

Theological Summary Paper for the See of Ebbsfleet

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Covering Note

This theological paper was written to support the group advising the appointment process for the successor to the Bishop of Maidstone, the Bishop of Ebbsfleet in 2022. It is reproduced with permission of the author who was not themselves a member of the 'Ebbsfleet Network'.

Background and Rationale

1. This paper sets out the complementarian position on the theology of male headship in the light of provisions made in *The House of Bishops Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests 2014 (GS Misc 1076)*.
2. In so doing it aims to clarify the theological position in relation to an appointment to the See of Ebbsfleet enabling future episcopal provision for those who take the Conservative Evangelical view on complementarian theology. This was proposed to the Dioceses Commission in June 2022.
3. *The House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests 2014 (GS Misc 1076)* states that: 'The House also accepts that the presence in the College of Bishops of at least one bishop who takes the Conservative Evangelical view on complementarian is important for sustaining the necessary climate of trust.' (*GS Misc 1076, para. 30*)
4. The provision represents the desire for ongoing unity and marks a significant step forward from the options examined in *Women Bishops in the Church of England? A Report of the House of Bishops Working Party 2004 (GS 1557)*.
5. The key roles of this postholder are:
 - a. To provide a voice within the College of Bishops for those who cannot on the theological grounds of complementarianism accept the priestly or episcopal ministry of women.
 - b. To act as an advocate for those who hold that position.
 - c. To provide episcopal ministry at the invitation of the diocesan Bishop in any diocese.

The House of Bishops Declaration on Ministry of Bishops and Priests 2014 (GS Misc 1076)

6. The *Declaration* makes clear that the opening of episcopal ministry to women and men is of pastoral and missional significance: ‘it brings with it new opportunities for building up the Body of Christ and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom’ (GS Misc 1076, para. 3).
7. But, recognising the breadth of theological views on the roles of women and men, the goal of *the Declaration* and subsequent *Guidance* is to create a ‘climate of trust’ that ensures the Conservative Evangelical position is represented in the House of Bishops with the appointment of ‘at least one bishop’ who holds that view (GS Misc 1076, para 30). This is a not simply a commitment to ensuring *male* bishops, but that the *theology* of male headship is represented. Thus maleness is necessary but not sufficient to meet the scope of the role.
8. The *Declaration* expects that ‘senior roles within dioceses will continue to be filled by people from across the range of traditions’ (GS Misc 1076, para 13.).
9. The *Declaration* seeks only to address the arrangements necessary for the spiritual welfare of those in the Church of England who, for reasons of theological conviction, do not think it is theologically appropriate to receive the priestly or episcopal ministry of women (GS Misc 1076, paras 3, 11, 22 &c.). This is the entire scope of the arrangements.¹
10. This means that the arrangements for extended episcopal care do not pertain to issues other than the priestly and episcopal ministries of women; parishes are not permitted to take advantage of the arrangements because they disagree with their male bishops over other issues (e.g., other doctrinal or ethical matters). Indeed, PCCs must pass the specific resolution, ***‘This PCC requests, on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the***

¹ The language of “appropriateness” is taken from *The Reform Covenant* (1993), [Microsoft Word - whatwhyconv.doc \(churchsociety.org\)](https://www.churchsociety.org/microsoft-word-whatwhyconv.doc)

House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests'
(GS Misc 1076, para 20) to take advantage of the provisions.

11. In addition, this is the only circumstance in which an appointment to an incumbency, priest-in-charge, or assistant curate role in a parish may be made based on sex (GS Misc 1076, para 23).
12. Once the diocesan bishop has been informed of the parish's resolution and has conducted a consultation with the PCC regarding the nature of the request (GS Misc 1076, para 22), they remain the ordinary of the parish and will determine the pattern of episcopal ministry that will be offered to it. This includes the option to appoint 'male bishops who are members of the House of Bishops of the diocesan synod' (GS Misc 1076, para 26, see also paras 27-29).
13. *The Five Guiding Principles (2013)* form the practical basis for the current arrangements. They are to be treated holistically, not selectively and are to be applied with simplicity, reciprocity, and mutuality.
14. **Simplicity** refers to the fact that the current legislation underpinning the provision 'leaves unaltered the position of each diocesan bishop as Ordinary and preserves the historical requirement for canonical obedience to the diocesan bishop' (GS Misc 1076, paras 7, 22, 26; see also Guidance Sections 14 & 16). The diocesan bishops involved still operate fully as bishops, and the parishes are required to recognise their structural position and authority regardless of any theological convictions about their position.
15. This is important for Anglican ecclesiology: the arrangements within the *Declaration* do not permit a Church within a Church, nor do they create a third province in which the visiting bishop becomes the effective ordinary of a group of parishes. Anglican polity remains and diocesan bishops continue to play a full part in the life of their parishes: invited bishops operate only at the request of the ordinary. The arrangements are a sign of the diocesan bishop's pastoral care for the parishes concerned.
16. **Reciprocity** is about the posture adopted between people holding different theological conviction and includes 'rejoicing in each other's

