



The Society

under the patronage of Saint Wilfrid and Saint Hilda

A Catholic Life in the Church of England

A Statement of Policy and Pastoral Guidance by the Council of Bishops of The Society

1 Parishes

Summary

Parishes are placed under the oversight of a member of the Council of Bishops by passing a resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration. Such parishes are invited to affiliate to The Society, which places them – through their bishop – in a structured relationship of full communion with the other bishops and parishes of The Society.

- 1.1 Parishes are placed under the oversight of a member of the Council of Bishops by passing a resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration that requires the diocesan bishop to ensure the provision of pastoral and sacramental ministry (para. 27) by a serving bishop (para. 26) who is 'chosen by the diocesan bishop to provide oversight' (para. 22). That bishop will be one with whom the parishioners are in full communion because they are able to receive the ministry of all the priests whom that bishop ordains.
- 1.2 While jurisdiction will continue to be held by the diocesan bishop (and the area bishop, if there is one), the Society bishop's pastoral and sacramental ministry of oversight (*episkope*) will involve pastoral care of the clergy and people, presidency at the Eucharist, confirmation and ordination. Where the Society bishop is not himself the diocesan bishop, he and the diocesan will 'cooperate in a variety of ways to contribute to [the parish's] welfare, resourcing and mission and in its relationship with the diocese' (Declaration, para. 28). The Society bishop will have responsibilities in respect of the parish that have 'many similarities with the range of responsibilities carried by any suffragan bishop within a diocese' (para. 29). We note that 'parishes which pass a resolution in one part of the country are entitled to expect equivalent treatment to that provided in another' (para. 27, cf. para. 16).
- 1.3 Parishes that are under the oversight of a member of the Council of Bishops are invited to affiliate to The Society. This places them – through their bishop – in a structured relationship of full communion with the other bishops and parishes of The Society.

2 Sacramental Assurance, Validity and Efficacy

Summary

As bishops, it is our duty to offer those committed to our charge sacramental assurance that when they receive communion in one of our parishes they do indeed receive Christ's body and blood, and to follow the safest course where the sacraments are concerned. We can therefore only commend the sacramental ministry of male priests who have been ordained by a validly ordained bishop (that is, a male bishop who stands in the historic apostolic succession of bishops at whose episcopal ordination a male bishop presided).

There must be a question as to the validity of an episcopal ordination at which someone whose episcopal orders we cannot recognize presides. But such a person participating as a co-consecrator cannot be said to make the ordination of the bishop concerned, or the orders of those whom he ordains, invalid. We reject any so-called 'theology of taint', so male priests ordained by a validly ordained bishop will be welcomed as Priests of The Society irrespective of whether that bishop also ordained women as bishops and/or as priests. In following the safest course in respect of the sacraments, we do not deny that other ministries may, through the uncovenanted mercies of God, be fruitful.

- 2.1 Sacraments are 'certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace' (Article XXV). As the Catechism teaches, a sacrament is a means whereby we receive spiritual grace and 'a pledge to assure us thereof'.
- 2.2 In the fourth of the *Tracts for the Times* John Keble wrote that 'our Fathers of the Primitive Church' upheld the principle that 'the Holy Feast on our Saviour's sacrifice, which all confess to be "generally necessary to salvation", was intended by Him to be constantly conveyed through the hands of commissioned persons'. From this Keble concluded:
- Except therefore we can shew such a warrant, we cannot be sure that our hands convey the sacrifice; we cannot be sure that souls worthily prepared, receiving the bread which we break, and the cup of blessing which we bless, are Partakers of the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Later in the Tract, Keble spoke of people's need for 'security ... that in receiving this bread and wine, I verily receive [Christ's] Body and Blood'. In the words of the Tract's title, 'Adherence to the Apostolical Succession' was 'the Safest Course'.¹
- 2.3 As bishops of The Society, it is our duty to offer those committed to our charge such sacramental assurance and, where the sacraments are concerned, always to follow the safest course. We can therefore only commend the sacramental ministry of male priests who have been ordained by a male bishop who stands in the historic apostolic succession of bishops at whose episcopal ordination a male bishop presided.

¹ *Tracts for the Times by Members of the University of Oxford*, vol. 1 (London and Oxford, 1834): no. 4: [J. Keble], 'Adherence to the Apostolical Succession the Safest Course', pp. 1–3.

