and salvation, by redefining repentance. So even if doctrine is not formally changing, it is an error to allow practices that create confusion as an option.

It should also be noted that any statement of doctrine implies some understanding that there is a discipline for those deviating from it, not only in activity but in belief. That this discipline has not been effective in the Church is reflected in the reports that a majority of the House of Bishops desire to see doctrine change in this area, despite their promises to ‘*banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God’s Word; and both privately and openly call upon and encourage others to the same*’ (Ordinal).

### 3. What has yet to be decided?

Although legally the use of PLF is now the choice of an incumbent, there is a lack of completed pastoral guidance particularly in relation to whether such prayers can be used for clergy, and a lack of

completed pastoral reassurance to create legal provision with integrity for those who cannot use them, which leaves clergy and parishes on all sides vulnerable to legal and other challenges.

It is expected that guidance on experimental 'standalone' services will come to the Synod in the Spring, and that an outline proposal for 'formal structural pastoral provision' will follow in the summer, but significant legal and theological obstacles remain unresolved and may be irresolvable.

It is now in the public domain that there are a significant number of bishops, maybe a majority, who would like to see the current teaching of the church change, and because of precedents in other parts of the Anglican communion it can feel like there is a 'direction of travel' beyond current teaching. It has always been the case that *2 Tim.4:3f* that some people '*...will not put up with sound doctrine; instead, to suit their own desires, will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear!*' The antidote to progressive unfaithfulness is our persevering faithfulness, that is what prevents any wrong direction of travel – as Paul says '*Preach the Word: be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.*' (*2 Tim4:2*)

## B. Immediately Responding to PLF?

### 4. What do we have to do with PLF?

You DO NOT NEED TO DO ANYTHING! In my view, commending these prayers has created needless confusion and division, their legal status is questionable, the implications of using them obfuscates clear biblical teaching, and there is not the necessary completed guidance and provision for conscience that is needed. However, neither the default teaching of the church nor its authorised liturgy has changed, at least not in an essential matter – so you don't **need** to do anything, because the historic position and teaching of the Church is still its current position.

The official 'theological rationale' for commending the prayers is that this is only a pastoral provision for a 'time of uncertainty' which does recognise the deep divisions in the church on this issue. My pastoral wisdom from 30 years of ministry is, if you face a situation with deep division and in uncertainty, "don't change things!" – rather work for deeper understanding, prayer and unity first.

### 5. Do we need to pass a PCC resolution?

You do not need to do so, and in churches where this would cause significant division, my strong advice is not to do so. However, where a PCC is united in a desire not to use the PLF it can be helpful to do so, for the sake of transparency and for requesting pastoral reassurance from a diocese.

A simple resolution such as:

*"This PCC, recognising the considerable hurt and divisions that this issue has caused, is resolved not to use the Prayers of Love and Faith, and requests the bishop to make suitable provision for our conscientious position with respect to any impaired fellowship that may result from their use elsewhere."*

### 6. What provision do we need to ask for?

At this stage it is not clear what "formal structural pastoral provision" will be offered churches. I have made clear that an arrangement similar to my own, (which is not provided as a 'legal' right but is only discretionary for a diocesan bishop), is a not a sufficient provision for what are in effect moral objections. I am happy to be consulted if parishes need further specific guidance.

To reiterate, if your PCC would be divided by the request to pass a resolution, you do not need to do so, so you don't need to ask for provision! These prayers are only 'commended' not 'authorised', so they are only able to be used at an incumbent's discretion, and they are not required to consult their PCC on that. I am conscious that some in a Parish may respond badly to that, so if you do experience inappropriate pressure from within the parish, community or from further afield, please let me know and be assured of my public support.

## C. Implications of a Pastoral Provision

### 7. What does a 'pastoral provision' mean?

A 'pastoral provision' is a recognition that in certain circumstances it is wise to permit actions that are not fully consistent with existing teaching, to enable progress in sanctification. A biblical example would be Naaman in 2 Kings 5:18, allowing him to bow in Rimmon's temple. It is a regular feature of providing pastoral support in a parish for people in situations which are irregular in other ways. It is not sanctioning sin, it is expressing grace towards sinners who are seeking greater godliness – where they realise they are a 'work in progress'.

