



Women and the Church
Affirming ✦ Challenging ✦ Transforming

Applying the Five Guiding Principles: Questions and Suggestions for Best Practice

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

Most people, whether PCC members, regular or irregular church attenders, or clergy, only come across the “Five Guiding principles” (5GPs) when their PCC chooses to use the provisions of the House of Bishops’ Declaration in order to restrict the ministry of women in their parish.

The purpose of this guide is to go through the different sections of the Declaration, considering how the processes and provisions can be followed in a way that respects all five of the 5GPs, takes seriously the context and values underpinning the legislation, and has the possibility of leading to genuinely mutual flourishing.

The Background

(this is covered in more detail in ‘The Five Guiding Principles: An Introduction and Guide’, chap 2 published by WATCH, 2020 womenandthechurch.org/5GP)

The purpose behind the 2014 legislative package was to make it possible to appoint women as bishops, and as soon as possible. This was the wish of the overwhelming majority of those who considered themselves part of the Church of England, and also of Parliament, which was significant because of the status of the C of E as the established church. General Synod was also determined to continue to make space for churches and individuals who did not accept the ministry and leadership of ordained women. The 5GPs were drawn up in early 2013 to set the framework for a legislative package that could achieve this.

The House of Bishops’ Declaration was drawn up by a group which included laity, clergy and bishops and reflected a range of theological viewpoints. Its provisions were designed to enable the C of E to continue to include those who dissent from ordaining women as priests and bishops and so focused almost entirely on meeting their perceived needs. GPs 4 and 5 are the expression of this wish. The Declaration and Guidance do not directly address the flourishing of the whole church or even all clergy, nor do they include any provisions to ensure that GPs 1 and 2 are given equal weight in applying the provisions of the Declaration. In continuing to provide for those who do not accept ordained women, the Declaration normalises discrimination on the grounds of gender within the Church of England, calling it acceptable theological difference. Similarly, the “highest possible degree of communion” is commonly defined by the limits of what is acceptable to those who do not receive ordained women’s ministry. It is important to be aware of this imbalance when applying the provisions of the Declaration, if the intention of the parish is to respect all five of the Guiding Principles. It was decided to include the text of the 5GPs as part of the Declaration, to remind users of its purpose and context.

The provisions of the Declaration are almost all related to parishes which wish to prevent ordained women leading worship in their churches, though precisely how depends on the theology of each church. Later decisions, such as requiring ordinands to affirm the 5GPs, and provisions for separate ordinations and consecrations, were not discussed by this group or any similar one with a wider range of views and experience, but by the bishops and (in the case of consecrations) Archbishops.

The phrases most often used when referring to the use of the 5 GPs are “mutual flourishing” and “the highest possible degree of communion”. However, the “flourishing” most often spoken of, is that of individuals and possibly a church, who do not wish to receive the ministry of women, while the flourishing of women, the wider parish community, and ecumenical partners is not considered. It is vital to continue to remind people that the ordained status of women is not just a point for debate and discussion or a theological viewpoint; for the woman in question it is her very identity as a person and a priest that is being undermined by such language. Recognising this, and the significance of the first two Guiding Principles, is important for good decision making both at parish and national level.

A new way of relating and dealing with difference

During the discussions and debates that led to the passing of the 2014 Measure and linked Declaration, members of General Synod were very clear that they hoped to legislate for women in the episcopate through a new way of dealing with differences based on mutual respect and listening. This new way would depend on everyone being willing to act with grace in order to move towards the full flourishing of all. The methods and approaches in which provision would be offered where needed were as significant as the provision itself, and it was hoped that they would continue to be important in putting the Declaration and the 5GPs into practice.

The possibility around those (Five Guiding) principles is that we might find ways of living together with difference in a way which is positive and respectful and honouring of one another.

The Bishop of Rochester July 2014

Members of General Synod made it clear that they hoped the values which 2014 legislation and the 5GPs would promote were:

- learning to live by grace not by law
- respecting and honouring one another mutually
- simplicity, reciprocity and mutuality
- transparency and relationality

WATCH believes that when applying the House of Bishops' Declaration, and the 5GPs, these values of the legislation should be central to all decisions, and that how they are applied should be made very clear to all. Mutual flourishing should flow from applying these values because it cannot be achieved through set actions and outcomes, but in how individuals and churches can become more fully themselves while listening with respect to everyone and being heard with respect and understanding.