- 2.4 Canon 4 of the Council of Nicaea requires the participation of at least three bishops (as a minimum) in the ordination of a bishop. Their participation gives expression to the communion of the local churches over which they preside. However, ordinations to the episcopate by a single bishop are recognized as valid (though irregular). Therefore, it can be said that the participation of not fewer than two co-consecrators, joining the bishop who presides over the liturgy of ordination in the laying on of hands, is necessary for canonicity and communion rather than strictly for validity.
- 2.5 This means, on the one hand, that there must be a question as to the validity of an episcopal ordination at which someone whose episcopal orders we cannot recognize (for example, a female bishop) presides. On the other hand, it means that, because the participation of the other bishops is not necessary for validity, the participation as a co-consecrator of someone (male or female) whose episcopal ministry we cannot receive cannot be said to *invalidate* the ordination of the bishop concerned or the orders of those whom he ordains.
- 2.6 We reject any so-called ‘theology of taint’ whereby a bishop who ordains women to the episcopate or the priesthood thereby invalidates his own orders and renders invalid the orders of those whom he subsequently ordains. Men who have been ordained to the priesthood by a male bishop who stands in the historic apostolic succession of bishops at whose episcopal ordination a male bishop presided will be welcomed as Priests of The Society, irrespective of whether the ordaining bishop also ordained women to the episcopate and/or the priesthood.
- 2.7 To be unable to affirm the sacramental validity of the orders of some who are ordained in the Church of England is not necessarily to deny the efficacy of their ministry. Keble recognized that advocating following the safest course by only receiving the sacrament from priests ordained by bishops in the apostolic succession might provoke the questions: ‘Do you then unchurch all the Presbyterians, all Christians who have no Bishops? Are they shut out of the Covenant, for all the fruits of Christian piety which seem to have sprung up not scantily among them?’ His answer was: ‘Nay, we are not judging others, but deciding on our own conduct.’ Moreover, he added: “‘Necessary to Salvation,” and “necessary to Church Communion,” are not to be used as convertible terms.’²
- 2.8 Writing in 1993, the then Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) similarly distinguished between validity and efficacy:

I reckon as one of the important results of ecumenical dialogue precisely the insight that the question of the Eucharist cannot be reduced to the problem of ‘validity’. Even a theology based on the concept of succession, as is held by the Catholic and the Orthodox Church, is in no way obliged to deny the saving presence of the Lord in the protestant Lord’s Supper.³

² [Keble], ‘Adherence to the Apostolical Succession the Safest Course’, pp. 5–6.

³ J. Ratzinger to J. Hanselmann, 9 March 1993 in J. Ratzinger, *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens: Kirche als Communio* (Augsburg: St Ulrich Verlag, 2002), p. 216: ‘Ich zähle im übrigen zu den wichtigen Ergebnissen des ökumenischen Gesprächs gerade die Einsicht, daß die Frage nach der Eucharistie nicht auf das Problem der „Gültigkeit“ eingengt werden darf. Auch eine am Sukzessionsbegriff orientierte Theologie, wie sie in der katholischen und in der orthodoxen Kirche gültig ist, muß keineswegs heilschaffende Gegenwart des Herrn im evangelischen Abendmahl leugnen.’ For another translation, see J. Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, tr. H. Taylor (San Francisco: St Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 248.

2.9 Without denying such uncovenanted mercies of God, it is our duty as catholic bishops to follow the safest course in respect of the sacraments and therefore to commend to those committed to our care only the ministry of priests whose orders meet the criteria that we have set out above.

3 Priests, Deacons, Ordinands and Religious

Summary

Priests are registered as Priests of The Society because we can commend their ministry as male priests, ordained by a validly ordained bishop, who are currently entitled to minister in the Church of England. We welcome both women and men who have been ordained to the permanent or 'distinctive' diaconate, and male deacons preparing for ordination to the priesthood, as Deacons of The Society. Potential Deacons of The Society are welcomed as Ordinands of The Society. We will do our best to support Religious of Orthodox Tradition and those who are called to the Single Consecrated Life.

- 3.1 One of the purposes of The Society is precisely to offer sacramental assurance by guaranteeing a ministry in the historic apostolic succession in which our people can have confidence. Registering priests as Priests of The Society is the mechanism for doing this.
- 3.2 The Society is not a membership organization or a clerical society, nor does it propose a corporate rule of life. Priests are registered as priests whose ministry we can commend because they are male priests, ordained by a bishop in the male historic succession, who are currently entitled to minister in the Church of England by virtue of being incumbents or holding a licence or permission to officiate. They are not registered as 'members of The Society'.
- 3.3 There is no precedent in orthodox Christianity for the ordination of women as priests and bishops, but in the early Church there was a form of diaconate for women as well as for men. The ordination of women to the diaconate does not raise issues of sacramental assurance in the way that ordaining women as bishops and priests does. We therefore welcome both women and men who have been ordained to the permanent or 'distinctive' diaconate as Deacons of The Society. At the same time, we respect the position of those who take a different view as to the appropriate relationship in the modern Church between the female diaconate and Holy Orders.
- 3.4 Male deacons who are preparing for ordination to the priesthood ('transitional deacons') are also welcomed as Deacons of The Society.
- 3.5 Ordinands who are potential Deacons of The Society are welcomed as Ordinands of The Society.
- 3.6 We will do our best to support Religious of Orthodox Tradition (RoOT) and those who are called to the Single Consecrated Life.

