



Women and the Church
Affirming ✦ Challenging ✦ Transforming

A Code of Behaviour in Support of Mutual Flourishing

A supplement to the WATCH Publication
The Five Guiding Principles: An Introduction and Guide

A code of behaviour in support of mutual flourishing

The Church of England's 2014 Settlement on 'Women in the Episcopate', is underpinned by five 'guiding principles', which confirm that the Church is 'fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those who it has duly ordained and appointed to office are true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy and thus deserve due respect and canonical obedience (Guiding Principle 1). The commitment to pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority who are 'unable to receive the ministry of women priests or bishops', is made 'in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England (Guiding Principles 4 and 5).

The second Guiding Principle requires acknowledgement of the 'clear decision' on the matter by all those who minister within the Church of England.

The Guiding Principles were an important element of what was to herald a new climate, moving beyond reception and into full and explicit acceptance of the ordination of women. Taken together they provide a foundation for a commitment to the meaningful demonstration of mutual respect amongst all members of the Church of England, whether lay or ordained. In practice the experience of ordained women demonstrates that in many circumstances this new climate has not arrived, and they are accorded neither respect nor courtesy.

Personal and individual examples include:

- Being 'blanked' or ignored in both formal and informal settings
- Being excluded from licensing or induction events, either by not being invited to attend or being asked not to robe
- Being excluded from the sanctuary
- Being the object of denigrating comments, either made towards them directly or deliberately in their hearing
- Receiving hate mail or hate message on social media and online

Corporate examples include:

- Holding separate Chrism masses for those who do not receive the ministry of women
- Requests for separate ordinations, including those of deacons
- Requests for separate consecrations
- Requiring advance notice of a celebrant so as to avoid receiving communion from an ordained woman

These are belittling and disrespectful behaviours that are misogynistic and discriminatory. They have no place in a church which subscribes to mutual flourishing and aims for the highest possible degree of communion. Individuals and groups tempted to display these sorts of behaviours are urged to remember that if nothing else common courtesy should rule them out. But there are principles above common courtesy which are important too.

Jesus commanded us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). St Augustine had this reminder to us all:

Whosoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbour, does not yet understand them as he ought (On Christian Doctrine, 1, 1, 36, 40) ¹

To be on the receiving end of these belittling and demeaning behaviours is damaging and amounts to psychological and emotional abuse. This can be true of single or isolated experiences, or persistent experiences. Negative behaviour, which may be perceived by many as 'low level' or harmless, has an effect which is both adverse and cumulative. For an ordained woman her identity as a person and priest is called into question, her self-esteem is damaged and her confidence undermined.

The effects of such behaviours are well-documented but are exacerbated for ordained women because they are told that in order to support the flourishing of those who do not accept their ordination, they must be gracious to those who do not believe that they exist. They are themselves then prevented from flourishing in their callings as priests, deacons and bishops. In these circumstances mutual flourishing is impossible.

These behaviours fall into the category of bullying and harassment. Where there are institutional procedures which are relevant and can be followed, it is a good idea to make use of them, but this option is not always available.

The Church of England has encouraged dioceses to provide policies on dealing with bullying and harassment but has as yet no overarching policy or guidance. Behaviours of this sort do not always easily fit into diocesan policies. WATCH calls upon the Church of England to provide advice and support to those experiencing behaviour which militates against mutual flourishing.

Identifying behaviour which encourages mutual flourishing and excluding behaviour which discourages the same

In all our behaviour we should remember that:

- The first fundamental premise is to be guided by grace
- The second fundamental premise is always to behave as you would expect others to behave towards you, with empathy, courtesy and respect

In addition we should:

- Recognise, in accordance with the first and second guiding principles, that ordained women are true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy and deserve due respect and canonical obedience, in exactly the same way as ordained men
- Consider whether our belief is playing out as prejudice, and affecting our behaviour
- Consider whether our behaviour towards an ordained woman is the same as our behaviour would be towards an ordained man in all circumstances
- And we should therefore never:
 - Ignore or blank an ordained woman in any setting
 - Make denigrating, demeaning or belittling comments, whether to someone's face or in their hearing
 - Behave in any insulting manner towards an ordained woman
 - Act to exclude an ordained woman from any liturgy or act of worship

