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Dear Brothers and sisters,

This is a longer than usual newsletter, largely because it contains the findings of the survey we conducted earlier this year into the ways churches put 'male headship' into practice. I hope you will find this of interest without becoming too absorbed in the fact that one group of churches do things one way and others do it another. The Reform Covenant, which has united us for over 30 years, urges us to keep the principle of male headship in mind but is silent on matters of detail. All of this is an encouragement to us to 'keep the main thing the main thing'. I was recently reminded of the need for this when preparing an address for the Oxford Diocesan Evangelical Union on the subject of 'contending for the gospel'. While many passages in the New Testament urge us to watch out for false teaching, the pastoral epistles in particular encourage us not to be distracted from the primary job of preaching and teaching (e.g. 2 Tim 4:1-5). There is also a lovely reminder in Philippians 4:4, that despite the chapter 3 injunction to 'watch out', this should never mean we lose our joy in the gospel. This time of year is especially appropriate for remembering Paul's entreaty "rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."

1. SURVEY ON MALE HEADSHIP IN PRACTICE

This survey was sent out in April 2018 to all 117 of the evangelical churches which had at that time passed a resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests. An exceptionally high response rate of 73% (85 respondents) was achieved. Overall, the picture that is presented is one where parishes are clearly valuing the ministry of women but seeking to stand by the biblical principle of overall leadership of congregations lying with men. There is considerable variation of practice in some areas (e.g. in approaches to housegroup leadership or male clergy having their ministerial development reviews conducted by women), with near unanimity in others (eg willingness to receive bible reading from a woman at a conference while not doing so on a regular basis in church services).

The Reform Covenant (which has been endorsed by all members of the Church Society Council) 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 in appropriate.'

This clear statement is reflected in the practice revealed in the survey. Generally respondents clearly affirm women's ministry and avoid appointments that would compromise male headship – but are varied in how they approach particular issues on which the covenant is silent.

Survey Findings

Characteristics of Complementarian Parishes

Respondents were asked to provide a one sentence 'pen picture' of their parish:

27% includes an area of deprivation or a designated UPA

20% mixed socio-economic characteristics

13% many of parishioners could be considered wealthy

40% various

Support for Ministry of Women

There was widespread commitment to supporting the ministry of women, subject to maintaining the Biblical principle of male leadership of congregations:

- 74% employed at least one non-ordained woman, of which :
 - 38% worked with women, students, youth or children
 - 37% had administrative roles
 - 25% were ministry trainees or had other pastoral roles
- 84% of respondents would happily accept a female ordained deacon, although only 5% had an ordained woman on the team
- 51% would accept as a member of the team an ordained presbyter who was herself committed to the principle of male leadership of congregations

Organisation of Complementarian Ministry

All respondents were committed to the Biblical principle of equality between men and women but differentiation of their roles. There were different ways of working this out in practice within the parameters of having overall male leadership of congregations.

- **Preaching** – this was an issue for most. Only 4% were happy for women to preach regularly to mixed congregations in Sunday services, although 37% would be happy for women to preach occasionally, principally at all age services.
- **Housegroups** – In 62% of cases women were involved in leading housegroups. In half of these they led as part of a husband/wife leadership team or within another leadership arrangement. 26% of respondents did not involve women in leading housegroups. 12% were uncertain about it's advisability.

- **The Lord's Supper** – 62% of respondents said they would be happy to receive the elements at a service where a woman presided. Those who would not said that presiding was normally understood as an exercise of headship.
- **Reviews** – 50% of respondents would agree to their Ministerial Development Review being undertaken by a woman. 25% were unsure.
- **Visitations** – 72% would attend an Archdeacon's Visitation if the archdeacon were female. The main reason this was not felt to be an issue was that it was not regarded as the exercise of congregational oversight.

