

The Need For New And Temporary Provision Of Alternative Episcopal Oversight For Ordinands Compelled To Resist The Proposals Of The House Of Bishops

By A Group Of Ordinands Currently In Training

During the debate on Living in Love and Faith at General Synod in February, the Archbishop of York spoke about the need for some settled way of ensuring that everyone has a place within the Church of England.

We agree wholeheartedly, and fully support the campaign by the Church of England Evangelical Council for a settlement that will enable those like us who cannot accept the recent proposals from the House of Bishops to remain in the Church of England by establishing necessary visible differentiation from those who support their use.

However, any such settlement is likely to take years of pain-staking negotiation. Therefore, it offers no immediate solution for ordinands due to be ordained as deacons and priests in the near future. For this reason, we have written this short statement to raise awareness of our situation and to call on bishops to provide a temporary solution while we await a long-term one.

Our problem is simple: all of us want to be ordained in the Church of England. That is the ministry we are being trained to do, and towards which we are willing to commit whatever time, energy, gifts, and resources God may see fit to bless us with.

But we are compelled by our theological convictions, which are biblical, which have been held by the church universal throughout history, and which we share with the majority of Anglicans worldwide, to seek ordination by a bishop who is:

- personally committed to the orthodox doctrine of marriage as expressed in Scripture, in the Book of Common Prayer, and in the Canons of the Church of England;
- publicly opposed to the proposals of the House of Bishops;
- and visibly differentiated from the legal jurisdiction and pastoral oversight of any bishop who does not meet the previous two criteria.

At the time of writing, we, along with many other ordinands, have no way to be ordained by any bishop who meets these conditions.

Though some are able to obtain alternative episcopal oversight under the Bishop of Ebbsfleet, many are not, either because their diocesan bishop is male and they do not qualify, or because they have asked and have been explicitly denied access by their diocese, or because they do not hold a complementarian view of ministry, or because they believe it provides an insufficient level of differentiation on an issue as serious as the doctrine of marriage.

Consequently, without a new and temporary provision for alternative episcopal oversight designed to address the specific needs created by the bishops' proposals while we await a long-term settlement, many ordinands like us will be left with an impossible decision: to get ordained against our consciences and in violation of our convictions without making any

visible differentiation between ourselves and the House of Bishops or to delay our ordinations indefinitely without any certainty about whether an acceptable long-term settlement will emerge.

We fully understand that our bishops are under no obligation to grant the kind of provision we are seeking. But we want them to know exactly what they are choosing if they refuse to. They are choosing to turn away those who have been disciplined and nurtured in the Church of England, whom they have approved for training in the Church of England, and who are deeply committed to the Church of England, for no reason other than the lack of a temporary measure to provide appropriate oversight to those who are compelled by their convictions to resist their proposals.

We are not asking for the impossible. There are several ways that such temporary provision could be made. It could include:

- allowing us to be ordained and licensed by a Church of England bishop other than our diocesan, who meets the conditions outlined above;
- allowing us to be ordained and licensed by a retired bishop who served in the Church of England, who meets the conditions outlined above;
- or allowing us to be ordained and licensed by an Anglican bishop from outside the Church of England, who meets the conditions outlined above.

We understand that it might take time, and we are willing to wait for a limited period if necessary. But if there is no prospect of receiving the kind of oversight we require, we will be forced either to begin our ordained ministry in the Church of England with an act that goes against our convictions, which stumbles our consciences, and with which we are deeply uncomfortable, or to seek ordination, with great sadness and at great personal cost to both ourselves and our families, outside the Church of England instead. Otherwise, many of us will be left without jobs, homes, or direction, while we await a long-term settlement that may take years to arrive, if it does at all.

If you are a bishop reading this, thank you for listening to us. We hope you will help us and not resent us for stating our position plainly. If you are an incumbent, college principal, or member of a deanery or diocesan synod, please use whatever influence you have to raise our concerns with those who can make a difference. If you are an ordinand and you share our concerns, please get in touch with us. We would love to point you in the direction of a number of helpful places where you can find support and friendship.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

– Jude 24-25 (ESVUK)