While it is publicly stated that the doctrine of marriage and sexual intimacy is not being changed, the particular provision envisaged in PLF is analogous in some ways to the pastoral issue: *'will you baptise the children of couples that are living together?'* Many Church of England churches do allow that. But if they have, those services are understood to be making a 'pastoral provision' despite an improper situation, because the public prayers of baptism (usually including a blessing) are being made in the context of families in inappropriate sexual relationships (*which is even more explicit where the children are clearly the fruit of sexual activity outside of marriage*). While not all churches do allow that, and only offer alternatives such as Thanksgivings which was my pastoral practice, there is a challenge for those of us who feel compelled to express an 'impaired fellowship' with those who use or commend the PLF, that our response to their 'pastoral provision' has some consistency with our response to this other pastoral provision – at least so long as the stated doctrines of the church are not explicitly being changed. Like the 'pastoral provision' for the baptism of children of unmarried parents, the use of PLF depends on the pastoral judgement of an incumbent, whose responsibility is to uphold, not undermine the Church's teaching.

So a question might be put: on what grounds is our response to the particular 'pastoral provision' of PLF significantly different from previous pastoral provisions on the baptism of children in unmarried relationships, that our 'impaired fellowship' should be different. Heterosexual and homosexual activity outside of marriage are both as serious and call for repentance, so we shouldn't treat one as more serious than another. There are some differences to be made in this analogy: the focus in a baptism is not usually on the family but the child, although that is less so if you have a reformed and covenantal understanding of baptism - so care must be taken for consistency in our biblical and pastoral policy.

## D. Relationships of Impaired Fellowship

### 8. What is 'impaired fellowship'?

The terms 'impaired fellowship' and 'torn fabric of communion' originate from the response of GAFCON Bishops to the US Episcopal Church's consecration of an openly gay Bishop, which had contradicted assurances given in 1998 at the Lambeth Conference that had agreed an Anglican Communion approach to Issues of Human Sexuality. At that episcopal level it was expressed by either refusing invitations to attend Lambeth conferences at which those publicly deviating from the Lambeth

1.10 resolutions were invited; or by not attending the communion services in such a context. That example from the wider communion arises from a commitment to ordination and consecration vows, derived from the Prayer Book Ordinal: “*Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God’s Word; and to use both public and private monitions and exhortations...*”. That vow calls on presbyters to take some sort of action against false teaching both in public and private, at least in ‘*monitions and exhortations*’.

(Note that ‘impaired fellowship’ and ‘impaired communion’ are both derived from the term *koinonia*, but the latter term risks confusion as only referring to the Lord’s Supper, as the ‘communion’ that is impaired is far more than just that.)

‘Impaired fellowship’ is specifically in relation to spiritual things, rather than legal ones. *Romans 13:1ff* and *1 Peter 2:13ff* call for sacrificial obedience to what may even be ungodly authority, insofar as it does not contradict God’s Word, even if those authorities claim a spiritual aspect (eg *Roman Emperor cult*). (See also the question on the legal/spiritual distinction below.)

In a parish, to fulfil their ordination promises, an incumbent is held responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church under their care, so it would be inappropriate to allow someone to hold spiritual responsibility, eg to preach or preside, who did not uphold orthodox biblical standards, and that may include a bishop, as the end of Article 26 explains. Our denomination has been structured since the Reformation to ensure that a local incumbent may remain faithful to biblical norms, whatever pressure from outside. ‘Spiritual safeguarding’ is as vital as any other safeguarding, so where a minister has concerns, they are required to act accordingly.

## 9. What does ‘impaired fellowship’ mean in principle?

‘Impaired fellowship’ means not relating to people who practice or teach something unfaithful to God’s Word in the same way as those who are faithful. This difference of relationship is done so as to challenge that unfaithfulness and seek their repentance. It means for person responsible for a ministry, to not allow that unfaithful person a spiritual ministry or responsibility, for risk it leads others astray.