Response to 'Mutual Flourishing'

- **Five guiding principles** – 75% indicated that they would be prepared to affirm their commitment to the five guiding principles. Of the remainder, there were a variety of responses with some saying they would not resist affirming them and others doubting their coherence.
- **Ordinations** – 89% were content for male curates to be ordained deacons alongside women. This fell to 54% being prepared to accept their ordination as presbyters alongside women. In most cases, respondents said they would respect their curates' conscience in working with dioceses on appropriate arrangements.
- **Conferences** – 92% of respondents said they would be happy to receive teaching from the Bible from a woman or a lecture on theology in a context other than a church service (e.g. conference or workshop). However, this fell to just under 50% for those who thought it acceptable for their male curate to attend a pre-ordination retreat led by a woman. 22% said this would not be acceptable.
- **Vocations** – 15% of respondents had commended a female candidate for ordination, including one for the permanent diaconate. 12% of respondents had enabled female candidates to explore an ordained vocation with an egalitarian clergyperson from another parish
- **Joint events** – 33% had organised joint events with female incumbents from other parishes. These ranged from Bible days to running homeless shelters. 7% had invited a female bishop to attend a parish event.
- **Oaths** – reactions to the possibility of taking an oath of canonical obedience to a female bishop showed that this remains an issue where respondents struggle. 59% either would or were unsure, but of this group 80% said they would send a clarifying letter to the bishop beforehand. 40% of respondents would find difficulty in taking such an oath.

2. PASTORAL ADVISER TO THE BISHOP OF MAIDSTONE

David Banting writes:

On my retirement in May this year from the incumbency of 20 years at St Peter's, Harold Wood, Rod did me the honour of asking me to become his 'Pastoral Adviser', with particular reference to the Northern Province. I am for a while sojourning in Sheffield, though my long-term permanent base remains in Chelmsford. This is a part-time role to assist and support him simply in covering the ground in his country-wide range of responsibility and involvement. There are now over 130 parishes from Carlisle to Cornwall to Clacton who in one way or another directly and indirectly look to the Bishop of Maidstone for oversight and advocacy.

In a recent letter to churches and ministers from or around the Northern Province, who have been in touch with Rod, I spelled out the details of how I might be of assistance. If you are interested, but have not received that letter (which Rod authorised), you have only to be in touch. I have thought for a while that although Rod encourages each of us to be as involved as possible in the lives of our dioceses, a very distinctive group is forming around Rod's ministry as a Bishop – that is, a Bishop to represent and be an advocate for our integrity and constituency within the C of E. While we are allowed and encouraged as 'loyal Anglicans' to take our place and flourish, we need to have the confidence and courage to identify as conservative evangelical and be prepared to stand as a constituency and network. Incidentally I have always understood 'conservative evangelical' to mean confidently conservative in theology and Bible, but cheerfully radical in vision and action for the mission of the gospel.

It is a gift and privilege to have Rod as the Bishop of Maidstone. He does not have the usual full support structures for episcopal ministry, but he does have our support – that is, the support and solidarity of our distinctive group. A Pastoral Adviser for the North (and in due course one for the South) are modest, but significant, developments. However, his support and strength is actually all those who look to him, not simply for leadership, but for what he represents of our integrity and faithfulness. We too need to be committed to 'growth in numbers and maturity'. That means being as active in partnership in our regions as we can (through Church Society/Reform, ReNew groups, Rod's Regional meetings, etc) to support and stimulate each other and to encourage others to become petitioning or Resolution parishes wherever and whenever possible.

I leave you with Psalm 16.5-6. Read it first in NIV or ESV, and then see it in GNB for a brilliantly memorable paraphrase. Thanks, and go well for the Lord.

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3. LATEST ON THE LONDON PLAN

You will know from previous newsletters that the new 'London Plan' represents a significant and positive development in defining my role and the extent to which parishes can look to me for decision making. Since this is something of a precedent, I am encouraging one or two other dioceses to consider adopting a similar plan in the hope that many others will follow suit in due course. To date the Diocese of Truro has agreed to do so.