Decision making in the light of the 5GPs and the underpinning values

The House of Bishops' Declaration focuses on provisions for parishes, and sets out the process for a parish to pass a resolution to send a letter of request to the diocesan bishop asking for provision to be made for them under the Declaration. A PCC wishing to use these provisions should consult the text of the House of Bishops' Declaration and the accompanying Guidance carefully, and not rely on other publications.

Before starting the process it is important for PCC members to be aware that the only reason for passing a resolution to send a letter of request to the diocesan bishop, is that the church members hold a theological view which leads them to choose not to receive the ministry of ordained women. PCC members have a responsibility to make this clear to the church members, and also to ensure that in their discussions, no one is supporting a resolution for reasons other than their theological views on the validity of women's leadership and sacramental ministries.

A Resolution is not:

- a means of choosing a bishop whose views the leadership of the church agree with.
- a means of preventing pastoral reorganisation and a church becoming part of a joint benefice.

It is not best practice to ask for extended oversight (and thus a greater degree of separation from the diocese) "in case" but only when the situation changes and there is no other way for that church.

Consultation before passing a resolution: mutual respect, transparency and relationality

There are various stages in the process of sending a letter of request. Throughout the process, the Declaration, the accompanying guidance, and the values of transparency and respect encourage as much consultation as possible, rather than allowing a small group in the parish to take all the decisions.

- The PCC should ensure that as many people as possible in the church and community are aware of the proposal to restrict the ministry of ordained women. This is a decision for the whole community, not only the ordained clergy or a small leadership group.
- It is also best practice for the PCC to seek ways of consulting as many members of the wider community as possible. In rural parishes this could be anyone who lives in the village because of the legal and social links between church and community.
- Church members and the wider community should be encouraged to discuss their views and ask questions of the PCC. They should be made aware that their views are important and given enough time to submit views to the PCC.
- A linked church school is a community which it is good practice to consult. The views of staff, parents and governors should be made known to the PCC and taken seriously.
- The PCC should ensure that everyone is aware of the implications of passing such a resolution, within the church, in the wider community and also for projects with other churches, including ecumenical partners.

When a parish is considering passing a resolution, some of the areas it should consider in order to promote mutual flourishing include:

- Being aware of how issuing a letter of request might impact on women in a team, both ordained and lay.
- Being aware of how women and girls in the congregation might be affected in their own vocation and calling.
- Being aware of the potential impact on female colleagues in shared projects (e.g. deanery) or in ecumenical churches with shared ministry.

The guidance notes are clear that PCC members are not delegates, and vote as each considers to be right. The notes also recognise that the views of PCC members might not match the views of the community (point 11). If there is disagreement within the PCC, or between the PCC and the congregation, then consideration of how everyone can flourish, including the impact on the mission and relationships of the church in that area, is particularly important.

If the PCC of a parish with a Church School passes a Resolution, it is good practice (and should perhaps be expected as normal practice) for any parish which has chosen to exclude ordained women to make arrangements for ordained women to be visible visitors to any school in their parish, in order to provide role models and enable the full flourishing of the school community.

When making these decisions, the value of reciprocity is particularly important, because of the lack of reciprocity within the Declaration itself. Reciprocity, listed in the preamble to the provisions of the Declaration, reminds everyone that the needs and flourishing of those who value the ministry of women also need to be provided for. It is important to recognize that a parish which values the ministry of women and wishes to be a place where the ministry of women can flourish, should be given the same consideration and respect as a parish which consciously wishes to avoid women's ordained ministry and leadership.

Agreeing a response to a Letter of Request with the diocesan bishop: mutual respect, mutual flourishing and the importance of grace

The next stage in the process is for the diocesan bishop (or someone given the task by the bishop) to meet with the parish to discern the best way of responding to the request of the parish. According to the Declaration, the PCC is not expected to ask for a specific outcome in its letter, but for discussions, in order to arrive at the best solution for all. (point 22)

The Guidance from the House of Bishops discusses this part of the process in points 13-20. The overriding values of mutual respect, mutual flourishing and seeking the greatest degree of communion whether in parish, deanery, diocese or national church, allow space for agreements and ways forward to be agreed in each instance. The underlying intention of this section of the Declaration is that any agreement for providing episcopal ministry to a parish is based on responding to the needs of the parish and ensuring the continued relationship between the diocesan bishop, the parish, and a bishop asked to minister to that parish. There are no set “packages”, and parish representatives and Bishop and parish work together to find ways to enable the relationship between the church, its members and the diocesan bishop to continue and be recognised, and, it is hoped, evolve towards higher degrees of communion. The hope is that they can achieve the highest possible degree of communion through mutuality, listening with respect and relationality.

