



Women and the Church  
Affirming ✦ Challenging ✦ Transforming

# Five Guiding Principles: An Introduction and Guide

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This publication is accompanied by, and should be read in conjunction with:

**A Code of Behaviour in Support of Mutual Flourishing**

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

## Preface

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### **The House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests: Statement of Guiding Principles<sup>1</sup>**

The House reaffirms the five guiding principles which it first commended in May 2013 when submitting legislative proposals to the General Synod for the consecration of women to the episcopate and which the Synod welcomed in its resolution of 20 November 2013. They need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively:

1. Now that legislation has been passed to enable women to become bishops the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those whom 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;
2. Anyone who ministers within the Church of England must be prepared to acknowledge that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on the matter;
3. Since it continues to share the historic episcopate with other Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and those provinces of the Anglican Communion which continue to ordain only men as priests or bishops, the Church of England acknowledges that its own clear decision on ministry and gender is set within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God;
4. Since those within the Church of England who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures; and
5. Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England will be made without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> GS Misc 1076 House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests pp 1-2.

## Introduction

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In 2014 the Five Guiding Principles (5GPs) were agreed as part of the framework for the legislation under which General Synod approved the Measure and the change in Canon Law for the consecration of women as bishops. The 5GPs were intended to be elements of a shared vision which would allow all sides in the debate to move forward towards 'mutual flourishing' and 'the highest degree of communion possible'. The intention was to nurture a culture of grace, mutual trust and respect. The principles were not intended to be, or to represent, either theology or legislation.

The first two principles set out, very clearly, the position of the Church of England with respect to a full and unequivocal commitment that all orders of ministry are open to all, regardless of gender, and that anyone who ministers within the Church of England 'must be prepared to acknowledge that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on this matter'. The remaining three principles were intended to enable those who do not wish to receive the ministry of ordained women to continue to be part of the Church of England.

This booklet has been prepared by Women and the Church (WATCH) as one response to the questions which continue to be asked of us about the 5GPs. It describes briefly how and why the 5GPs were created, explores ways in which the principles have worked out in practice so far, and addresses some of the difficulties and tensions which continue to arise, despite the hopes following the 2014 votes in General Synod.

WATCH believes that it is of the utmost importance to have clarity about how different interpretations of the principles, and the behaviours which spring from those interpretations, continue to militate against mutual flourishing, and a culture of grace, mutual trust and respect in the Church of England. In particular it is important to remember that any attempt to say 'this is what the Five Guiding Principles mean' will be a matter of interpretation. The principles were created in the context of passing a simple Measure which stated that both women and men could be ordained as priests and bishops, in order to remove discrimination on the grounds of gender in this regard in the Church of England.

They were not intended to be rules, but were created to enable conversation between different individuals and groups to continue, rather than to lay down a specific interpretation. WATCH believes it is important for the health of the whole of the Church of England to acknowledge and name the contradictions which play out in some of these interpretations, and the impact these can have on church members, not least ordained women.

This booklet is intended for all in the Church of England, both those familiar with the 5GPs, and those who know little about them. Clergy, including bishops, those holding posts such as Deans of Women's Ministry, and staff in training institutions, may well be very familiar with the principles. It is possible that ordinands, the laity, and even members of General Synod, will be less so. It is likely that individuals in all these groups will be unaware of some of the ways in which the principles have been interpreted, and played out, and the unforeseen consequences of these interpretations and outcomes. The analysis and evidence presented below will, WATCH hopes, allow the Church of England to reflect on the efficacy of the 5GPs and consider how mutual flourishing may be achieved in the future.

It is suggested that the booklet be read in conjunction with two complementary WATCH publications:

### **A Code of Behaviour in Support of Mutual Flourishing**

[womenandthechurch.org/5GP-Code](http://womenandthechurch.org/5GP-Code)

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

[womenandthechurch.org/5GP-apply](http://womenandthechurch.org/5GP-apply)

### Background and context

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They [5GPs].... are principles that underlie how we have reached the position we are in now and can continue to guide us in the way in which we will act together in the future. I am particularly pleased that we have reached a position where we can all say that we accept each other's orders.

Mrs Sue Slater (Lincoln) General Synod debate Feb 2014

The 5GPs were developed after the collapse of the 2012 legislation for the appointment of women as bishops in the Church of England. A House of Bishops working group proposed the 5GPs as parameters within which new legislation could be created, affirming the 'elements of the vision around which all can gather, and also setting the acceptable limits of diversity'.<sup>1</sup> General Synod accepted them for this purpose in July 2013.<sup>2</sup>

Members of Synod were clear that:

- any sense that ordained women were 'inferior' or might not be fully priests was unacceptable;
- that as far as the Church of England is concerned, the period of 'reception' had passed;
- there should not be any attempt to separate the legal and spiritual functions of a bishop. 'Office' and 'Order' could not be divided;  
(in the established church bishops have spiritual and legal roles – for a fuller explanation see the Faith and Order Study Guide pp18-21).<sup>3</sup>
- Synod wanted provision for those who could not receive the ministry of ordained women which would be primarily provision for parishes, not for individuals (or clergy).<sup>4</sup>

The 5GPs were included at the beginning of the House of Bishops' Declaration as a reminder of what Synod could agree on, to underpin the rest of the document. Later uses, such as the need for ordinands (and some clergy on licensing to a new benefice) being required to affirm them, were introduced by the House of Bishops at a later date.<sup>5</sup>

The subsequent passing of the 2014 legislation ended the theologically questionable separation between priesthood and episcopacy. Not all have a vocation to episcopal leadership, but no longer could gender prevent someone from being appointed as a bishop. The first of the 5GPs included in the House of Bishops' Declaration, stated that:

...the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those whom it has duly ordained and appointed to office are true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy...