partnership in the Gospel’ as well as ‘cooperating to the maximum possible extent in mission and ministry’ (*GS Misc 1076, para 9*).

17. Reciprocity also means that ‘those of differing conviction will do all in their power to avoid giving offence to each other’ demonstrating ‘sensitivity to the feelings of vulnerability that some will have that their position within the Church of England will gradually be eroded, and that others will have because not everyone will receive their ministry’ (*GS Misc 1076, para 10*). Reciprocity commits us to ongoing relationship.
18. **Mutuality** describes the Church’s ongoing desire and commitment to sustain diversity, especially to making it possible for those of differing theological convictions to flourish. This is quite different from tolerance of one another’s position and requires mutual investment from those of differing theological convictions (*GS Misc 1076, paras 14-15; and Guidance para 17*).
19. Regarding oaths, in the light of the continuing role and authority of the diocesan bishop as the Ordinary, ordinands and all clergy taking up any office in the Church of England are both required and enabled to give (and, where appropriate, receive) the oath without “acting contrary to theological conviction” (*GS Misc 1076, paras 34-36*).

An Evangelical Bishop with Complementarian Theology

20. The necessity of a conservative evangelical bishop is, as has been said above, clearly stated in *GS Misc 1076 para 30* for the maintenance of a climate of trust between the wider Church of England and the conservative evangelical constituency. It pertains to ecclesiology.
21. For those in that constituency, this trust requires a bishop who believes and espouses the theology of male headship because a male bishop who asserts the interchangeability of men and women in priestly and episcopal ministries will be perceived to be in theological conflict with a parish that passes the resolution. The *Declaration* states that the diocesan bishops should appoint another bishop to offer extended

episcopal care 'avoiding conflict with the theological conviction on this issue' (*GS Misc 1076, para 26*).

22. The argument here is that maleness is necessary but not sufficient to ensure good pastoral care and support of those parishes who, for reasons of theological convictions, do not think it is appropriate to receive the priestly or episcopal ministry of women. Indeed, the postholder is required to advocate for those parishes holding this theological conviction in dioceses and in the wider Church of England.
23. The complementarian position arises from several interwoven theological convictions relating to:
 - a. the biblical presentation of male and female relationships;
 - b. orders of creation;
 - c. the distinctive but complementary roles to which God normally calls men and women;
 - d. the ordering of God's own trinitarian life.
24. The complementarian position regards women as having equal dignity, value and worth to men, but argues that the biblical witness indicates that women and men are created for distinctive roles and purposes. These distinctive roles are how men and women express their full humanity and live out God's intended purpose for their lives.
25. The complementarian theology of 'male headship' comes from the household regulations found in Ephesians 5:23 – "For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour" – and 1 Corinthians 11:3 – "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" – and describes the relationship between a husband and wife (see also related passages that do not mention headship but do describe male leadership in the home, Col. 3:18-20; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).
26. Male headship is patterned after Christ's loving care for the Church. It is understood as a divine ordinance in which both women and men should flourish (in accordance with God's will) and is not understood to mean

“power over”. It should involve sacrifice and service, such that the kind of headship the husband brings is to be a blessing to the wife.²

27. Though these texts do not refer to the relationship between all men and all women, or indeed between male church leaders and female members of the congregation, the complementarian position extends the structure of male headship to the church for two reasons: (a) because Ephesians 5 makes marriage analogous to the relationship between Christ and the Church; and (b) because the Church is the household of God (c.f. 1 Tim. 3:4-15) and thus the relationship between church polity and marriage is paralleled.
28. In the complementarian male headship understanding, marriage is a partnership of equals, though not interchangeable equals: husband and wife are differing, interdependent, and complementary. The argument therefore goes that nothing that happens in Church – the Household of God – should therefore confuse or contradict what happens in the home as God has set up and ordered it.
29. Other biblical material that describes the relationship between men and women, and particularly which reflects the leadership role of men and the necessity that woman act appropriately in the life of the Church (c.f. 1 Cor. 11:1-16; 1 Cor. 14:34-36; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6), is also often marshalled to make the case and explain the overlap between household regulations and church polity.
30. From this vantage point, male headship theology draws on the orders of creation in Genesis 2. Adam and Eve have differing but complementary roles and tasks to perform, the most obvious being that Eve alone would give birth to children. This biological distinction and interdependence is thought to be indicative of a wider set of distinctions, including the oversight role of men in relation to the first family and thus in wider humanity.
31. The picture throughout the complementarian view is of partnership (marriage being the foundational partnership) rooted in unity and

