



NATIONAL COMMITTEE 2020 ANNUAL REPORTS

National Committee:

Revd Canon Dr Emma Percy (Chair), Dr Felicity Cooke (Vice-Chair), Dr Esther Elliott (Vice-Chair), John Briggs¹, Claire Creese¹ (Secretary), Revd Yvonne Clarke, Jenny Humphreys, Revd Dr Mary Kells², Michèle Kitto, Revd Rosalind Rutherford, Revd Michael Smith, Revd Anne Stevens, Revd Jody Sowell³, Lizzie Taylor, Cath Williamson.

Staff: Eve West (Membership Administrator p/t), Claire Creese (Secretary p/t)

¹ Not a trustee ²Co-opted 25/01/2020 ³Stepped down 25/01/2020

Reports

- Accounts CIO 2020 - *separate document*
 - Administrator (Membership)
 - Secretary
 - General Synod
 - Transformations & TRIG
 - Strategic Plan
 - Transparency & Accountability
 - *Statistics*
 - *Call for Clarity*
 - Five Guiding Principles
 - Communications
 - Liturgy, Theology, Language
 - Chair's Reflections
-

REPORTS

Accounts CIO to June 30, 2020 - separate document

John Briggs, Treasurer

Membership Administrator

Eve West (part-time)

At time of writing (end of August 2020) there are 682 members on the WATCH database. This compares with 774 members at the end of July 2019 and 855 in 2018. Membership is a constantly fluctuating figure as people can join/leave/renew at any time during the year and there are always quite a number of 'lapsed' members being followed up, some of whom will eventually renew, but by no means all.

It seems the general trend is downwards and those members who explicitly resign (rather than stop payment without communication) cite retirement, reduced funds and bereavement as reasons. Occasionally people indicate they feel either WATCH's work is done or that WATCH isn't doing enough. Both possibly indicate communication issues with the website and email channels. On the positive side, there are flurries of new members - 17 in July & August - who become aware of the need to support WATCH's work due to member presentations, or via social media channels of Twitter and Facebook where the 'follower' numbers are considerably higher than paid membership supporters.

Two years on from the start of WATCH's partnership with the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF - online banking) over half the membership (55%) is yet to move its support to this tax-effective way of maximising financial support. This time last year the balance was 40% / 60% so the move is in the right direction, but still very slow. Running the new and legacy membership systems takes time to manage and cross-reference.

<p>If all members move to paying via CAF, as hoped, this will not only significantly reduce administration time and cost, but more importantly make a huge difference to the funds available to WATCH for its on-going work. Approximately 80% of subscriptions paid via CAF are tax-effective which allows WATCH to claim an additional 25p for every £1 donated. We cannot claim Gift Aid on existing standing orders and recurring PayPal instructions - the 55% of subscriptions.</p>

Also, we encourage members to set up Direct Debit rather than one-off payments. We are now able to set up Direct Debits on behalf of members who don't wish to use the online interface with CAF themselves. There is still a small number who would prefer to pay by annual cheque and this process is now sped up with the new WATCH PO Box address. It is hoped to set up a process whereby Gift Aid can be claimed separately on these non-CAF cheque payments.

Members who are in any doubt about what or how they give, how WATCH contacts them, or who have any further questions, are encouraged to get in touch at admin@womenandthechurch.org.

Secretary

Claire Creese

The national committee met four times since last year's AGM: in November (St Mark's, Sheffield), January (Oxford Deanery), April (online) and June (online - annual residential cancelled).

Comings and goings. Jody Stowell stepped down from the committee in January due to her commitments as chair of the House of Clergy (London). Michael Smith has taken over Jody's role as Press Contact. Mary Kells was welcomed onto the committee when she was co-opted in January and stands for election at this AGM (bio in AGM materials). Mary brings her interest and research into liturgical language and theology. With lockdown and other life events, we've been in a holding pattern with the treasurer hand-over, from Mark Bennet (outgoing 2019) to John Briggs (incoming 2019.) Mark has been holding the fort meantime. Philippa Blackwell (Bursar, Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford) joined the financial team this Autumn (2020), and the hand-over is now in hand.

WATCH's address for membership/office correspondence changed over the Summer. We now have a Post Office PO Box address with the post going directly to Eve, our membership Administrator. This is more efficient and, in addition, is a cost saving. Thanks to Georgiana Bell, and previously to Anne Stevens, for collecting our post in person from St John's, Waterloo.