Followed in the second by the clear statement that:

Anyone who ministers within the Church of England must be prepared to acknowledge that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on the matter.

This was particularly important, because, as the reaction to the failure of the 2012 legislation demonstrated, many women, and men too, realised that although the Church of England had ordained women since 1994, the Act of Synod, the thinking that underpinned it and the way in which the role of Provincial Episcopal Visitors (PEVs) was used and allowed to play out in the Church of England, validated the thinking that women were only provisionally ordained. What followed the failure of the

2012 legislation was a deep sense among many women, lay and ordained, that women were somehow regarded as less than men in God's and/or the church's view. The 2014 Measure and the House of Bishops' Declaration ended the basis for such thinking in the Church of England, and General Synod members recognised the importance of this.

However, alongside the statement that the time of reception in the Church of England was over, lay the wish of General Synod to continue to find a place in the Church for those who still could not and do not accept the ministry of women ordained to the priesthood or episcopate.

The thinking and discussions in General Synod and the dioceses that led to this Measure being passed all emphasised the importance of giving priority to grace, reconciliation and trust rather than legal statements of boundaries and what is and is not permissible. Most speeches in Synod spoke of the importance of mutual trust and acceptance, rather than codes of practice. There was much talk of this potentially demonstrating a different and Christian way of living with difference, which should be welcomed. There was hope in a future where differences of approach to any topic would be marked by the enrichment of hearing and valuing a range of responses, rather than putting up barriers between groups in the church.

.....with the five guiding principles we are invited to commit ourselves to a spirit of working and walking together, which is befitting a Christian community that is animated by the spirit of the risen Christ.

Rev Canon Dagmar Winter, General Synod, July 2014

The House of Bishops' Declaration, the Guidance on putting it into practice, and the role and remit of the Independent Reviewer, were all set up to give confidence that the Declaration would be administered equitably and to ensure the place of the minority who would not accept ordained women either as sacramental ministers or as church leaders.

Nevertheless several crucial issues were not covered in the House of Bishops' Declaration, nor were they considered by General Synod.

- There was no detailed discussion of what 'mutual flourishing' could look like and feel like to different people.
- There was no detailed discussion of what 'the highest possible degree of communion' might look like, or even what aspirations for this might be.
- The House of Bishops' Declaration and the Guidance do not contain any information or advice on how to plan ordinations and consecrations. This was left to the Archbishops.
- The Declaration does not consider the hidden discrimination, often felt keenly by lay members of a congregation, of an incumbent refusing to allow women to minister in any way in 'his' church.

### Notes

- 1 Women in the Episcopate – New Legislative Proposals GS 1886 May 2013 [bit.ly/gs-1886](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2013-05-20%20GS%201886%20-%20Women%20in%20the%20Episcopate.pdf)
- 2 For further detail on the context of the creation of the 5GPS, see GS 1886.
- 3 The five Guiding Principles; A Resource for Study FAOC 2018
- 4 GS 1886, Annex point 56.; House of Bishops' Declaration points 16-29
- 5 For example: Guidance Notes for DDOs, Bishops' Advisers and Principals of TEIs on Handling the Five Guiding Principles in the Diocesan Discernment Process, at Selection and Prior to Ordination. November 2017.

### Interpretations

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#### Interpretations of what the 5GPs might mean

While legislation was prepared and debated in 2013-4, no attempt was made to explore what 'mutual flourishing' and 'the highest possible degree of communion' might look like in practice. The role of the Independent Reviewer is limited to adjudicating on the application of provisions of the House of Bishops' Declaration. The lack of any such work then or in the following years was highlighted in a letter written to the Church Times (17 March 2017) from three members of the group who drew up the 5 GPs and the linked legislation in 2013-4:

The problem, however, is that they [the 5GPs] are, as their name suggests, "principles". All principles need work to be applied in practice, and the more important a principle, the more vital it is that time and energy are put into thinking through its practical outworking.<sup>1</sup>

#### Faith and Order Commission

The members of the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) are appointed by the Archbishops in order to respond theologically to current issues of church and society. In 2018 they published a Study Guide on the 5GPs which provides a commentary on them and offers suggestions for future reflection. It is important to recognise that this is a guide for study, not a report or position statement of the Church of England. If a parish or group wishes to consider the 5GPs and their implications in more depth, this guide is one place to start.

The sixty-page document describes how continuing divisions in the Church of England have been accommodated institutionally since 1993; analyses each of the 5GPs to explain its purpose and implications; and suggests reasons why some might find it a challenge to accept each principle. The report goes into detail in explaining the significance of the precise wording of the 5GPs and so is worth reading in full. Below, we highlight some of the significant issues that are explored in the report.

One is 'the challenge of recognition' (p20). GP1 makes it clear that all three orders of ministry are open to women as well as men, but the Study Guide asks what this might mean for someone who is unsure about this. Significantly, it also recognizes that ambiguity of recognition of an individual's order, and thus identity, can be a source of great pain (p21). A majority of ordained women today recognise this tension and pain. Lack of recognition for a minister (nearly always a woman) also raises questions about the 'life of the church communities that receive their ministry' (p21).

The willingness of the Church of England to say that it is acceptable for clergy to remain publicly ambivalent over the validity of women's orders is one the key reasons for women feeling that the 5GPs continue to undermine them and their ministry (see Chapter 4 below).