So if that person is **under your oversight** (eg *a parishioner of a presbyter*), it may mean limiting their spiritual responsibilities in the church – eg not allowing them to preach or lead a congregation. That should be done with a due disciplinary procedure (eg *Matthew 18:15-17*), with transparency and grace.

If a person is **not under your oversight**, but is either alongside it (eg *a neighbouring presbyter*), or possibly a fellow team minister, then your responsibility is first to challenge any unfaithfulness where you can, in specific terms of what they publicly taught or have actually done, to call for their repentance (*again along the lines of Matthew 18*). Should that be unfruitful, you will need to ensure they are not allowed to exercise a spiritual ministry in any body for which you hold spiritual responsibility (eg *the church where you are incumbent*).

If a person **has oversight of you** in some way, (eg *you are their lay reader, or under them as Team Rector*), or who has specific legal and/or spiritual oversight (eg *a diocesan bishop*), then you will need to conscientiously navigate how you are able to conduct your ministry with integrity, expressing what has been ‘impaired’ and agreeing what you are able to continue to do. It may include exploring particularly whether you are still able to publicly challenge the teaching or behaviour that impairs fellowship, and what provision for you is being made by the one in oversight. It is worth remembering

those whose faithful ministry in similar settings (eg *Jeremiah or Daniel*) sowed seeds of future blessing despite personal suffering.

## 10. What does ‘impaired fellowship’ with a bishop mean in practice?

If it is asked precisely what forms of ministries constitute a spiritual rather than the legal authority of a bishop, which may then require some sort of alternative episcopal oversight, it may include:

- Preaching and teaching (*2 Timothy 4:2-4 – the way to resist error*)
- Baptising, confirming and presiding at Holy Communion (*1 Cor. 10:14-22 – how we express spiritual union*)
- Leading others in prayer or worship (*1 Timothy 2:8 – how we express spiritual care for each other*)
- Occasional ministry-focused events, (eg presiding at Maundy Thursday Chrism service, opening new churches)
- Recommending candidates for ordination training (*2 Tim. 1:6 – the way we identify future ministry*)
- Signing off curates after initial training (*2 Tim. 2:2 NB in CofE this may be argued to be just a legal not spiritual act*)
- Ordaining deacons and priests (*Titus 1:5 – the way we commission faithful oversight*)
- Licensing lay ministers (*Acts 6:1-4 – the way we recognise wider ministries*)
- Appointing and Instituting ministers to parishes (*Titus 1:5 – the way we secure future ministry*)
- Undertaking ministerial development reviews (*2 Tim 1:6f – the way we help ministry persevere – NB in CofE an MDR can be more focussed on vocational development and is not necessarily an expression of oversight*)

Generally my advice is to only treat as ‘spiritual’ those things that Scripture calls such. In an established church there are civic responsibilities that bishops may hold that are clearly distinct from aspects of spiritual oversight (eg *Remembrance day parades*). If there are activities where you would be content for a minister of another denomination of questionable theology or even a member of another faith to take part, it should not then violate conscience about it as a spiritual ministry.

## 11. What is ‘impaired fellowship’ with the House/College of Bishops?

There is a well established biblical principle that speaks against treating others with a ‘guilt by association’ – eg *Ezekiel 18* gives a whole chapter to it, and when Jesus was accused of it he countered that accusation by instead calling for a judgement on his actions (*Matthew 11:19*) and their fruit in the lives of others (*Luke 7:34*). It is only right to ‘impair fellowship’ with those individuals whose own actions or teaching contradicts God’s Word. ‘*Impaired fellowship with the House/College of Bishops because of PLF*’ is unhelpful in that it ignores the public dissent of a significant number of bishops from the majority decision, and it risks diminishing the God-given calling that they are meant to embody.

There is a more general ecclesiological question here. Why only target the House of Bishops for collective ‘impaired fellowship’, rather than the ‘House of Clergy’ or the ‘House of Laity’ – who also voted by majority in favour of the PLF proposals. My observation is that it is only when we import an Anglo-Catholic view of bishops, that treats them as a different order in the Church, that we have become used to treating them collectively (with a sort of mystical identity or unity).