The Charity Commission, meanwhile, requires a geographic address. As of the Summer this is: The Verger's Cottage, 1 Gog Magog Way, Stapleford, Cambridge CB22 5BQ - the office address for St Andrews Church, who have kindly permitted us the use of their postal address.

In July, WATCH's rented storage cupboard at St John's (London Waterloo) was emptied and closed down. Michael Smith (cttee member), his son along with Jenny Standage (archivist) spent a day on this. Jenny has taken charge of archive-worthy documents.

I am grateful to Eve West, Membership Administrator, for her continuity and attention to detail, to committee members for their ongoing support; and to Graham Stacey (O&B) for his expertise.

General Synod

Jenny Humphreys & Anne Stevens (Coordinator)

This has been another relatively quiet year for WATCH members on General Synod, partly because much of WATCH's contribution to the national Church continues to be made through the work of the Transformations Group, and partly due to the changed arrangements for the July Synod due to the coronavirus pandemic. WATCH continues to support the work of Inclusive Church in raising awareness of the need for inclusive-minded candidates to stand for elections to the next Quinquennium of General Synod, which has now been postponed to 2021.

A Fringe meeting was held at the February Synod in Church House to bring GS WATCH members up to date on the ongoing work of the Implementation and Dialogue Group (IDG) on the 5 Guiding Principles. Following this, a number of WATCH members attended the fringe meetings organised by the IDG and spoke about their experiences.

Our annual report on the Developments in Women's ministry continues to be warmly received by Synod members in all three houses.

WATCH members submitted a number of written questions about matters relating to women in the Church:

- Why was the Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda awarded £140,100 of Strategic Capacity Funding in October 2019 when such awards are usually reserved for dioceses?

- Could the Secretary General update the Synod on the progress towards equal pay in the NCIs and explain what steps are being undertaken to correct any imbalance?
- Who is responsible for updating the Dignity at Work policy so that it complies with the 2010 Equality Act?



Transformations Steering Group (TSG) & TRIG (Transformations, Research and Implementation Group.) *Emma Percy & Cath Williamson*

- **Transformations Steering Group**

WATCH has two members on TSG, currently Emma Percy and Cath Williamson. TSG agenda focuses on ordained women in the Church of England and how they can be best supported. ([Brief introduction, pdf.](#))

We held a major event in November at Lambeth to consult on the Transformations Agenda. All diocesan bishops were invited to attend with a Bishop's Advisor in Women's Ministry or equivalent person from their diocese. The day enabled the sharing of research on the role of Deans of Women's ministry which differs across diocese. Discussion highlighted the importance of intentional HR policies to support women especially around maternity leave, job applications, ministerial development. Diocese with good numbers of women at Incumbent level are actively working to encourage and sustain women in ministry.

Susy Brouard shared the research she was doing in interviewing Deans of Women's Ministry and the 4 main areas: Ministerial Pathways, Mainstreaming, Harassment and the 5 Guiding Principles were discussed in the afternoon groups. Issues raised on the day continue to be followed up.

The issue of Harassment and Bullying requires better understanding across the church. Most diocese have outdated policies and few have clear processes for raising issues small or serious. Cath has produced a survey of diocesan provision. TRIG have raised this with ministry division and it is hoped that the policy document Dignity at Work will be updated. We also hope that good practice will be shared across diocese.

TSG continues to be concerned about the fact that women enter the training process for ordination about 10 years later than men. Do targeted vocation events for younger women make a difference? We hope to do some research to answer this. There are also still issues about women taking on leadership roles in larger churches. Does implicit bias training help in selection procedures as well as in appointments? TRIG is looking at the positives and the shortcomings of such training.

- **TRIG**

The appointment of Bishop Ruth, Taunton, as chair has made a big difference to the working of TRIG. Bishop Chris Goldsmith as the current Head of Ministry Division works constructively with TRIG and we now have a representative from the Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee (RACCS) on the committee. This was extremely important for addressing issues of maternity policy. We have

also been looking with them at issues around clergy couples. Diocese have very different policies about remuneration for clergy couples and the issue of housing, pension contributions etc.

Some issues, such as harassment and bullying, clergy wellbeing and flexible working are simply not concerned with women clergy. We aim to ensure that a gendered lens is used so that women are not disadvantaged because of their gender.