The Guide also considers the wider context of decisions made by the Church of England (GP3). The provinces of the Church of England are the only provinces in the Anglican Communion which attempt to balance legislation including those who do not accept ordained women with legislation stating gender is not a disqualification for ordination. The report also reminds us that non-conformist churches (e.g. Methodists) would have found the Covenant between the churches very difficult if women could not be bishops. It is also worth noting that the Roman Catholic church does not accept the orders of Anglicans whether they are women or men.

Another significant issue raised in this report, particularly when considering GPs 4 and 5, is what constitutes mutual flourishing. Despite flourishing normally being described as mutual, the 5GPs and the House of Bishops' Declaration focus on the flourishing of those who dissent from the ordination of

women. The FOAC Guide writes in detail about this, but a significant reminder is that

The phrase ‘mutual flourishing’ needs to be understood in this context [that of seeking the highest possible degree of communion]. It should not be taken to legitimate deepening separation, as though we will flourish more if we have less to do with one another (p36).

The guide reminds us that the language of ‘degrees of communion’ originated in ecumenical ecclesiology, to affirm the communion between divided churches without denying the serious effects of that division, such as not sharing communion (p33). The Church of England has normalized accepting that not everyone shares in communion, an episcopate that is not fully in communion with each other, the continued questions over the sacramental validity of some clergy’s orders, and careful organisation of ordinations and consecrations to preserve boundaries. This does not match the definition of a church as generally understood.

The report reminds readers that the 5GPs ‘need to be read one with the other and held in tension, rather than being applied selectively’, but also acknowledges that if GP1 is accepted in its entirety, then it is impossible to profess to be unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests (GP4). The FAOC study guide (pp21-22) explicitly states that there should be no risk of divorcing ‘the office itself from the person holding that office in a way that undermines both ecclesiology and personal relationships’. It then asks

how can the Church of England be ‘fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender’ and, at the same time, enable the ‘flourishing’ of those who ‘on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests?’ (pp27-8)

The FAOC Study Guide comes to no definitive conclusion on this. It emphasises the importance of mutual respect for those who have different theological views, and the importance of continuing to work together and develop relationships between those of different views.

Readers are left with hopeful suggestions and aspirations, rather than a theological way forward with practical applications for parishes and dioceses. The mutual respect described is the same as that exemplified in all good ecumenical relationships and does not speak to any degree into the tension of contradictory views on whether or not someone is truly a priest or bishop, and how the eucharist can be a place of reconciliation rather than place where barriers are explicit. No awareness is shown, or guidance offered, for the needs of those who are negatively affected by the denial of their priesthood.

The years of attempting to live in the context of the 2014 Declaration and the commitment to mutual flourishing have not yet led to any answers, nor offered deeper biblical or theological understanding and enlightenment. They are questions we need to continue to reflect on and discuss.

### Forward in Faith

Forward in Faith was founded in 1992, following the approval by General Synod of the ordination of women. The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda was set up in 2010 to create, with Forward in Faith, a framework for ensuring the ‘sacramental security’ of ‘traditional’ Anglo-Catholic clergy, and produced its own guidance and theological interpretation of the 5GPs as soon as the Measure was passed.

Whilst many catholic Anglicans welcome ordained women, the groups represented by FiF and SSWSH have never believed that the Church of England has the right to make this decision. Since 1993, their emphasis on ‘sacramental assurance’ has meant they not only refuse to take communion if the president is a woman, but also believe that (male) bishops who have ordained women have put their own orders

into doubt, and so many will not take communion from such bishops. This has also led to requests for separate ordinations by Society bishops, and special arrangements for the consecration of traditional bishops. This comes perilously close to a theology of taint.

FiF and SSWSH are adamant that they do not hold a theology of taint, and explain continued requests for separate Chrism masses, ordinations and other rites, even when the Diocesan bishop is male, by emphasising the importance of 'an episcopate or priesthood that enjoys full mutual recognition'. This concept uses the Roman Catholic term of 'impaired communion', normally used in ecumenical contexts.

Forward in Faith issued guidance on how they could interpret the 5GPS in 2014.<sup>2</sup>

- The 5GPs were drafted to be clear that the period of 'reception' in the Church of England is now complete. FiF guidance states that discernment on this issue is not 'absolute' because it has not been arrived at by 'the whole Church' and 'with hope and prayer that, in the fullness of time, the Church of England will come to recognise it has been wrong'.
- The 5GPs were drafted to avoid the separation of the legal and sacramental roles of bishops and incumbents. FiF guidance is drafted to enable this.
- When discussing 'mutual flourishing': 'The bishops and other Church of England authorities in the Church of England will need to be able to demonstrate (if necessary, to the Independent Reviewer) that what they do in respect of us is directed towards enabling us to flourish.'

There is an unspoken tendency to think that 'flourishing' is demonstrated through promotion and preferment, which is not relevant to the majority of clergy, and not to laity.

### **The Church Society (amalgamated with Reform in 2018)**

The Church Society is one of the dominant associations of conservative evangelicals in the Church of England. It shares with other conservative evangelical groups a complementarian view of ministry and subscribes to a doctrine of 'male headship'. This usually means men leading in church and in marriage and the family (and sometimes in the workplace). Wives are expected to submit to husbands, and women generally to submit to male leadership in church life, where it is viewed as inappropriate for a woman to teach or have authority over men.<sup>3</sup>

The Church Society describes itself as existing to 'strengthen local churches in biblical faith and to help shape the Church of England now and for the future.'<sup>4</sup> It, and other conservative evangelical organisations, have different points of tension with the 5GPs.<sup>5</sup>

Male headship theology is the key reason for conservative evangelical opposition to the ordination of women, the consecration of women as bishops, and more generally, to appointing ordained and lay women to leadership roles in churches. They are less concerned about sacramental authority, but many of these churches prevent women from preaching and from teaching groups which include adult males. Many conservative evangelicals are also uneasy about making oaths of obedience to a bishop who is a woman.