Following publication of the Plan, detailed work has been undertaken with Bishop Sarah and the Diocesan Director of Ordinands to agree the procedures both for putting forward candidates for BAPs and for agreeing to offer title posts to new curates. In the case of the former, while the normal Diocesan discernment procedures will be used, I will be notified early on about candidates so that I can get to know them and will be responsible for endorsing (or not) a recommendation that they proceed to a BAP. After that, on the basis of a BAP outcome, I will decide how to proceed and communicate that decision to the candidate. Only when that stage has been completed will the candidate then see the Area/Diocesan Bishop. This process will apply initially in the 'Two Cities' area of London, but it is hoped will be adopted by other Area Bishops in London in due course.

4. TRANSPARENCY ABOUT RESOLUTIONS

I have recently read an article about the need for greater openness and transparency in churches opting for male headship ministry¹. This made the point that many churches which have passed a resolution under the House of Bishops Declaration fail to make this apparent in their publicity and called for those churches which have done so to state this on a public page of their website in simple, clear language. We carried out a quick investigation into websites for evangelical resolution churches from a sample of two dioceses and only found one that referred clearly to the fact that a resolution had been passed and what this meant.

It is of course entirely understandable that churches want to keep the focus on the gospel and do not want to elevate what they see as a secondary issue into a primary position. Also understandable is the desire to invite people to discover God's Word for themselves before they have to address an issue that is so counter cultural.

However, the criticism that we are not being altogether transparent must be heard. This criticism is being voiced not simply in articles but also in the House of Bishops' special group on mutual flourishing - The Implementation and Dialogue Group.

Might I suggest therefore, that without necessarily giving greater prominence to the issue than is appropriate, your websites might find space to mention that your PCC (or equivalent) has sent in a letter of request for arrangements to be made under the House of Bishops' Declaration on the ministry of Bishops and Priests?

5. IMPAIRMENT OF COMMUNION

Various steps are being taken by incumbents and PCCs in different dioceses to express the impairment of communion that occurs when individuals or other bodies act in a way that is inconsistent with the Church of England's doctrine of marriage and teaching on sexual relationships. The range of actions include withdrawal from times of prayer; abstention from joining others at the Lord's table; re-routing of some element of financial contribution to dioceses; unwillingness to attend events held in a Cathedral; and unwillingness to receive the ministry of certain bishops and archdeacons.

As I noted at the start of this newsletter, in a recent address to the Oxford DEF, I sought to examine the teaching of the New Testament in relation to false or distorted doctrine. I highlighted in particular the apostles' exhortations that:

- We're not to be disunited ('striving together' Phil 1:27)
- We're not to be distracted (Timothy is told to have nothing to do with foolish and ignorant controversies but to devote himself to teaching and godliness)
- We're not to be deceived (Colossians 2:8). We're to watch our own doctrine closely.
- We're not to be in denial. 2 John 10 is particularly clear on the need to avoid those who do not bring apostolic teaching, although we are also urged to distinguish between enemies and brothers (2 Thess 3) and to demonstrate reasonableness (Phil 4:5).

¹ Lizzie Taylor writing in *Outlook: Women and the Church*, Summer 2018

6. ORDINATIONS

During 2018, I have ordained 6 presbyters and 7 deacons in 7 services all in different dioceses. One more ordination to the presbyterate is arranged for the autumn. If you anticipate having curates whom you would like me to ordain in 2019, please do let Rachel know as soon as possible and well in advance so that we can liaise with the diocese and make appropriate arrangements.

7. REGIONAL MEETINGS

As many of you will know, I am holding a series of these meetings, covering the whole country in two years. The first four meetings have been held for those in the North West; East Midlands and North East; and South and West, respectively. The meetings provide an opportunity to consider particular issues that have arisen for churches which have passed resolutions; a time to share information about local situations; and a lengthy opportunity for questions about future ministry in the Church of England. As we have gained experience, we have changed their format so that the short time we have together is used as effectively as possible. The main meeting is followed by a session for curates who have completed at least one year of training and covers practical issues such as applying for incumbencies.