4 Ordination

Summary

This section of the Statement sets out our policy with regard to ordinations to the diaconate, the priesthood and the episcopate.

Ordinands will have a natural desire to be ordained by a bishop with whom they will be in full communion (because they can receive the ministry of all whom that bishop ordains). This desire is even stronger in the case of ordination to the priesthood than in that of the diaconate, since full communion with the ordaining bishop involves being able to recognize the orders of all those ordained to the same order by that bishop.

Bishops and Priests of The Society cannot join in the laying on of hands at the ordination of bishops and priests (respectively) with those whose ministry as bishops and priests they are unable to receive. To do so would indicate a sacramental recognition that they cannot give.

Because ordination to the episcopate is the primary occasion when full ecclesial communion is manifested (and not because of any so-called 'doctrine of taint'), it is important that, when a traditional catholic is ordained to the episcopate, it is bishops with whom he is in full communion who preside over the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of Ordination and join in the laying on of hands.

- 4.1 Para. 15 of the House of Bishops' Declaration says that 'ordination services for deacons and priests should be planned and conducted in a way that is consistent with the five guiding principles'. This statement applies to all ordinands, whether or not their title parish has passed a Resolution under the Declaration. (Para. 15 is a general provision; it does not form part of the 'Arrangements for Parishes'.) It may be interpreted as follows. Ordinations are conducted under the authority of the diocesan bishop, and the archdeacon (male or female) has the right to present the candidates (Principle 1). But ordinands cannot flourish (Principle 4), and sacramental provision cannot be made (Principle 5), if the arrangements violate the consciences of those who are to be ordained.

4.2 *Ordination to the Diaconate*

- 4.2.1 The Declaration that we invite Ordinands of The Society to make confirms that on grounds of theological conviction they seek ordination to the diaconate by a male bishop who stands in the historic apostolic succession of bishops at whose episcopal ordination a male bishop presided. The rite of ordination forms part of a celebration of the Eucharist during which those ordained must receive communion. Ordinands who are unable to receive the ministry of women as bishops and priests should not be required to be ordained during a Eucharist which women concelebrate by saying the Eucharistic Prayer with the bishop.⁴

⁴ References to concelebration in this statement are to concelebration in the sense of co-consecration.

- 4.2.2 If someone cannot receive the sacramental ministry of a priest, his or her communion with the bishop who ordained that priest is thereby diminished. Because of the intimate bond that exists between a bishop and those whom he ordains, ordinands will have a natural desire to be ordained by a bishop with whom they will be in full communion. (This aspiration is not limited to ordinands serving in parishes that are under the oversight of a Bishop of The Society.)
- 4.2.3 We therefore hope that ordination of traditional catholic deacons by Bishops of The Society will become customary across the Church of England. This will have the added advantage that practice in dioceses with female bishops (or, in future, male bishops at whose ordination a female archbishop presided) will be no different from that in other dioceses.
- 4.2.4 When deacons are ordained by a Bishop of The Society, an opportunity should be sought to give expression to the diocese's welcoming of them into the body of its clergy and to the deacons' relationship with the diocesan bishop.

4.3 *Ordination to the Priesthood*

- 4.3.1 Deacons who are unable to receive the ministry of women as bishops and priests should not be required to be ordained to the priesthood on an occasion when women are ordained to the priesthood, or when women minister as priests by laying on hands with the bishop. This will generally require a separate ordination. Where this takes place in a parish that has passed an appropriate resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration, the ordination will need to be by the bishop who ministers in that parish under the Declaration.
- 4.3.2 Whether an ordination to the diaconate or priesthood by a bishop of The Society takes place in a parish church or in the cathedral, the principle of 'equal treatment' (House of Bishops' Declaration, para. 15) suggests that care should be taken to ensure that the occasion is one of equal dignity with the other ordinations in that diocese.
- 4.3.3 The Declaration signed by a Deacon of The Society seeking ordination to the priesthood states that he seeks ordination to the priesthood from a bishop ministering under the House of Bishops' Declaration. The desire to be ordained by a bishop with whom the ordinand's communion will be undiminished is even stronger in the case of the priesthood and episcopate than in that of the diaconate, since full communion with the ordaining bishop involves the ability to recognize the orders of all of those ordained to the same order by that bishop.
- 4.3.4 The Canons and liturgy of the Church of England provide that ordination to the priesthood is by a single bishop and that presbyters (not other bishops) join in admitting the ordinand to the presbyterate by laying on hands with the bishop.⁵
- 4.3.5 Bishops and Priests of The Society cannot join in the laying on of hands at the ordination of bishops and priests (respectively) with those whose ministry as bishops