My own view as an evangelical bishop (and in line with reformed tradition), is that Bishops are ‘presbyters of presbyters’, (*hence why they are consecrated and not ordained*), and they have the same calling and duties as any other presbyter to uphold the doctrine and teaching of the Church. It is absolutely right to call for individual bishops promoting error (or clergy or laity) to repent, but wrong to treat them as a collective body. In an evangelical understanding, if bishops fail in their duty to be ‘guardians

of the faith', they are to be disciplined insofar as they can be (See Article 26 of the 39 articles!), but their sin/error should not in itself be a reason to leave the wider fellowship of the church. And the Church of Jesus Christ is not a democracy that can change its teaching by majority vote even of bishops! God's Word is supreme, and he will judge his church for unfaithfulness. (NB in Athanasius' case at Nicaea it was his lone voice with biblical backing that changed the majority).

That it is wrong to treat the House of Bishops collectively is doubly true when it is now publicly clear that the House of Bishops themselves are divided. I am one of the 15 dissenting from the House of Bishops, and with possibly another 20 in the College, it is clear that what has been done is only from a majority of bishops, just as it was by a majority of elected clergy and laity (although much smaller majorities in their cases) – but that does not make it right (Article 21 teaches that General Councils "...sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God.")

## E. Relating to Bishops in 'impaired fellowship'

### 12. What provision is necessary for those in 'impaired fellowship'?

Following the implications of the section above (esp. Q 10 & 11), there are a number of spiritual activities that properly belong to episcopal ministry, that could not be received by a minister in 'impaired fellowship' with their relevant Diocesan or Area Bishop as an expression of spiritual oversight.

The complicating factor in a church established by law, is that some aspects of a bishop's role are legal/temporal, some are spiritual, and some could confuse both.

A Church of England bishop's legal authority is their 'jurisdiction as Ordinary' (Canon C18.2) – which expresses their legal responsibilities to order the church according to law. They are the person who oversee the ordination and licensing of clergy to their legal responsibilities in parishes, and their compliance with canon law – which is expressed by clergy taking an oath of 'canonical obedience' and promising to obey them in all things 'lawful and honest', which makes explicit this legal aspect.

A Church of England bishop's spiritual authority is expressed as them being 'chief pastor of all that are within his diocese' (Canon C18.1) – which expresses a spiritual oversight expressed in faithful teaching and discipline, holy living and peace-making: *'it appertains to his office to teach and to uphold sound and wholesome doctrine, and to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange opinions; and, himself an example of righteous and godly living, it is his duty to set forward and maintain quietness, love, and peace among all men.'*

In broad terms, the spiritual authority describes 'what a bishop can do', their jurisdiction describes 'where a bishop can do it'!

This distinction of legal oversight and spiritual oversight is explicit in Canon C19 which directs how 'spiritual jurisdiction' is managed distinct from 'jurisdiction by the laws', and also Canon C20 which describes how any jurisdiction or episcopal power of a suffragan bishop is delegated by their diocesan bishop, while their spiritual oversight belongs to their consecration (*they remain bishops even if not licensed*).

When fellowship with a bishop is impaired, it is primarily their spiritual ministry and authority that is impacted, their teaching, discipline, example and ability to make peace that is compromised. It is those aspects of oversight that a minister and parish require from an alternative bishop, to whom the suitable delegation of jurisdiction is made. Where there is overlap between legal and spiritual responsibilities, such as in ordination – which is both a spiritual discernment of vocation and a legal authorisation of ministry, it will necessitate the delegation of the legal aspects to the alternative bishop. However it is appropriate to the nature of 'jurisdiction' that such delegation has the consistency of a legal provision – that it is not a 'spiritual' act to delegate necessary 'legal authority'.