TSG had been focusing on organising an event for Lambeth 2020 to bring together the women bishops from across the communion. As the Lambeth Conference was cancelled, we have put these plans on ice until we know that the event will be happening.

This coming November we are planning a joint TSG and TRIG meeting. Like many organisations a benefit of meeting online due to COVID has been the reduced cost in time and money with no travelling. I suspect we will do more online meetings in future to ensure we have a good attendance from across the Church of England.

Strategic Plan

Felicity Cooke

In 2018 WATCH developed a new strategy which recognised the changed landscape in which WATCH operates both in the Church of England and wider society. The strategy takes into account developments in the Church in relation to gender equality since the 2014 Settlement and the limited resources of a relatively small-scale volunteer organisation. Below are reports on actions taken to implement the five strategies agreed for WATCH.

Working Groups:

❖ **Strategy 1: Transparency & Accountability**

- **Statistics – Rosalind Rutherford**

The annual WATCH report analysing the statistics published by the Church of England Research and Statistics Department was published in February, so that all GS members could be given a hard copy. It was also published on the WATCH website at the same time. The Church of England report, which was the data the WATCH report used, had been published in late August 2019 and was based on data for year ending Dec 2018, which does mean that by February, the data is over a year old, though we did update some numbers, including senior women clergy.

As in previous years, the report analysed some of the data provided by the Church of England. Each year we report on the proportion of stipendiary incumbents or incumbent status clergy who are female in each diocese. In 2018 the proportion ranged from 41% in Ely diocese to 14% in Europe and 15% in Chichester. The proportion of women holding these sorts of roles is increasing slowly, 28% being the median figure in 2019, while in 2013 the median was 23%. Less encouraging is that some dioceses which used to be thought of as very supportive of women's ministry are slipping down the list, relatively. For example, Southwark, always considered supportive of women's ministry was 33 out of 42 in 2019; Oxford, another diocese known for its support of women, is half way down the list, and in 2019 Sheffield had a lower proportion of women incumbents than in 2013.

We were also able to show the proportion of SSM clergy who are women in each diocese, and look at leadership roles, both local leaders (Area Deans) and diocesan (deans, and bishops and

archdeacons). The other set of statistics we looked at in more detail was to compare the age and gender of ordinands starting training in 2017 and 2018. Despite national church press releases which talk of slightly over 50% of ordinands being women (true), a more careful reading of the statistics shows that the ages at which women and men begin training is very gendered. A majority of male ordinands start training under the age of 40, and most of them under 35. For women, the majority (about two thirds) are over the age of 40 when they start training.

This also plays a part in the division between stipendiary and SSM for women and men. Once again, more women are ordained to an SSM title post (that is changing a little) while the majority of men are ordained to stipendiary posts. Of even more concern than these figures are that the national church is not asking this question – or not publicly, at least. The financial pressures of the last six months make reductions in the number of stipendiary posts across the country very likely. WATCH encourages all members to keep a close eye on decisions being made locally, and in particular, to ask about the impact of these decisions on diversity and role models among clergy, amongst other issues both local and national.

There is other data which would be helpful, but which we do not have. One example is the number of men and women under the age of 70 in House for Duty posts. The national figures do not give data about the proportion of women clergy in roles such as Team Rector. It looks as though women are in a minority in these roles but this has to be inferred rather than having the exact numbers. Nor are the figures for BAME clergy divided into male and female. Knowing what proportion of women who are also BAME, in stipendiary roles and have roles of responsibility is vital in being able to assess whether such clergy are discriminated against twice. These are questions which have to be asked at diocesan level.

The data we do analyse and publish is valued by various groups in the church, such as Diocesan Advisors in Women's Ministry (DAWM), and some bishops. It is valuable because it provides evidence of the extent to which ordained women are becoming part of the normal life of the Church of England, but also shows which dioceses still have much work to do to even reach a proportion which is average.

The national statistics were released earlier this year (June 2020) and so WATCH's intention was to publish our complementary report to coincide with the November General Synod. As it seems that this Synod may be held virtually, we need to consider how best to circulate the report in addition to our normal practice of publishing it on the website.

<https://womenandthechurch.org/resources/a-report-on-the-developments-in-womens-ministry-in-2019/>

- **Call for Clarity/Honesty – Lizzie Taylor**

If you had told those making the 2014 settlement opening all orders of ministry to women that a major issue by 2020 would be secretiveness, they might have been incredulous. Yet here we are, still in a profoundly disturbing situation.