The Reform Covenant (which has been endorsed by all members of the Church Society Council, and which Reform churches sign up to) says:

Our understanding of God's way of life for his people includes:

The unique value of women's ministry in the local congregation but also the divine order of male headship, which makes the headship of women as priests in charge, incumbents, dignitaries and bishops inappropriate.<sup>6</sup>

This statement is clearly in contradiction to GP1 and GP2, so it is unsurprising that women, both lay and ordained, will find it hard or impossible to flourish in such church communities, as the ways in which they can experience vocation or exercise their gifts are significantly limited. It is especially hard for women to flourish if they are not informed and so are unaware about the policy to exclude them from certain opportunities and roles.

The Bishop of Maidstone was appointed as a (suffragan) bishop with views acceptable to Reform churches under the scheme for provincial episcopal visitors (PEVs), and he ministers to parishes that have passed Resolutions (see Chapter 5 below). In a 2018 survey 25 per cent of clergy respondents choosing oversight from the Bishop of Maidstone said that they were unhappy to some degree or other with the 5GPs, and in affirming their acceptance of them. When asked about the possibility of taking an oath of canonical obedience to a female bishop, responses demonstrated degrees of resistance; 59 per cent either would or were unsure, but of this group 80 per cent said they would send a clarifying letter to the bishop beforehand. 40 per cent of respondents would find difficulty in taking such an oath.<sup>7</sup>

The Bishop of Maidstone has documents explaining the 5GPs and the House of Bishops' Declaration and Guidance from the point of view of churches with complementarian theology.<sup>8</sup> Much of this leaflet is advice on how to pass a Resolution asking for episcopal oversight from the Bishop of Maidstone, and how to manage this process so that the Resolution is most likely to be passed. The advice goes well beyond the parameters set out in the House of Bishops' Guidance (GS Misc 1077).<sup>9</sup>

### Notes

- 1 The letter was signed by Vivienne Faull, Paula Gooder and Margaret Swinson.
- 2 'The Five Guiding Principles: A Commentary', FiF summary leaflet. [www.forwardinfaith.com/uploads/Principles\\_Commentary\\_for\\_Web.pdf](http://www.forwardinfaith.com/uploads/Principles_Commentary_for_Web.pdf)
- 3 Carrie Sandom, 'The role of women in the local church' [churchsociety.org/docs/reform\\_resources/role\\_of\\_women.pdf](http://churchsociety.org/docs/reform_resources/role_of_women.pdf)
- 4 [churchsociety.org/society/page/about\\_us/](http://churchsociety.org/society/page/about_us/)
- 5 Other organisations holding similar views include AMiE and GAFCON.
- 6 [churchsociety.org/docs/reform\\_resources/why\\_have\\_a\\_covenant.pdf](http://churchsociety.org/docs/reform_resources/why_have_a_covenant.pdf) p.10
- 7 [www.bishopofmaidstone.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Newsletter-Advent-2018-final-version.pdf](http://www.bishopofmaidstone.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Newsletter-Advent-2018-final-version.pdf)
- 8 [www.bishopofmaidstone.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/bishop-full\\_screen.pdf](http://www.bishopofmaidstone.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/bishop-full_screen.pdf)
- 9 GS Mis 1077 House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests – Guidance note from the House [bit.ly/gs-Misc-1077](http://bit.ly/gs-Misc-1077)

### Living with the Five Guiding Principles: joy, pain and ambiguity

God is available to us as we work together to find His will for the future. For me this means changing the language of our discourse from one of suspicion, balanced by guarantee, to one of mutual respect. I hope that we can work together to begin the journey again but in a different way...God is inviting us to respond to his love by building new relationships characterized by mutual respect.

Christopher Lowson, Bishop of Lincoln July 2013

When the Measure to enable women to be appointed to the episcopate in England finally passed in General Synod in July 2014, there was a mixture of joy and relief across the Church of England, and in the wider community. After twenty-five years, the theologically questionable separation between priesthood and episcopacy was ended. The Church of England had finally stated unambiguously that women could be ordained to any order, without reservations, and the deep sense of unease that women were somehow regarded as less than men in God's and the church's view would finally end. Gender could no longer prevent someone from being appointed a bishop, and many looked forward to the enrichment that greater gender diversity among the bishops, might bring to the Church of England, to Parliament and in their communities. A majority of people in the country as well as the church hoped that it meant the Church of England had finally ended discrimination against women.

Those who still could not accept ordained women, and women in church leadership, were also glad that the General Synod had shown itself committed to including them in all parts of the Church of England and that this had been agreed without a time limit.

General Synod members who had experienced the divisions and anguish when the first attempt to legislate for women to be part of the episcopacy was voted down in 2012, were relieved and joyful that they had both been able to pass legislation to enable this, but also that the process had brought those with very different views together, and enabled respect for each other to grow, in ways unimaginable two years earlier. They hoped very much that this experience would lead to a new way of dealing with difference in the Church of England through mutual respect and listening, and willingness of everyone to act with grace and towards the full flourishing of everyone. The ways in which provision would be offered where needed was regarded by most members as at least as significant as the provision itself, and much was made of learning to live by grace not by law.

I sense what I hope is a greater degree of trust and a desire to be open and transparent. The proposals that have come before us are relational, ..., and are based on a desire to walk together around the five principles that the House of Bishops has articulated and committed itself to. This relational way of moving forward has to be founded on trust.

Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Southwark, General Synod, February 2014

However, it was not long before the pain, so familiar to many ordained (and lay) women was felt again. Usually, women were silent about this, or only spoke in contexts where what they said was entirely confidential and felt safe. Many felt that it was regarded as unacceptable to say that actions taken in the name of 'mutual flourishing' did not enable them to flourish, and yet again, raised questions for them about whether the Church of England really did affirm their priesthood.

These reactions and feelings are not surprising when we look objectively at the 2014 legislative package, and realise that the aspiration (however laudable it may sound) to include everyone meant that gender discrimination remains an integral and accepted part of the Church of England. The focus

of the House of Bishops' Declaration was to ensure the place of the minority who would not accept ordained women either as sacramental ministers or as church leaders, and there is nothing overt in the Declaration or processes to protect the flourishing of women and parishes which support women's ministry, nor to support women who may be experiencing exclusion, discrimination or harassment and other inappropriate behaviour. Instead there seemed to be an underlying assumption that once women could be appointed as bishops, nothing more needed to be done to enable women to flourish in the Church of England.

### **The wound of mutual flourishing**

This underlying assumption was challenged by an unpredicted result of research carried out by Dr Gabrielle Thomas published in 2019.<sup>1</sup> Dr Thomas was investigating receptive ecumenism and her method was to set up several ecumenical groups of women who would discuss the same questions. One of these questions was 'What would you name as a wound in your church?' In every single group, ordained Anglican clergy described 'mutual flourishing' as 'an active wound' in the Church of England, and only three of the 22 Anglican women thought that everything was working well.

The research supports WATCH's experience that, if asked in a context in which they feel safe, a majority of ordained women will say that mutual flourishing is not real for them. Sometimes this is related to an experience of hurt and rejection; sometimes to the dissonance of being told by the church that following the 5GPs will lead to well being and flourishing for all, while they experience a deep ambiguity about where they fit into the church. This is manifested in several different ways.

We need to need to acknowledge that the 5GPs themselves, are by their very purpose, internally contradictory, with GPs 4 and 5 contradicting GPs 1 and 2. They were created as a framework for legislating for the church to move forward while still choosing to retain the deep divisions over the ordained ministry of women. In themselves they do not give any particular guidance on how to make decisions which are not included in the House of Bishops' Declaration. Each time a decision is announced as 'in line with the 5GPs' a very different decision could also be made, equally and apparently 'in line with the principles', but there is no transparent process for working out how such decisions have been made. There is a growing sense for many women that the minority groups within the church are privileged too often in such cases.

Another tension is the continuing 'challenge of recognition'.<sup>2</sup> This describes the reality that there are still clergy and churches which do not recognise ordained women's orders, despite the 5GPs. This ambiguity of recognition of an ordained woman's order and thus her very identity is a source of great pain.

Lack of recognition for a minister, nearly always a woman, also raises questions about the 'life of the church communities that receive their ministry', particularly if the bishop with oversight is himself (sic) resistant to affirming the priestly orders of the ordained minister of that church.<sup>3</sup> If a bishop who is pastorally responsible for a parish has licensed a woman as incumbent, but does not himself believe that women can be priests, then what is the parish to understand? Are the sacraments offered by their priest valid or not?

For most women their experience is that the demand to flourish by those who do not accept their ministry undermines their office and their order. They, as women, are required to be gracious and accept the denial of their identity as priests, and to assimilate and hide the difficulty and hurt this causes them.

### **Harassment, bullying and unacceptable behaviour<sup>4</sup>**

As noted above, the Church of England contains recognised groups that are entitled to argue that women do not have the same rights as men. Too often these views and the theologies behind them, legitimate

and support very negative attitudes towards ordained women (and men who support them), including overt discrimination. This can easily lead to women being obliged to minister in some parishes, deaneries, and training institutions where there are pockets of clergy who consider it is acceptable to treat women in ways which are discourteous and fundamentally disrespectful. This behaviour is frequently neither recognised nor acknowledged and many women fear that a complaint will not be taken seriously.

Examples of this sort of behaviour include:

- Being 'blanked' or ignored in both formal and informal settings
- Being excluded at services outside the parish in deaneries, licensings etc, by being asked not to robe, excluded from the sanctuary or not invited
- Being the object of denigrating and vitriolic comments, either made directly or deliberately in the woman's hearing. Social media is a context where these sorts of comments are all too common.

It is also important to emphasise that the extent of this sort of behaviour, and whether women do trust senior clergy in their diocese to take action, depends very much on the culture of a diocese or even deanery, although Twitter and other social media are not limited by diocesan boundaries.

There are also local examples of good relationships developing between clergy who are women, and clergy who do not believe women can be ordained. These are to be welcomed, but the need to challenge unacceptable behaviour and words remains.

### Systemic discrimination

The underlying pain and contradiction experienced by women, and others, is a result of the deep systemic gender discrimination that still exists within the Church of England, where a white male is still too often seen as the default 'norm'. The decisions and actions which often give the deepest pain to many ordained women, and many others in the Church of England, are those linked to liturgy and sacraments which should mark being part of one church. Separate Chrism masses are still held for those clergy who consider that they are in 'impaired communion' with their diocesan bishop, and so will not receive communion from him or her, nor renew their vows in a service presided over by their diocesan bishop. Each year, some ordinands choose to be ordained by a PEV or bishop other than their (male) diocesan or (male) suffragan, because they do not want to be ordained by a diocesan, even if he is male, if he has also ordained women. All of these decisions emphasise separation and deny that affirmation of the first two Guiding Principles, that the Church of England has reached a settled view that gender is not a disqualification for ordination. Nevertheless, we are still told that 'this is what the Five Guiding Principles say'. However, it is important to remember that:

Like all texts, the 5GPs are read and understood in different ways and, could not one say, that the 5GPs are in a process of reception.<sup>5</sup>

Decisions which impose a solution based on separation, but reached without consultation with those with a wide range of views (the way in which the House of Bishops' Declaration was reached) hurt deeply because once again the church and its most senior representatives choose ambiguity about women's ordination rather than full affirmation, and choose separation rather than finding a way of worshipping together, even if imperfectly. It is not surprising that every time this happens, women once again feel pain and anger that male privilege has taken precedence over seeking to model 'the greatest degree of communion'.