With that in mind, what is necessary for those in ‘impaired fellowship’ is a bishop whose ministry legitimately can conduct the functions in Q.10 – that is with at least a legal delegation of relevant powers from the bishop in ‘impaired fellowship’ – a ‘formal, structural, **legal**, pastoral provision’. Specifically, that means a full spiritual oversight with a legally derived delegated jurisdiction. It be expressed as required a ‘separate ecclesial space within one Church of England that allows for the tangible separation of the legal and spiritual functions.

In Church of England precedent, this is how the Area Bishop scheme works – a legal instrument delegates a Diocesan Bishop’s legal jurisdiction for the area where they then also exercise full spiritual oversight. The ‘rights’ of an Area Bishop are delegated by law, not as an expression of ‘spiritual’ ministry. This was also unsuccessfully explored during the women bishop’s debate as a “Transferred Episcopal Arrangement”.

### **13. Will the +Ebbsfleet do to provide for ‘impaired fellowship’?**

A ‘formal, structural, legal, pastoral provision’ is not the arrangement for +Ebbsfleet or other PEVs, who have a full spiritual oversight calling from their consecration, but whose jurisdiction is only ‘extended’ from the diocesan. That is it is not their legal right to serve resolution parishes in episcopal functions, but they may only do that as an expression of the spiritual oversight of the Diocesan.

However, when a Diocesan Bishop has invited +Ebbsfleet to be responsible for particular episcopal functions, he is able to fully provide for the spiritual oversight of the parish and its ministry and in whatever legal aspects have been delegated. That means a parish will have an orthodox bishop in spiritual oversight, not being spiritually served by someone who is teaching error. A complementarian resolution guarantees that a diocesan bishop in ‘impaired fellowship’ explicitly does not have oversight in pastoral and sacramental matters, they are required in law to make such provision for you.

### **14. Can +Ebbsfleet serve non-resolution churches in ‘impaired fellowship’?**

To serve resolution parishes in a Diocese, it is recommended that he serve as an Honorary Assistant Bishop, which enables the full expression of spiritual ministry (like a PTO) and outlines the legal boundaries for where and what he is able to do. Where that status exists, with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop, he is legally able to serve any church. So if a non-resolution parish is in ‘impaired fellowship’ with a diocesan bishop, with their permission, +Ebbsfleet is able to serve them in whatever episcopal ministry is permitted.

### **15. Can those in ‘impaired fellowship’ with bishops still be involved in a Diocese?**

If a Church is in impaired fellowship with one or more of the bishops in a diocese, they still should remain fully involved with the Diocesan structures. Clergy and laity are still part of the diocese, even if their fellowship with their bishop(s) is impaired and they should be prepared to work with others in the diocese through the Bishop’s Council, the Diocesan Synod and the Deanery Synods to ensure that the day to day-to-day business of the diocese is conducted as efficiently as possible (since this is for the benefit of everyone in the diocese) and in order to make sure that the conservative voice continues to be heard in the diocese and that conservatives continue to be elected on to General Synod (orthodox churches cannot complain of being ignored if they have sidelined themselves).

Abstention from services of worship conducted as part of synodical activity where a person in ‘impaired fellowship’ presides should however be considered as a visible witness to the existence of impaired fellowship with those who support ungodly sexual conduct in theology or practice. While Article 26 explicitly makes it clear that even if ‘...*the evil hath chief authority in the Ministration of the Word*



and Sacraments... we may use their Ministry, both in hearing God's Word, and in receiving Sacraments', nonetheless the principle of *1 Cor.8:7-13* calls those with spiritual responsibility for others to have special care for the perceptions of less mature church members, who could be confused about the discipline that 'impaired fellowship' expresses if there is no change of relationship.

### **16. How do I ensure my 'impaired fellowship' is not misunderstood?**

It is important as an expression of conscientious conviction that a full explanation of your 'impaired fellowship' is given to those whose teaching and actions have caused it. It must be treated personally, not institutionally (see also Qn.11), at least while the Church of England is publicly upholding traditional and biblical teaching. Part of that purpose is to help individuals understand the seriousness of the issue, but also to enable them to either clarify or repent of their position. Ideally a written statement of what spiritual functions are impaired is desirable, so as to maximise what is not impaired.