Here is the summary:

Over the course of the last two years it has become clearer that Guiding Principle 1 of the 2014 settlement has not been properly implemented. At the moment we cannot clearly say that all orders of ministry are open without reference to gender, because women's ministry has not been flourishing everywhere as it should as a range of vocations and ministry statistics demonstrates.

One significant reason is that there are still Church of England 'Resolution' churches which are keeping invisible their policy and practice of

- only identifying and encouraging men's vocation to priesthood
- having only men as priests or incumbents

Women are most often not informed of the policy to deflect, dissuade or re-direct their discernment to vocation. All the while, men's vocations to priesthood are being quietly identified and nurtured. So, often without their knowledge of what is being done, women's paths to priestly ministry are being blocked.

In spite of it being two years since the issue was first raised with and through the Bishop of Maidstone, there has been almost no response from the churches concerned. Meanwhile, the national conversation on it has gathered pace, as visible in social and print media. For example, WATCH's Twitter engagement has doubled to over 6000 followers, with significant activity on the transparency situation. There have been more calls, particularly from the laity, for clergy to be transparent about what is going on.

In addition, this year research was conducted to clarify the situation. It revealed that of 144 conservative evangelical churches with PCC Resolutions for Male Headship or 'Complementarian' ministry:

- 129 made no reference at all on their website to their theology of male headship and its consequences in church life for women
- Only 15 had any reference at all to restrictions on women's roles
- Only 8 of those references were transparently worded
- Only 5 of the 15 statements were placed where churchgoers might reasonably and logically expect to find the information (e.g. in sections like About Us, What We Believe, New Here?, Our Theology or Our Beliefs)
- The other 10 statements were put in sections where churchgoers might not expect to have to look to find this information (e.g. Links + Partners, Helpful Links, Training Documents and History sections).

The issue has now been raised in General Synod by Lay Representatives. This July the Bishop of Rochester, replying to Supplementary Questions from Anne Foreman and John Appleby, said 'bishops are clear about the importance of transparency and openness'. He proposed that the matter should be dealt with locally, by 'pressure if necessary', by bishops and diocesan communications staff engaging with parishes to ensure they follow best practice. This is an aspiration presently without content. And so far, there is no indication that this approach is working.

What is our vision for where we need to be, and what will we continue to call for? What does transparency about practices affecting women at parish level look like? Here are some basic requirements:

1. The websites of 'Resolution' churches must have a statement explaining this, in language which can be easily understood, and in a place where churchgoers would reasonably expect to be able to find it.
2. The statement should also be provided to churchgoers in written leaflets, notices, newsletters, pew sheets or similar printed communications, so that those not online are not excluded.
3. Clergy should agree to refer women exploring vocation to clergy in another church - clergy who fully support the ordination of women to priesthood, and will enable free exploration and support of individuals' vocations.
4. In order to be sure that the theological conviction of the parish has not moved on, and that women are not being excluded from ministry in a church for years longer than they should be, PCCs should be required to review Resolutions every three or five years, with proper consultation of the parish, as described in the Declaration GS Misc 1077, para 7. Review dates should be diarised.

5. PCCs and Diocesan Offices should make the text of churches' Resolutions and Letters of Request freely and easily available to any interested lay or clergy person, so that the precise nature of the parish's theological conviction and practice can be known to anyone attending or wishing to attend the church.

These changes will make an important contribution to bringing about an environment of trust, so that mutual flourishing in ministry will no longer be impaired. Of equal importance is that they will meet the reasonable expectation and natural right of laity not to have important information withheld from them. Clergy must not keep churchgoers in the dark about the nature of the ministry they are being asked to receive, and to support financially.

There are further changes in the wider Church which are also needed to bring about an honest and open situation on this. These include:

- When a new bishop who does not support the priestly ministry of women is appointed, the announcement to those he is coming to serve should make this clear, so that the rights of those not wishing to receive or support such ministry are not simply overridden.
- Crown Nominations Commission candidates should be required to declare interests which could affect or give the impression of affecting their voting. The Nolan Principles for holders of public office can be used as a standard for good practice in this matter.