### Silencing of women's voices

It is a significant concern that so many women, ordained and lay, feel unable to talk publicly about the impact of these decision on them and their sense of self worth, as it is felt that this is an unacceptable response to aspiration of 'mutual flourishing'. Despite women now being appointed as bishops, women's voices speaking about their lived experience are still effectively silenced by the unspoken expectations of the institution of the Church of England.

When the Church of England is emphasising the importance of careful and respectful listening to everyone, the silencing of women's voices feels even more painful. Nor is it only in parishes and local contexts that women's voices are not heard. For example, women's voices have been notably absent from the Independent Review (IR) process designed to arbitrate on situations where the flourishing of women and those unable to accept their ministry are in conflict. An analysis of reviews up to mid 2019 shows that the majority of the voices quoted were male and over 70 per cent of the appendices were provided by men (not counting appendices where submissions were written by more than one person or where authorship was unclear). In the largest report to date, Sir Philip Mawer's extensive review of the Nomination to the See of Sheffield, he lists over 100 people with whom he had conversations and over 70 per cent of those named individuals were men.<sup>6</sup> There may be a number of different reasons for this including the choices made by the IR about who to canvass for views, and the choices made by individual and groups about whether to offer evidence or views (bearing mind that women may be less likely to put themselves forward than men). Sir Philip Mawer clearly exercised great care and integrity in preparing all his reports. Even so, women's voices are not heard as loudly or as clearly as those of men.

### Notes

- 1 Gabrielle Thomas, "Mutual Flourishing" in the Church of England: Learning from St Thomas Aquinas, Church Times, 28 June 2019; 'The wound of mutual flourishing', Ecclesiology 15 (2019) 302-321.
- 2 FOAC Study Guide p. 20 and cf chapter 3 above.
- 3 FOAC Study Guide, p21.
- 4 It is important to understand what is meant by these terms. The Diocese of Chelmsford document Getting on Together includes a helpful explanation and definition, stating that 'Any behaviour that could potentially undermine someone's dignity and respect should be regarded as unacceptable'. The links between 'unacceptable behaviour', 'bullying' and 'harassment' are discussed and a definition laid out. See [www.chelmsford.anglican.org/uploads-new/pages/Getting-on-Together\\_-\\_amended\\_2019.pdf](http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/uploads-new/pages/Getting-on-Together_-_amended_2019.pdf)
- 5 Dr Judith Maltby comment on Thinking Anglicans 16 July 2020 [www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/statement-about-episcopal-consecrations/#comments](http://www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/statement-about-episcopal-consecrations/#comments)
- 6 [insearchofaroundtable.home.blog/2019/03/12/reviews-silence-and-a-deeper-magic/](http://insearchofaroundtable.home.blog/2019/03/12/reviews-silence-and-a-deeper-magic/)

### Pathways to good practice

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The Church of England needs to ask itself how this 'open wound' can be resolved. An important part of the answer lies in recognising that there is never a single way of making a decision 'in line with the 5 GPs'. This is a direct result of the difficulty which has yet to be fully acknowledged, including by the FAOC, that there is a contradiction between GPs 1 and 4. In practice, because the Declaration was drafted to provide for the needs of the minority who do not accept GP1, when there is conflict over interpretations, decisions are frequently made in line with the interpretations of these minority groups. Often these interpretations were not what most people hoped for and expected in 2014, which was a way forward that would involve continuing to engage deeply with each other, seeking the best solution in each context.

The framework created in 2014 continues to include those who dissent over ordaining women, and describes how a parish can request extended episcopal oversight. The 5GPs, created in February 2013 to provide a framework for the legislation, were included in the House of Bishops' Declaration as a reminder of the continuing divisions that the provisions the legislation were designed to overcome. Equally important was the emphasis on creating a context in which decisions based on the Declaration and the 5GPs could be discussed.

The House of Bishops believes that the outworking of these principles needs to be accompanied by **simplicity, reciprocity and mutuality** (original emphasis).<sup>1</sup>

This emphasises that the House of Bishops' Declaration and guidance are about more than setting rules (law). They are also intended to create a new way of living with deep difference within the church (grace), and seeking to become a reconciled community.

Why I hope we can vote for this package is that it has moved us from the legalistic into the realm of the relational and it will better enable us to live out who we believe we are as members of the Body of Christ

Christina Rees, General Synod July 2014

### The House of Bishops' Declaration in practice

These are important aspirations, but it is also vital, when trying to understand the continuing tensions, to recognise that discrimination against women underpins the House of Bishops' Declaration. It is based on the exception granted to the church under the 2010 Equality Act, to discriminate on grounds of gender, and only includes provisions for those who do not receive the ministry of women. For example, a parish which supports women's ministry has no formal way of preventing the appointment of a man who does not do so. This is why it is vital to remember the commitments to mutuality and reciprocity, when working to create an atmosphere and context where the impact of any decisions on women is explored and the responses of women and those who value their ministry are heard and included as part of decisions, particularly those made under the House of Bishops' Declaration. It is important to note that the only documents with agreed processes on issuing a Letter of Request and passing a Resolution, are the House of Bishops' Declaration itself, and the linked Guidance issued by the House.