⁵ The Ordination of Priests, also called Presbyters, Note 12: *Common Worship Ordination Services: Study Edition* (London: Church House Publishing, 2007), p. 50; Canons of the Church of England, Canon C 3.4: 'The priests taking part in an ordination shall *together with the bishop* lay their hands upon the head of every person who receives the order of priesthood' (emphasis added).

and priests they are unable to receive. To do so would indicate a sacramental recognition that they cannot give.

4.4 *Ordination to the Episcopate*

- 4.4.1 The ordination or consecration of bishops is the primary occasion when full ecclesial communion is manifested: bishops, who are ordained to guard the teaching and unity both of their respective local or particular churches, and the Church catholic, participate in ordinations as a sign of the full ecclesial communion of their respective churches.⁶ It is for this reason, and not because of any so-called ‘doctrine of taint’, that the precedent has been set for the establishment of a custom that when traditional catholics are ordained to the episcopate a bishop with whom they are in full communion will preside over the Liturgy of Ordination and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and only bishops in full communion will lay on hands.

⁶ Cf. *Bishops in Communion: Collegiality in the Service of the Koinonia of the Church. An Occasional Paper of the House of Bishops of the Church of England* (GS Misc 580) (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p. 12: ‘Through the ordination of deacons and presbyters into catholic order and especially through the consecration of bishops, Christian communities remain constantly in touch with one another throughout the Church’; *Women Bishops in the Church of England? A Report of the House of Bishops’ Working Party on Women in the Episcopate* (GS 1557) (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), p. 22, para. 2.3.32: ‘[Canon 4 of the Council of Nicaea] clearly embodies the principle ... that a bishop was not an isolated figure but part of a wider episcopal college ... Furthermore, because a bishop was the representative of his church the approval of an episcopal appointment by other bishops and their ordination of the bishop concerned was also a sign that his church was regarded as part of the Catholic Church rather than as an heretical or schismatic sect.’

5 ‘The Highest Possible Degree of Communion’

Summary

The first Guiding Principle commits us all to respecting lawful office-holders.

The fifth Guiding Principle promises pastoral and sacramental provision. It also challenges us to give expression to the communion that we share in the Church of England, and to live in the highest degree of communion that principle and conscience will allow. This section of the Statement sets out what we believe this should involve. Such participation in the life of the diocese and the wider Church of England will be an expression of the love (charity) that is an essential characteristic of the communion that flows from our common baptism.

- 5.1 The first of the Five Guiding Principles commits us all to respecting lawful office-holders in the Church of England. Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thess. 5. 12–13)

- 5.2 The fifth Guiding Principle states:

Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority in 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.

For members of The Society, this embodies not only a promise but also a challenge: How can we give expression to the communion that we share with the rest of the Church of England, and live in the highest degree of communion that principle and conscience will allow?⁷

- 5.3 We believe that this should involve

- spirituality – taking belonging in faith and prayer seriously;
- finding non-sacramental opportunities for common prayer;
- a serious renewal of the study of Scripture together;
- engaging in mission together;
- working in partnership to serve local communities, strive for justice and care for the poor;
- playing a full part diocesan life – for example, by participating in chapter meetings, in mission initiatives, and in the work of boards and committees;

⁷ Cardinal Walter Kasper’s *Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (New York: New City Press, 2006) explores ways in which, in a context of some degree of visible separation, Christians may deepen and extend their experience of baptismal communion.

- participating together in the structures of the Church of England – deanery and diocesan synods, the General Synod and the College of Bishops.

5.4 Such participation in the life of the diocese and the wider Church of England will be an expression of the love (charity) that is an essential characteristic of the communion that flows from our common baptism. When the Archbishop of Canterbury gave evidence to the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament about the women bishops legislation and the associated provisions, he was asked how he was going to present them to the public. He replied:

We are a family, not a political party. We do not chuck people out who disagree with us. Therefore, we seek to bring forward ways of living and being in which – except on the absolute essentials, in which I would include the Nicene Creed – we find ways of accommodating difference and disagreement, continuing to debate, discuss and disagree, seeking constantly to move towards a point where we are in unity and knowing that, at the end of all things, we will be in unity and unanimity in the face of Christ. That is how I explain it: it is love.⁸

Love should similarly motivate our response.