While 2020 has seen research giving data on the number of conservative evangelical churches not being open on their websites, as yet there is no comparable data on Anglo-Catholic male priesthood-subscribing churches. We hope this research will be done in the next few months. It will then be possible to gain a national overview of this profoundly disturbing situation, and then further steps will be taken as necessary. It is hoped that the Church of England will conduct a national review and then take the necessary steps to resolve this in short order.

❖ **Strategy 2: Critique Five Guiding Principles**

- **Implementation & Dialogue Group** – *Emma Percy*
See Chair Reflections (p 11)
- **5GPs Working Group** – *Felicity Cooke, Rosalind Rutherford*

The "Five Guiding Principles" became part of the structure and culture of the Church of England in July 2014. These are claimed as the way the church is able to bridge unbridgeable gaps of theology and practice; ordinands, and at times others, have to "affirm" these. It's not uncommon to hear, "You have to act like this because of the Five Guiding Principles", although if pushed, there is usually no clear link made between the expectation and what these five statements say. (A recent example is the separate consecrations for the bishops of Horsham and St Germans, and the bishop of Lewes, with the linked reported decision by the archbishops that they will no longer consecrate any bishops themselves. It was stated that this decision is "in line" with the Five Guiding Principles.

Six years on, while the House of Bishops' Declaration offers processes for parishes that wish to avoid the ministry of ordained women, the sad reality is that if asked for examples of the Principles leading to deeper relationships between those who still disagree fundamentally on the ordained ministry of women, none have yet been found beyond basic good relationships, such as colleagues praying with each other. Moreover, many people in the church and community at large still have no idea that so much protection exists for those who do not believe that ordained women are "real" priests or bishops, or able lead a church.

At the same time, WATCH was becoming aware that there was a growing undercurrent of unease, frustration, pain and anger, particularly among ordained women, whenever the Five Guiding Principles or the phrase “mutual flourishing” were invoked. In common with so many examples of discrimination and harassment, these feelings remained suppressed, with many women feeling that it was their fault for not being gracious enough, and that it was their responsibility to put up with these feelings because this was their understanding of what the Five Guiding Principles said in terms of how they “should” behave.

Over two years, WATCH has been working on a guide to the Five Guiding Principles. Originally, it was intended to be a brief summary, but in the process of writing we discovered that this was not possible if we wanted to provide useful information. The booklet will include information on how the 5GPs came about, highlight the points of contradiction within the Principles, explore how different groups have interpreted these, consider what the experience of women has been since the Principles became part of legislation and, finally, suggest ways to achieve the greatest degree of communion, rather than functioning as “security” for those who still do not accept ordained women. It will also seek to clarify what the Declaration does and does not say, which may be helpful for PCCs if a proposal is raised to send a letter of request to the diocesan bishop.

Two other documents will also be published: a more detailed guide to applying the 5GPs if a parish starts to consider sending a letter of request to the bishop; and a code of behaviour to identify and redress the situations when women in the church are being treated in demeaning ways.

Once published, we will be very interested in feedback on how useful it is (or not) and how the resource could be made more helpful. We recognise that the question of whether it is ever possible for women to flourish in a church which continues to give space and a hearing to those who do not believe that women can be ordained, remains a live question.

❖ **Strategy 3: Broaden membership engagement and resources**

See Strategies 1 (Statistics Report), 2 (5GP-related publications - October 2020), Strat 4 (Writing workshop & new 2020 Liturgical Resources), and Chair’s Reflections (sponsorship of research). The work of transitioning members to CAF is still in progress.

❖ **Strategy 4: Develop Liturgy, Theology, Language – Mary Kells**

To promote and encourage liturgy, theology and general language of the church which recognises and affirms that women are made in the image of God.

WATCH’s fourth aim concerns language and recognizes that how we speak about ourselves and about God has power. Language moulds our sense of our own identity, frames how we behave in community, and directs how we relate to and conceive of the divine. If women’s embodied experiences are excluded, this represents a diminishing of the sacred for us all.

We are thus committed to making women’s lives visible in our churches through the language we use. We have two specific objectives to this end. The first is to produce a guide to gender neutral language. This is intended to help people who wish to make their language more inclusive, through ensuring that it includes both men and women.

I propose that we change the wording of this from “gender neutral” to “gender inclusive”. Christian worship is characteristically personal. What has distorted it is the committed use of male metaphors and images for God. Rather than neutralize the androcentric nature of much current worship, I propose that we seek to inclusivize it, by including female as well as male models for God. This

recognizes that women are made in the image of God and therefore their lives and experiences are valid sources for ways of relating to God.