The dates of future meetings are:

- Tunbridge Wells on 15th January 2019 for Rochester, Chichester and Canterbury Dioceses
- Stafford on 5th February 2019 for Birmingham, Lichfield, Hereford, Worcester and Coventry Dioceses
- London on 5th March 2019 for London, Chelmsford and Southwark Dioceses.

As a result of feedback, we have extended the invitation to these meetings to conservative evangelical clergy whose churches have not passed resolutions, in addition to the original target group of clergy and leadership teams of resolution churches. If you would like to be invited and fall into the category of clergy whose church has not passed a resolution, then please let Rachel know by emailing her: admin@bishopofmaidstone.org

8. SABBATICAL

I will be taking a sabbatical from the beginning of April until the end of June next year, 2019. This will necessarily reduce my availability throughout the year for confirmations and other engagements. If you would like to request that I take a confirmation in 2019, please bear this in mind. Please let Rachel know once you have made plans and she will work to organise things to include as many requests as possible. This will be much helped if churches in a locality have a shared confirmation service and if you can be as flexible as possible concerning dates. If you had been hoping to invite me to a meeting of your PCC during the week, then during the period April-June please consider inviting David Banting instead. He is a member of General Synod and is hugely knowledgeable about the House of Bishop's Declaration and current developments in the Church of England. As the recently retired vicar of one of our larger evangelical churches, he is also very skilled in advising on relationships within Dioceses. David can be contacted on the email address and phone number given at the end of his letter.

9.VACANCIES

I have been advised of a number of vacancies around the country, mostly but not all for Associate Ministers. Please do email my office if you are looking for a post and we will pass on the information we have.

Christ Church Heiloo, Netherlands Chaplain, from 2019

All Saints Fordham Associate Minister

Emmanuel Hastings Assistant Minister for Families – not looking for someone ordained but with some experience, for example has worked as a Ministry Apprentice.

In addition I know of two further parishes where vacancies will be announced in the near future.

Separately, I have been approached by a student at Fuller Theological Seminary in the USA who would be interested in a summer placement in England. Do let me know if you would be interested.

10. PRAYER REQUESTS

A number of you are good enough to let me know you are regularly praying for me – either individually or in church meetings. I am hugely grateful for this prayer support and am very conscious of answered prayer month by month. Particular items for prayer at the moment are:

- Wisdom in knowing how to respond to an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury to attend the Lambeth Conference in 2020
- Developing the detail of the London Plan so that I am able to support ‘resolution’ churches effectively
- Being granted wisdom and time to respond to appeals for different sorts of pastoral care
- Knowing how best to contribute to the work of the group set up by the House of Bishops to see how ‘mutual flourishing’ could become more embedded in the life of the church
- That a request I have made for an additional staff member to help on pastoral and advisory issues would be well received and acted on
- That the Lord would bless a Christianity Explored Group I am seeking to set up with local churches where I live.

10. RESOLUTION PARISHES - resolutions passed by conservative evangelical churches, 133 in total under Bishop of Maidstone, Extended Episcopal Ministry 63 (in red)