Reviewing Resolutions: growing towards the highest degree of communion possible

The Declaration states that the decision to pass a resolution should be reviewed from time to time, and particularly when there is a vacancy. This review is about whether to continue to restrict the ministry of ordained women, not the practicalities in that particular church.

In the same way that it is good practice to review Mission Action Plans and other strategic plans every three to five years, it would be good practice to include agreement on a suitable review interval when discussing the implementation of a resolution with the diocesan bishop. Such reviews would recognise the values of transparency and mutuality, and include wide consultation with the church and parish.

Promoting mutual flourishing and the highest degree of communion possible beyond the parish

Transparency: publicising the church’s theological view on women

A church which passes a resolution based on its theological views of ordained women, will consider this an important part of its identity. In a world where women are regarded as equal with men in employment, leadership etc, it is important to publicise this counter cultural position. In the interests of transparency and enabling the flourishing of all, including those looking for a church to attend, this information should be made clear and obvious on websites and publicity literature, and in language which is not church “jargon” (e.g. phrases such as “has passed a Resolution under the House of Bishops’ Declaration”; “is under the pastoral care of the Bishop of Ebbsfleet/ Beverley/Maidstone” etc, which are not understood by a majority of people in or out of the Church). “A Church Near You” website pages should include information on the theological position of a church which does not accept the ministry of ordained women.

Receiving Communion

Any congregation member is free to choose whether or not to receive communion at any service, and if they do not, whether to remain in their seat or go to receive a blessing. Those who choose not to receive communion from women should consider, in the light of the flourishing of all (in this case, other

regular congregation members, visitors, and the priest who is presiding), how they behave if they find themselves at a service where a woman is presiding. Choosing not to receive communion is a personal decision, and should not become a “statement”. Leaving during the service in a way that appears to others as a “statement” may cause distress to others, distract from the liturgy and their worship, and thus make the flourishing of others more difficult.

Some churches choose to publish the names of the presiding priest in advance. It is important for these churches to consider, if they do this in response to a request to enable an individual to avoid services where women preside, whether they are acting pastorally (for the individual) or are colluding with discrimination, and thus becoming a church which does not fully support and enable the flourishing of ordained women in its actions.

NB Anglican teaching is that the efficacy of receiving the sacrament is not dependent on the person of the priest.

Affirming the 5 GPs

This is painful for many women ordinands and others who are asked to affirm these principles. The 5GPs, by their nature, include statements which both those who affirm the ordained ministry of women, and those who do not believe it is possible, find it difficult to affirm with integrity (e.g. many members of General Synod who explicitly do not accept women as priests and church leaders, voted against the 2014 Measure and linked canon, because of their beliefs) . The 5GPs were not drawn up to be a “credal” statement that all could affirm, but to set the boundaries which all would acknowledge when preparing new legislation and finding ways of living with it. Such an affirmation is not part of the House of Bishops’ Declaration and was never discussed in General Synod. Since this requirement causes difficulties of conscience, pain, and anxiety, it would be helpful to revisit this decision in order to consider what is being expected and asked of clergy, and what such an affirmation is intended to achieve. Are there other or better ways of achieving mutual respect and working towards the highest degree of communion across the Church of England?

Vocations

The Church of England selects and trains women for ordained ministry on the same terms as men. Women who are worshipping in a church which does not receive the ordained ministry of women can still have a vocation to the priesthood, even with few role models. It is important that a woman of any age is able to discuss these early stirrings of vocation with someone who is sympathetic and can affirm her calling. Churches which have passed resolutions enabling them to avoid the ministry of ordained women should be willing to make a link with someone to whom women discerning vocation can be referred, if the church’s own ministers are not able to advise them with personal integrity.

It would be even more helpful if this was publicised within the church, so that at a vulnerable moment a woman does not have to face the implicit disapproval of her church leaders.

Lay women

The House of Bishops’ Declaration is predominantly about the needs of parishes and church communities, not the clergy who are licensed to them. Despite the current C of E commitment to developing the ministry of all the baptised, very little thinking has taken place, or certainly has not been discussed publicly, on how laity in parishes may flourish. It is particularly important to consider how lay women and girls might flourish in their vocations in parishes which do not have any role models of women leaders, or where opportunities for ministry are limited to certain roles, such as children’s work.