My M.Th. research is on just this topic and is producing data which will be extremely helpful for the guide. I intend to draft it after this data analysis is complete.

Our second objective is to develop simple liturgies using explicitly female language and imagery. To this end, we held a liturgy writing day on 8 February this year at Christ Church Deanery, Oxford, chaired and hosted by Emma Percy. There were 14 attendees, all of whom had an opportunity to write in relation to the theme of Holy Week, with helpful guidance as to those parts of the Communion service where it is permissible to be creative. It was these sections which formed the basis for the day's explorations. Themes engaged were: the use of non-gendered language, the mixing up of genders, and imagery drawn from women's embodied experience.

The day produced some interesting discussion, but more importantly, a range of creative and exciting liturgy, which we were delighted to publish on our website (Resources). It is our intention to hold more of these days, and to organise a seminar with an invited speaker to help us to grow in our writing skill. While lockdown has interrupted these plans, we intend to progress them either online or in a socially distanced way in the coming year. We are also intending to self-publish a booklet of inclusive liturgy which we can all help to promote in our various areas.

In the meantime, if you have any writing you would like us to publish online, in the first instance, please send it to Claire Creese secretary@womenandthechurch.org and she will ensure it gets to us.

❖ **Strategy 5: Communications** – *Michael Smith*

This past year has been relatively quiet from a communications perspective. Along with everyone else across the country, the Global Pandemic has affected church life. We continue to be active on our social media accounts: facebook.com/womenandthechurch and [@WATCH_ACT](https://twitter.com/WATCH_ACT).

April saw the appointment of the Rev'd Ruth Bushyager as the next Bishop of Horsham alongside another new appointment, the Rev'd William Hazlewood as the Bishop of Lewes, a traditionalist. WATCH responded to the announcement in the hope that there would be a joint consecration by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Sadly, this was not the case and at the time of consecration comment was made on WATCH's website and social media pages by Emma Percy. This in turn attracted significant engagement.

The website is kept up to date and a future task will be to refresh it more comprehensively. However, with our regular postings and engagement through growing social media pages, we have been able to ensure engagement with a large number of people on current church matters.

- **Twitter** – *Lizzie Taylor*

We continue to challenge and in particular this past year we continue to focus on transparency in conservative evangelical parishes. There has been much related activity on our Twitter feed ([@WATCH_ACT](https://twitter.com/WATCH_ACT)) and the number of followers is growing, approaching 6,000.

- **Facebook** – *Rosalind Rutherford*

The Facebook page has 1900 people who have "liked" it and see most of the posts. Articles published on the WATCH website automatically link to the Facebook page. We try to link other

articles of interest, although not so many that people stop taking notice of WATCH posts. We now use Facebook mostly for linking to articles that take time to read, though there have been one or two more reflective pieces. Most posts receive 500-800 views, some are viewed by over 1000. In the past year the two with the highest engagement were the statement WATCH issued after the separate consecrations of the bishops of Horsham and Lewes (1.7k) and a reflective post published on the first lock down Sunday in March (1.6k).

- **Greenbelt – Michael Smith**

The in person 2020 Greenbelt Festival was cancelled due to the pandemic. But WATCH had a presence in 2019, sharing stand space with Inclusive Church where we were able to engage well with festival goers. We took the main Greenbelt theme of 'Wit and Wisdom' and asked people to reflect on how they referred to God – 'A cloak for Sophia: what do you call God?' – by pinning ribbons on a cloak. The sun shone and a great many conversations were had.

- **Outlook Magazine 37 (Summer 2020, 24 pages, colour, A4)**
Cath Williamson, Editor

Hard copies were distributed to members, diocesan bishops, women bishops and to diocesan secretaries. New this year, electronic copies were made available to GS representatives and to NADAWM members; and online via social media (FB & Twitter) to reach a broader and younger readership.

Extra hard copies are available to members by contacting admin@womenandthechurch.org.

Chair's Reflections

Emma Percy

This has been my fourth year as Chair of WATCH and, as ever, I am both heartened and saddened by the things that have crossed my desk this year. I am heartened because there are ways in which we are able to speak truth to power, to support encourage and challenge individuals, churches and diocese, and to encourage a changing climate. I am saddened because we still have to defend ourselves from accusations that it is we who are discriminatory, non-inclusive and somehow unkind to those who oppose the ordination and consecration of women.