The 5GPs themselves illustrate the continued deep divisions and contradictions that still exist in the Church of England. The hope of the 2014 legislation provisions and the Declaration was to prevent the only way forward being institutionalised separation. The challenge continues to find ways of moving beyond the legislation itself and look for ways to grow together. With this is the recognition that the most constructive way forward is unlikely to be the same for each parish.

In response to requests from a number of sources, WATCH has prepared a paper with suggestions which it is hoped will be helpful to PCCs and parishes when considering whether to send a Letter of Request to limit the ministry of women in a parish.<sup>2</sup> The paper does not include 'solutions' or any sense that there is a right way to deal with any issue that is 'in line with the 5GPs', but rather, highlights questions which a PCC and congregation might find it helpful to ask when considering writing a Letter of Request to a bishop. It reminds parishes that consulting the community is important, and emphasises ways of working with the Declaration based on listening, real mutuality, and a wish to remain in the highest degree of communion possible within a parish, with other local churches and ecumenical neighbours, and with the diocese. Used well, and as means of discussing the significant identity of the parish, its mission, links with other parishes and churches, and the flourishing of all the members of the congregation and community, the provisions of the Declaration have the potential to lead to constructive conversations and decisions that might enable growth in faith and personal discipleship. However, this is dependent on using the opportunities to listen to all the different voices, rather than start the process with preconceived ideas about the outcome. Similarly, it is important to realise that passing a Resolution is not the end of the whole process, but the start of a conversation between parish and the diocese on how to develop constructive relationships. It also suggests that regular reviewing of a Resolution, again including wide consultation, is good practice.

### **The role of the Independent Reviewer and a culture of reconciliation and grace**

The role and scope of the Independent Reviewer was created to adjudicate on differences about applying the House of Bishops' Declaration, rather than leaving them to fester, and therefore has been largely confined to reviewing processes to ensure they comply with the Declaration and the Guidance issued. In Chapter 4 above we noted that women's voices are largely absent from the Independent Reviewer's reports. There is very little, if any, investigation into whether the actions being reviewed are helping or hindering the flourishing of all, and leading to the greatest degree of communion possible. When the role of the Independent Reviewer is considered in the context of creating a culture of mutual respect and flourishing, WATCH suggests that the role should be expanded to include more than one person, to include women as well as men, and that more conscious effort be made to engage with women when investigating a complaint. If the Church of England is serious about creating a new culture where God is 'creating all things new' then it is worth considering whether the fundamental question to be asked in any review is what the greatest degree of communion could be, and then how it might be reached.

### **Affirming the Five Guiding Principles**

The requirement to affirm the 5GPs is painful for many women ordinands and others asked for affirmation, and was never discussed in General Synod. Both those who affirm the ordained ministry of women and those who do not believe it is possible, will find different principles hard to affirm. For example, those Synod members who conscientiously did not believe women can be ordained as priests and bishops voted against the Measure in July 2014, will still certainly find it hard to affirm the first two Guiding Principles. Since this requirement causes pain and anxiety and many find it hard to affirm the 5GPs with complete integrity, it would be helpful to revisit this decision in order to consider what such an affirmation is intended to achieve, and whether there is a way of achieving this intention which does not result in many ordinands feeling their integrity has been compromised, or even withdrawing from ordination because they cannot in all honesty affirm the principles.

### **Transparency**

It is important for every church to own and publicise its theological view and practice on the role of women. A situation has developed where this is not always the case and this is causing reputational and

structural damage, both to the Church's mission and its ministry.

A church passing a resolution based on theological views about ordained women will consider this a fundamental part of its identity. In a world where women are regarded as equal with men in employment, leadership, marriage and every other role, it is important to clarify and publicise this counter cultural position. Information needs to be provided that enables church members, and those looking for a church to attend, to make informed decisions about the type of ministry they are receiving and supporting, both in service and financially. This should be made clear on the church website and in its written communications, in plain language and in plain sight.

### Notes

- 1 The House of Bishops' Declaration GS1076 Women in the Episcopate, p 2, §6 [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%201076%20Women%20in%20the%20Episcopate.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/GS%20Misc%201076%20Women%20in%20the%20Episcopate.pdf)
- 2 Applying the Five Guiding Principles: Questions and Suggestions for Best Practice [womenandthechurch.org/5GP-apply](http://womenandthechurch.org/5GP-apply)

### Developing a more positive culture

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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).

1 John 4. 'Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.'

It is clear that in the Church of England, too many women still experience behaviour that excludes and undermines them, and the pain of systemic discrimination. The intention to identify a new way of working with difference in 2014 included a commitment to the meaningful demonstration of mutual respect amongst all members of the Church of England, whether female or male, lay or ordained. In practice, as can be seen from the examples given in Chapter 4 above, the experience of ordained women demonstrates that in many circumstances this new climate still has not arrived, and they are accorded neither respect nor courtesy.

It is vital for the Church of England to take seriously the need for positive action to enable the development of a culture where women can fully develop their gifts and feel valued, and where the values of mutual respect, transparency and relationality underpin behaviour and decision making.

It is very desirable, and possible, to identify and encourage behaviours which contribute to flourishing which is genuinely mutual, and to exclude behaviours which discourage this.