² See John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (2006). See also Lis Goddard and Clare Hendry, *The Gender Agenda* (2010)

difference in Christ. This is often said to reflect the unity and distinction that is part of God's own inner, triune life: the key term *perichoresis* names this unity and distinction. Each of the persons of the trinity is caught up in mutual penetration of the others, sharing their common divine essence whilst remaining distinctly and identifiably Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and performing different roles within the divine economy: the Son (who is equally worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Spirit) does only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19), and the Spirit is sent by the Father (John 14:16) to be our advocate.

32. For most complementarians this is not a first order issue – of faith and salvation – but a second order issue of Church order and polity, but, because it relates to the authority and interpretation of scripture, there are those who view it increasingly as of first order importance.
33. Regarding Anglican ecclesiology and polity, it is extremely important that the arrangements in *GS Misc 1076* are upheld to allow for the flourishing of those who, 'on the grounds of theological conviction are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests' (as per *The Five Guiding Principles*).

Appendix A

Excerpts from the House of Bishops' Declaration and accompanying Guidance 2014

House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests 19th May 2014

20. The recommended form of the resolution to be passed by the PCC is as follows: **"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 Bishops and Priests."** A PCC which has passed a resolution should send a copy of it to the diocesan bishop, archdeacon, diocesan registrar, and registered patron.

22. The House recognises that the nature of the theological conviction on the ordained ministry of women which underlies a decision to pass such a resolution will vary according to the tradition of the parish concerned. Where a resolution has been passed, and before clergy are appointed to the parish or a bishop chosen by the diocesan bishop to provide oversight, there will, therefore, need to be consultation between bishop and parish to ascertain the nature of that conviction so that the resolution can be implemented effectively. The House will provide guidance for bishops and parishes to help facilitate these conversations.

The College of Bishops

30. The House affirms the importance of there continuing to be consecrations of bishops within the Church of England to enable such ministry to be provided. The fact that the sees of Ebbsfleet and Richborough in the diocese of Canterbury and Beverley in the diocese of York remain in existence will provide one of a range of means by which the Archbishops will ensure that a suitable supply of bishops continues where it would not be secured in other ways. The House also accepts that the presence in the College of Bishops of at least one bishop who takes the Conservative Evangelical view on headship is important for sustaining the necessary climate of trust.

House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests – Guidance note for Bishops and Parishes – 12th June 2014

Conversations between the bishop and the PCC

13. In its Declaration the House of Bishops acknowledged that the needs of parishes would vary, depending on the nature of the theological conviction that had prompted the PCC to pass the resolution. Thus, for example, in some cases the issue will be one of 'headship' and the need will be for ministry from a male incumbent / priest in charge or bishop. With PCCs where the theological conviction reflects Traditional Catholic concerns there will be additional considerations. It is for the PCC to nominate one or more of its members to articulate on its behalf to the bishop the particular needs of the parish in the light of the theological conviction that underlies the resolution, so that the resolution can be implemented effectively.

14. In relation to episcopal ministry, it is for the diocesan bishop to decide who should minister to a parish where a resolution has been passed. In accordance with the principles set out in the House of Bishops' declaration the diocesan bishop will seek to ensure that pastoral and sacramental ministry is provided in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing.

15. He or she will choose the bishop from among those who are members of the House of Bishops of one of the diocesan synods of the Church of England - in other words, from among serving rather than retired bishops.

16. It is for the diocesan bishop, in the light of the five guiding principles and following consultation with the bishop, to determine the precise extent of the ministry to be entrusted to the latter in relation to a parish where a resolution has been passed. The expectation is that there will be many similarities with the range of responsibilities carried by any suffragan bishop in a diocese.

17. The aim will be to ensure cooperation in a variety of ways so as to contribute to the welfare, resourcing and mission of the parish and its relationship with the diocese. The position of the diocesan as Ordinary and chief pastor is unaltered.