However, regard must be given to the wider community you are called to serve and their perceptions of how you express 'impaired fellowship'. That may require a limitation on some activities in public that you may be content to express in private. For example, for the sake of the weaker consciences *1 Cor.8:7-13* it may require you to request that a legal licensing or ordination to be done privately rather than publicly, as not all understand the distinction between the legal and spiritual oversight. Similarly, while Article 26 may conscientiously allow you to be at the Lord's table with someone you are in impaired fellowship with, it may be necessary to avoid that in public contexts for the sake of those who otherwise will not discern the change in relationship that 'impaired fellowship' expresses.

It remains the duty of presbyters to teach appropriately so that congregational confusion about such things is diminished, so I commend simplicity and clarity in expressing and communicating reasons for particular practices about 'impaired fellowship', and inviting concerned people to explore it with you.

### **17. Can those in 'impaired fellowship' still be involved in IME or CME?**

IME and CME is not an expression of fellowship with a particular Bishop, but is for the edification of the clergy receiving it. It is not to be understood expressing spiritual relationships in itself. It is not inappropriate to request that any people involved in providing practical training are themselves orthodox in faith, but training on aspects not focussed on spiritual relationships may still be helpful.

However, where IME/CME is shared with others whose teaching and practice has led to an 'impaired fellowship', it may be appropriate to abstain from joint worship with them. However, that should be done as part of an appropriate spiritual discernment process (eg *Matthew 18*), where a person is approached personally initially for clarification or possible repentance before applying a discipline. It is vital that an orthodox conservative voice continues to be heard in those IME/CME forums, if only as part of discharging a spiritual duty to call people we are alongside with to turn away from error.

### **18. What about BMO's and their relationship to a Bishop?**

BMO's have a particular relationship to the Diocesan Bishop, in that the legal justification for their ministry is that a Diocesan Bishop retains a right of spiritual oversight of every parish under their jurisdiction – which means that they are able to minister or to arrange ministry in a parish which otherwise is under the oversight of the local presbyter – which is why a BMO can exist in another person's parish whether or not they give consent (although it good practice that that consent is sought).

That presents a serious complication for the oversight of BMOs, because it is an expression of the spiritual and legal ministry of a diocesan bishop. While it is possible to conceive of a legal arrangement, whereby there could be a legal delegation of the spiritual right to minister in someone else's parish, akin to an Area scheme, or perhaps with a formal Commissary document, these are not easy to procure and definitely require the legal authorisation of a Diocesan Bishop.

### 19. What about Proprietary Chapels and their relationship to Bishops?

Proprietary chapels are slightly different than BMOs, that their ministry does not derive from the spiritual oversight of the Bishop, but from the legal enactment of their existence. Usually Proprietary Chapels have a legal provision or deed that secures their ongoing ministry, which does require a Bishop's license, but unlike a BMO is not a derivation of their spiritual ministry.

### 20. What about pausing parish share?

I have written about this more fully [HERE](#). Whatever you choose to do, follow biblical principles of stewardship, generosity and fellowship.

The principles I suggest you consider are summarised:

- 1: The support of other Churches is intended to be a good expression of generosity and fellowship, and should not be used punitively.
- 2: Contribute the costs of the ministry you receive as a minimum.
- 3: Faithful stewards of God's resources should not give to those who they understand to be unfaithful.
- 4: Designate your PCC giving of Parish Share to orthodox churches only
- 5: Consider what areas of 'central' diocesan activity are appropriate to support if a diocesan bishop does not uphold 'orthodoxy', and fund that proportionately.

## F. What about the bigger questions?

### 21. Why should we stay in the Church of England?

There are several reasons to commend continuing contending for the faith in the Church of England:

**Theological.** I am aware how deeply distressing commending PLF has been, particularly among those who are same-sex attracted yet committed to the biblical norms for marriage and sexual behaviour. These norms have not been changed, neither in God's Word nor in the church's teaching. It has only ever been the calling of Christians to stand up for biblical holiness in a rebellious world and even in a confused church. Canon A5 remains in place committing the Church to the authority of God's Word.