As Chair of WATCH my focus for the autumn of 2019 was on the Transformations Lambeth Day. 25 years on from the ordination of women as priests in the Church of England we invited Bishops and Deans of Women's Ministry to come and take stock. We noted that we had come along way. The Bishops were male and female. It involved a lot of planning and I was immensely grateful for the generous free time given by an extremely competent facilitator Andrew Jackson. His expertise made the day run very smoothly.

For some of the Bishops this event was a wake -up call. They were personally supportive of women in ministry and saw their diocese as doing fine. Yet listening to the people in the room made them stop and think. Were they actively encouraging women? Were they aware of the levels of harassment women experience? Was there more that could be done? We hope that these questions are being cashed out in actions back in their diocese. My own diocese, Oxford, was challenged by the day and is now working on a new harassment policy which I have been able to have input into.

The day included a presentation from Susy Brouard on a research project that she was doing for WATCH as part of an MA thesis. This work on the role of deans of Women's Ministry is now completed and we will look at how best to share it.

The Implementation and Dialogue Working Group on the Five Guiding Principles, on which I sat, submitted its report to the House of Bishops at the end of 2019. It agreed to meet again to discuss some of the H of B reactions before submitting the final report in April. I was prepared to sign up to most of the recommendations, many of which are about better communication and resources. There are two recommendations which I would not sign and that has been duly noted. We expect the report to go to Synod in November. I am not at liberty to discuss it further until then.

From this work and other discussions, it is clear that there are very different understandings of 'what we signed up for in 2014'. It seems likely that undocumented promises were made to certain groups which we are now expected to accept as part of the package despite not being discussed by Synod. One such is the idea that mutual flourishing means having senior clergy who do not recognise women's full sacramental authority. An important outcome of the Mawer Independent Reviewer Report (post +Philip North's withdrawal from Sheffield), is the question of whether a diocese needs to be prepared to ordain men and women, must be widely and explicitly asked as part of the appointment process.

The second issue is the matter of consecrations. +Philip North was consecrated by a select group of bishops, not the ABY, and other bishops attending were asked not to lay hands on him as had been the usual practice. The appointment of two suffrage bishops in Chichester diocese raised the question of consecrations again. One, Ruth Bushyager, is a woman, the other, Will Donaldson, does not recognise the sacramental ministry of ordained women. Much has been made of the 'inclusive' nature of these two appointments. Yet, not only were they not both to be consecrated in a single service but, with 24 hrs notice of the event, we learnt that the ABC had decided that he would no longer consecrate any bishops, and we would only ever have a small designated number of bishops involved in consecrations. It was unclear what role Covid 19 played and how much this was a way to justify the desires of The Society. I have tried to raise concerns about this justification of separate ordinations, separate consecrations and other ways in which we appear to function as different churches within one church.

Much practical work towards change comes through my participation in Transformations and there is a separate report on that work (p 4).

Individuals contact WATCH for advice and support. Sometimes this means helping people to understand their rights. What does the House of Bishop's Declaration 2014 actually say about the passing of resolutions, voting etc.? Sometimes we have worked with a particular church where there is a concern that the laity's support for women in ministry is not taken seriously by those seeking to pastorally reorder. It has been good on a few occasions to find that a Bishop will listen to what we say. The mechanisms to support those opposed to women's ordination are well laid out with an Independent Reviewer financed by the central church. The mechanisms for those who have a legitimate complaint that the rights and opinions of those in favour of women's ordination are being overridden in a certain context are not clear, and it takes considerable courage and persistence to challenge clergy, archdeacons and bishops who dismiss such concerns.

Covid 19 has both reduced our ability to meet; we were not able to hold our committee residential which is often a very productive time for us. It has also offered new opportunities of meeting online. It was great to be able to speak at an event for women clergy in Chester diocese with 40 attending organised with a simplicity and speed that an in-person meeting would not have achieved. We need to reflect on this.

WATCH is still needed in our current Church of England. We are still listened to and invited to participate in the life of the church. We are also still seen to be difficult and I think that is no bad thing. Culture change needs people who disturb the comfortable. In a future with serious financial problems for many diocese we need to be watchful that changes to deployment of clergy do not have a disproportionately negative impact on women. We will continue to WATCH.

END