Bath&Wells	St George's Wembdon	Derby	St Peter's Stapenhill
Birmingham	St Stephen/St Wulstan, Selly Park		Little Eaton
	St Agnes, Moseley		St Alkmund's, Duffield
Blackburn	The Church of the Saviour, Blackburn		St Mary's Chaddesden
	St Bartholomew's, Ewood		St Giles, Normanton
	Christ Church Blackburn		Trinity Church Buxton
	Wellfield Church, BMO	Europe	Leipzig
	St Andrews Ashton on Ribble	Ely	All Saints Little Shelford
	St Andrews Leyland		Christ Church Cambridge
	All Hallows Bispham		St Andrew the Great, Cambridge
	Padiham		St Matthew's Cambridge
	All Saints Preston		St John's Orchard Park
Canterbury	St James Westgate	Exeter	St Matthew's, Elburton
	Christ Church Ramsgate		St Leonards Exeter
	All Saints Loose		Christ Church, Paignton
Carlisle	St James, Burton in Kendal	Guildford	St Andrew's Frimley Green, Mytchett
	Houghton and Kingmoor	Leicester	Enderby
			Holy Trinity Hinckley
	St John's, London Road, Carlisle	Lichfield	Oswestry, Holy Trinity
	St John's, Hensingham		Audley
	St Bridget's Moresby		Castle Church Stafford
Chelmsford	St George Dagenham		St Thomas Kidsgrove
	St Paul Harold Hill, St Thomas Noak Hill		St Luke's, Wolverhampton
	Holy Cross Felsted	Liverpool	St Philemon's Toxteth, DCC
	St Peter's Harold Wood	London	St Thomas', Oakwood
	Immanuel, Brentwood		St Helen's Bishopsgate
	Henham, Elsenham and Ugley		St Anne's Limehouse
	Becontree St Elisabeth		St Luke's Hampstead
	Christ Church, Leyton		St Botolph without Aldersgate
	St Peter and St Paul Dagenham		St John with St Andrew Chelsea
	Fordham		Christ Church Cockfosters
	Chadwell St Mary		St Paul's Hadley Wood
	St Michael's Braintree		St Peter's Barge, Limehouse
	St John's Great Clacton		St Peter Cornhill
	Crossway Stratford		St Michael's Cornhill
	St John's Walthamstow		Grace Church Highland
Chester	St John's Lindow		St Peter's Fulham
	St John's Church, Over		Christ Church Mayfair
	St Mary's, Cheadle		St Benet's, Paul's Wharf
	St John's, Knutsford		St Nicholas, Cole Abbey
	Toft		Euston
	St John's Hartford	Manchester	Christ Church Chadderton
	St Catherine's Tranmere		St Mary's Balderstone
	St Mark's New Ferry	Norwich	Christ Church Lowestoft
	Holy Trinity Poulton Lancelyn		St Andrew's Honingham
	Christ Church, Wharton	Oxford	St Ebbe's, Oxford
Chichester	Holy Trinity, Eastbourne		Arborfield
	All Souls Eastbourne		Barkham
	Little Common, Bexhill		Christ Church Wokingham
	Emmanuel Hastings		Holy Trinity Nuffield
	Bishop Hannington Hove		St Paul's Banbury
	All Saints Crowborough		St Mary's Maidenhead

Peterborough	St Peter and St Paul, Moulton	Southwark	St Nicholas Tooting
Portsmouth	St James Ryde		Emmanuel, Wimbledon
Rochester	St Nicholas, Sevenoaks		Dundonald
	St John's, Tunbridge Wells		St Luke's, Wimbledon
	Christ Church, Bromley		Holy Redeemer, Streatham Vale
	St Peter's Bexley Heath		St Stephen's, South Lambeth
	St Peter's Tunbridge Wells		Holy Trinity Wallington
Salisbury	St Johns Wimborne	Southwell	St Mary's, Wollaton Park
Sheffield	Christ Church, Fulwood	St Albans	Holy Trinity, Frogmore
	St Andrew's, Kendray		All Saints Riseley
	St Thomas Kilnhurst	Truro	Fowey
	Christ Church Endcliffe	Winchester	Christ Church Westbourne
	Gleadless Valley		St Mary's Basingstoke
	St Mary's, Wheatley		Sherbourne St John, Basingstoke
		York	St Andrew's Kirk Ella, Hull

All that remains is for me to wish you all a very joyful Christmas season and express the hope that you have time for rest and refreshment before the New Year.

With love

Rod Thomas