**Biblical.** I have found Jesus' command to the church of Thyatira (Rev.2:18-29) a particular challenge: Jesus calls out the church's leadership there for tolerating false teaching on sexual immorality from a prophetess Jezebel, with a warning of his judgement; but to those who are faithful to his biblical teaching (v.24) he says: "*Only hold on to what you have until I come.*" He doesn't call for them to abandon the church despite its leadership's errors, only to persevere in the truth.

That coheres with the action in mercy that Jude calls for, when calling the church to contend for the faith (Jude 3) – have mercy for doubters, mercy to those in danger of being led astray and even mercy to those corrupting the church (Jude 22-23). But that calling to 'contend for the faith' is a calling to

stand up for what is right within the church, and not to abandon it to its leaders' error. Even when visible differentiation is called for in the NT (eg Rom.16:17f, 2 John 10f), it is expressed by people not receiving the ministry of particular false teachers, not by the faithful leaving the church.

**Missional.** It is still the case that the place of the church of England in every community significantly increases its impact and opportunity to preach the gospel. There are significant numbers of church schools under Church of England care. There are significant community relationships and local traditions that open up possibilities of building gospel bridges. It is also true that the historic resources of the Church of England in its buildings and their locations in communities also considerably supports the impact it can make. This should not be lightly given up.

**Moral.** While the Church of England retains its teaching on marriage and sexual intimacy, despite the way it is being undermined by PLF, nevertheless it will thereby provide some safeguards against those of other denominations and faiths when they are challenged on what is morally permissible by the Christian faith. The moral position of the established church still has influence, however diminished, which means contending for that faith has a moral dimension with respect to its impact on the nation.

**Vocational.** Ordination vows are made to God, and it is in keeping those vows that we express our calling to care for his flock. When you are compelled to break those vows, you may be forced to leave a church; but when you are conscientiously able to keep them, whatever pressure from other places or people, or whatever their status in the Church, then primary consideration needs to be given to the vocation of God and the place of his calling.

**Structural.** The Church of England is not hierarchical, as though it derives its ministry from its bishops and their teaching— that is a Catholic understanding. The focus of the Church “...is a congregation of faithful men (and women!) in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered...” (Article 19). That means the Church of England holds integrity when its local gathering upholds biblical faithfulness. It is therefore legitimate in the Church of England to hold that Synods can err (Article 21), ‘...sometimes the evil have chief authority...’ (Article 26), and yet to remain in the Church of England with integrity.

The foundations of the Church of England are still secure, Christ and His Word – but as Paul reminds us 1 Cor.3:10-15, not everything that people build on those foundations will last the scrutiny of Jesus, yet it is our calling to keep building where we can with what really lasts.

## 22. What if I can't in conscience remain in the Church of England?

I am aware that for some, conscience issues on PLF have already created burdens that seem too great to bear, and a different denominational connection may feel the only option for the future.

Sometimes family breakups can seem the lesser of evils, and in the end the spiritual welfare of those we are called to serve must have priority. If it is right that if we can no longer serve the Church with a clear conscientious faith, it would be sinful for us to remain (Romans 14:22-23); so if that is you, though it grieves me, I will support you.

However I am not persuaded that what has been proposed has yet prevented our gospel proclamation or impaired godly living for faithful people, nor prevented people discipling others in that way. Though fellowship will be impaired by this harmful innovation, it is only from within that we

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can significantly contend for truth and rebuke error in the Church of England – which is a reason to remain.

I have tried to respond to the questions that I have been being asked from the Churches I am called to serve, and I have had already a couple of ‘virtual coffee’ meetings on Zoom for people to explore things in more depth. I will be doing that again in January, so watch for details in the next Newsletter.

If there are significant areas that you feel have not been addressed, that will benefit others, please feel free to contact me and I can include them; or if it is just a personal question to you, I am happy to help.

### **PSALM I**

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked  
or stand in the way that sinners take  
or sit in the company of mockers,  
<sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and who meditates on his law day and night.

<sup>3</sup> That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—  
whatever they do prospers.

<sup>4</sup> Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.