Advice if you experience this behaviour

‘If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault’
Matthew 18:15

It is justified and Christian to demonstrate to someone that their behaviour is at fault. You are not expected to ignore or accept what is done to you. You may want to do any of the following:

- Speak to the person privately to explain how they have offended you, and that their behaviour falls outside any concept of mutual flourishing (if the behaviour is rude or offensive it is appropriate to state this)
- If you feel unable to speak privately consider whether to approach the person accompanied by a trusted colleague
- If you feel the behaviour falls into the definition of bullying or harassment, and there are relevant procedures (e.g. in your diocese), make use of the advice in those procedures
- If you feel unable to make any approach either informally or formally, alone or with a colleague or friend, seek the opportunity to share the experience and your feelings about it with a trusted person (e.g. your spiritual director/companion, your Dean of Women’s Ministry, or anyone else who would understand the hurt and difficulty you experience)

Advice if you are challenged about your behaviour

‘If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault’
Matthew 18:15

It is justified and Christian to demonstrate to someone that their behaviour is at fault.

If you are challenged in this way you may want to do any of the following:

- Listen to what is said to you and respond graciously. If you feel your behaviour has been misunderstood then explain how and why, and listen to any response with empathy
- If you realise you have behaved unacceptably, apologise
- You may want to seek advice from a trusted colleague, whether you feel you have been unjustifiably accused, or wish to amend your behaviour (e.g. your spiritual director/companion, or anyone else who would understand your predicament)
- If an approach is made to you under the procedure laid out in a relevant policy on bullying and harassment, follow the advice given to an individual who is the subject of a complaint

Other ways forward

Where it appears to be impossible to act in grace there are possible routes to better understanding

- St Thomas Aquinas’s theology of friendship [G. Thomas, CT, 28 June 2019]
- Pastoral Principles for living well together [Church of England’s Pastoral Advisory Group, 2019]

Other resources

The Diocese of Chelmsford's advice on these issues is highly recommended as a model for understanding unacceptable behaviour, its definition and impact.

[Getting on Together: Encouraging positive relationships and preventing bullying and harassment in the Diocese of Chelmsford](#)

The definitions of bullying and harassment from *Getting on Together* are given below:

What is bullying and harassment?

Any behaviour that could potentially undermine someone's dignity and respect should be regarded as unacceptable. If it is not challenged, it is likely to escalate and lead to significant difficulties for all concerned.

In establishing the links between 'unacceptable behaviour', 'bullying' and 'harassment' as well as drawing together the common themes and issues, the following broader definition may be helpful: "Any behaviour, always involving a misuse of power, which an individual or group knows, or ought reasonably to know, could have the potential effect of offending, humiliating, intimidating or isolating an individual or group should be regarded as unacceptable... 'Unacceptable behaviour' changes its label to 'bullying' or 'harassing behaviour' when it causes actual harm or distress to the target(s), normally but not exclusively, after a series of incidents over a prolonged period of time. Lack of intent does not diminish, excuse or negate the impact on the target or the distress caused. The degree of intent is only relevant in terms of how the behaviour should be challenged and the issues subsequently resolved." (Fergus Roseburgh, Senior Staff Representative, Unite the Union, The Children's Society. March 2007)

The legal definition of harassment – as applied to gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and race and ethnic and national origin is: 'unwanted conduct that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 makes it illegal for someone to pursue a course of conduct which amounts to harassment; bullying has been successfully claimed as harassment under this Act.

Bullying is most easily identified when it is continuous, frequent, repetitive and part of an overall pattern. However, some abuse is serious enough to be recognised even if the behaviour occurred only once and is therefore not defined as bullying. (p 3)

[Unite the Union](http://unitetheunion.org) (unitetheunion.org) for members.

[ACAS](http://www.acas.org.uk) (www.acas.org.uk)

[The Sheldon Community](http://www.sheldon.uk.com) (www.sheldon.uk.com)
and in particular the [Sheldon Hub](http://www.sheldonthub.org) (www.sheldonthub.org)

Notes

1 Quoted by Mark Oakley, *My Sour-Sweet Days*, SPCK, 2019, p. 29)



womenandthechurch.org
admin@womenandthechurch.org