Diocesan and national events

The embedded contradictions within the 5GPs often become most obvious at diocesan events, particularly those which include sacraments e.g. Chrism Masses and ordinations (see chapter 4 in 'The Five Guiding Principles: An Introduction and Guide' womenandthechurch.org/5GP).

The legislative package agreed in 2014 includes very little guidance for making decisions beyond parishes. Most decisions on matters of wider concern, such as Chrism Masses, ordinations and consecrations, have been made by bishops or archbishops without consulting more widely or fully considering the impact of these decisions. It is noteworthy that it is frequently these decisions which have caused most pain for ordained women. The interpretation of "mutual flourishing" has been used more often to create barriers between different groups within the church rather than create a context which models the greatest degree of communion possible e.g:

- separate Chrism Masses for those who do not receive the ministry of women emphasises division rather than shared communion, shared ministry and mission
- holding separate ordinations, including those of deacons, also emphasise that some groups in the Cof E do not fully accept the ministry of their own diocesan bishops.

Holding separate events may feel easier, but it colludes with a belief that mutuality and shared communion is about feeling comfortable and doing what we have always done. It also plays into the belief that ordaining women has somehow invalidated the sacramental ministry of the Church of England and all its bishops and priests. There must be ways of planning such events to focus on what is shared rather than what separates, and which does not leave women feeling that they and their ministry is undermined by the church itself. One key factor in this sort of planning is to ensure that the planning group includes a wide enough range of people, and is willing to hear the voices of those who will feel excluded or hurt by a decision which seems to tacitly accept that ordained women can undermine sacraments.

Independent Reviewer

(this is discussed in Chapter 4 of 'The Five Guiding Principles: An Introduction and Guide' womenandthechurch.org/5GP)

The role of the Independent Reviewer was created to give confidence that if any parish or individual or group with legitimate interest felt that the House of Bishops' Declaration was not being followed, there was a way of challenging this independently of other church (often diocesan) structures. A PCC, or an individual or group with a "legitimate interest" can appeal to the Independent Reviewer. Information on how to bring a grievance can be found on the Church of England website here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/general-synod/bishops/house-bishops-declaration-ministry-bishops>

However, the role and scope of the Independent Reviewer is largely confined to reviewing processes to ensure they comply with the House of Bishops' Declaration and Guidance, with very little investigation into whether the actions being reviewed are helping or hindering the flourishing of all and leading to the greatest degree of communion possible. These documents, on which the Independent Reviewer bases his (sic) decisions, were drawn up to ensure the place and needs of the minority who do not accept ordained women either as sacramental ministers or as church leaders. There is nothing included in any of the documents to support women who may be experiencing discrimination or harassment, or to consider what women need to be able to flourish in their faith or ministry.

Good examples of Mutual Flourishing

Examples are given of “mutual flourishing” which include action such as:

- Members of a Deanery Chapter continuing to meet and pray together even though the Chapter might include both ordained women and also ordained men who remain uncertain that their female colleagues are priests or who feel that receiving communion from a woman might be risky.
- Bishops who are members of the Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda supporting the ministry of women, including supporting those who are discerning a vocation to priesthood.
- Bishops who are women being present at ordinations in their diocese when the ordaining bishop does not accept the priestly or episcopal ministry of the bishop.
- Ordained women attending and robing at the licensings of colleagues who will not receive their ministry, and clergy who do not accept women’s priestly ministry being present at a woman’s licensing.
- The occasions when individuals can recognise that there is pain on both sides and share that pain.

When looking at such examples, whilst being thankful they exist, we all need to ask ourselves if this is the extent of “mutual flourishing” and if it fulfils the hopes of those who agreed the legislation and House of Bishops’ Declaration in 2014. What is described is what anyone would hope and expect to be the behaviour of any clergy chapter and colleagues. We should expect to listen to each other with respect, to be able to share vulnerabilities and to pray for each other and with each other. If any of these examples are seen as examples of new ways of living, then although we are thankful for developing relationships, this is also an indictment of what has been accepted and normalized over the past 25 years.

While it is good to hear from clergy who are women who feel that they are supported in their ministry and vocation by a bishop who does not personally believe that women can be ordained, this support should be a normal expectation (accepting that individuals may have different experiences). Women still feel it is strange and painful that their bishops cannot fully trust the sacramental worth of their priestly ministry.

WATCH will be very glad to hear of any examples of mutual flourishing which go beyond mutual support and prayer, welcome as this is.



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