In some dioceses and deaneries this has begun to happen, and there are stories and examples of men and women from different wings of the Church of England valuing each other's ministry and giving each other mutual and prayerful support. However, the experience of ordained women demonstrates that there are still too many circumstances where this new climate has not yet arrived, and they are given neither respect nor courtesy, and too often (particularly online and on social media) are excluded, undermined and bullied, and as a consequence are unable to flourish fully. If we are trying to create a church culture based on mutual respect and relationality, in no circumstances should a woman have to accept behaviour which ignores her existence or belittles her. This is never a situation which anyone should be expected to accept with grace.

Senior clergy must ensure that their diocese has a robust policy on harassment and bullying which is fit for purpose and acted on so that anyone suffering such behaviour feels able to report it. This includes reminding everyone that harassment and bullying on social media and online, including Twitter, are unacceptable. The Church of England published a covenant of behaviour for social media, but some behaviour verges on the illegal and should not be tolerated. Such policies should include reference to unacceptable displays of excluding, discourteous and disrespectful behaviour, understanding that these fall into the categories of bullying and harassment.

It is also very important to note that much of the impact of this sort of behaviour is hidden from bishops, archdeacons and other senior clergy who therefore do not realise quite how significant it is. In many cases women only talk about their experiences in groups where they feel safe, usually all women groups. Too often women have absorbed a message that they should not complain about this sort of behaviour, but be 'gracious'. This fear and learned behaviour are in themselves examples of the culture which is still dominated by (unrecognised) male privilege. This is one reason why it is still vital for each diocese to have an Adviser or Dean of Women's Ministry, able both to support women and be an advocate for their wellbeing amongst senior staff.

Behaviours we should never practice include

- Ignoring or blanking an ordained women in any setting
- Making denigrating, demeaning or belittling comments, whether to someone's face or in their hearing,
- Behaving in any insulting manner towards an ordained woman
- Act to exclude an ordained woman from any liturgy or act of worship
- Making demeaning and undermining comments on social media and online

### Flourishing and transparency

**Vocations** are another area where the culture of the church in a local context, matters. One significant question is how to create a culture where a woman, particularly a young woman, with the stirrings of vocation to ordained ministry, can be encouraged in this call if she attends a church which does not receive the priestly and episcopal ministry of women or where women are directed towards certain narrowly defined activities, and so has few role models for her. If she raises a sense of vocation to ordination, it may be dismissed. It may be hard for her to recognise that sense if the teaching she experiences tells her that her calling is not legitimate. For her own flourishing, it is important that a woman of any age is able to discuss these early stirrings of vocation with someone who is sympathetic and affirms her calling. A referral system should be in place similar to that used in the medical profession where there are issues of conscience.

Despite the current Church of England commitment to developing the ministry of all the baptised, very little thinking has taken place on how laity in parishes may flourish, and in particular, how lay women might flourish in their vocations in parishes which do not have any role models of women leaders and where they may be discouraged or prevented from leadership and teaching.

The Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together (developed as resources for the Living in Love and Faith Project) could be a helpful way of shaping the sort of conversation that could enable deeper understanding and ways forward that take everyone into account. These name six "pervading evils" which hinder our relationships with each other: prejudice, silence, ignorance, fear, hypocrisy and lack of paying attention to power. Congregations and groups are encouraged to engage with each other through 'LOVE':

- Listening attentively and openly,
- Opening hearts and minds without judgmentalism,
- Valuing everyone's vulnerability and perspective, and
- Expressing concern and empathy.

### Behaviours and ways of exploring how to improve culture

WATCH has identified simple guidance to help all members of the Church of England in support of mutual flourishing.

- 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

### Resources

The following resources are recommended for readers wishing to follow up on the issues discussed in this chapter.

1. **WATCH A Code of Behaviour in Support of Mutual Flourishing**  
[womenandthechurch.org/5GP-code](https://womenandthechurch.org/5GP-code)
2. A theological model to encourage mutual trust and developing relationships of mutuality has been explored by Dr Gabrielle Thomas, considering St Thomas Aquinas's theology of friendship: 'Mutual Flourishing' in the Church of England: Learning from St Thomas Aquinas, *Ecclesiology* 15 (2019) 302-321.
3. **Pastoral Principles** (developed as part of Living in Love and Faith) offer a framework for exploring many of the underlying issues which the behaviour we have described are symptoms of, and could usefully be used when discussing gender roles in a church. [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/PAG-PP-website.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/PAG-PP-website.pdf)



### Conclusion

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The hopeful messages in the Synod debate in 2014 were based on a confidence that the Five Guiding Principles could provide a framework for mutual flourishing and full communion. In that context there was an assumption that the combination of the legislation and the principles would finally remove the ambiguity felt by most women over whether or not the church fully and accepted their ordained role as priests. At the heart of the legislation passed in July 2014 was the Measure (which became part of the law of the land as well as the church) which stated unambiguously and simply that it is lawful for women to be ordained as priests and consecrated as bishops in the Church of England. It is unsurprising that these hopes have not been fully realised, because the best intentions of imperfect humans are liable to misfire. While there are examples of those holding different beliefs about the ordination of women worshipping and working together successfully, there are too many instances where this is not happening, and where ordained women still describe their lack of affirmation by the Church of England in the same language and terms as they have done since 1993. This is not only very damaging for women, both lay and ordained. It is also damaging for the reputation of the church.

In these circumstances it is important to reflect on the extent to which all the desired outcomes of the 2014 legislative package are truly working successfully. WATCH invites others to engage in an honest appraisal, to give thought to how the church, its ministers and lay people can find a way to achieve gender justice, flourishing for all and full communion which are truly reciprocal and in balance for all involved.



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