⁸ Ecclesiastical Committee, 233rd report (HL Paper 45, HC 622, 2014): transcript of the Deliberation (22 July 2014), p. 9.

6 Holy Communion

Summary

Normally, holy communion is received within a context of full ecclesial communion. For our clergy and people, this means receiving communion in Society parishes or from Bishops and Priests of The Society. But there can be occasions when it is appropriate (though none should feel compelled) for our clergy and people to receive communion from other validly ordained bishops and priests.

At ordinations those who are ordained and those who share in the laying on of hands must receive communion. In all other circumstances, the decision as to whether to receive communion on any occasion from a validly ordained bishop or priest must be a decision for the person concerned, as a matter of conscience.

- 6.1 Normally, holy communion is received within a context of full ecclesial communion. For the clergy and people of The Society, this will mean receiving communion in parishes that are affiliated to The Society or at celebrations of the Eucharist at which Bishops and Priests of The Society preside.
- 6.2 There can be occasions when it is appropriate (though none should feel compelled) for our clergy and people to receive communion from validly ordained bishops and priests who do not belong to The Society.⁹ This would give expression to our commitment to living in the Church of England in the highest possible degree of communion and charity. We are particularly conscious of the situation of those who identify with The Society but live at some distance from one of our parishes.
- 6.3 Clergy and Ordinands of The Society have freely committed themselves not to receive communion when women priests, women bishops, and those ordained by them, preside. This reflects their desire to bind themselves to a discipline shaped by catholic consent. Bishops and Priests of The Society have also freely committed themselves to refrain from concelebrating the Eucharist with women priests, women bishops, and those ordained by them, because to do so would not be consistent with their self-understanding within the Church of England.
- 6.4 At an ordination, those who are ordained and those who share in the laying of hands must receive communion. In all other circumstances, the decision as to whether to receive communion on any occasion from a validly ordained bishop or priest must be a decision for the person concerned, as a matter of conscience.

⁹ Receiving holy communion when validly ordained male bishops and priests preside does not raise issues of validity or sacramental assurance. Nor is the reception of holy communion inextricably linked with full ecclesial communion: Anglicans and other Christians who are not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church can and do receive communion in the Roman Catholic Church in certain specific circumstances, and under particular pastoral provisions. Similarly, there is canonical provision for Roman Catholics to receive communion 'from ministers in other faith communities whose sacraments are accepted as valid by the Catholic Church' (Code of Canon Law, Canon 844; Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (1993), nos 129–32; *One Bread One Body: A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the Life of the Church, and the Establishment of General Norms on Sacramental Sharing* (London and Dublin: Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland, 1998), paras 106–21).

7 Concelebration

Summary

When priests concelebrate the Eucharist with their bishop, this expresses his collegiality with his college of presbyters. This is especially appropriate at Chrism Masses and ordinations. We shall continue from time to time to concelebrate the Eucharist with validly ordained priests, especially those who are under our oversight (as priests of Society parishes or as Priests of The Society). But in some circumstances it may promote the 'highest degree of communion' for a bishop to preside alone or with other bishops only. Similarly, there are many occasions when it is natural for priests to concelebrate the Eucharist and others when it would be more appropriate for one priest to preside alone.

- 7.1 When priests concelebrate the Eucharist with the bishop under whose oversight they minister, this expresses the collegiality of the bishop with his college of presbyters. This is especially appropriate at the Chrism Mass and at ordinations.
- 7.2 As bishops, we shall therefore continue from time to time to concelebrate the Eucharist with validly ordained priests – especially those who are under our oversight (by virtue either of a resolution under the House of Bishops' Declaration or of a Declaration that they have made to us), and those whom we invite to share with us in the laying on of hands at an ordination to the priesthood. However, in some circumstances it may promote the 'highest degree of communion' for a bishop to preside alone, or with other bishops only.
- 7.3 Similarly, there are many occasions when it is natural for priests to concelebrate the Eucharist – for example, as priests of a parish or benefice or as members of a priestly society – but there may be other occasions when a number of priests are robed on which it would be more appropriate for one priest to preside alone.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 Our life in a church in which communion is torn but not torn apart, in which ecclesial communion is diminished but not destroyed, confronts us with many decisions as to the most appropriate course of action in particular circumstances. It is important that such decisions are taken according to conscience and principle, and remembering the primacy of charity in the Church. Decisions taken in good conscience should be respected. Sometimes, inevitably, the wrong decision will be taken, albeit for the best of motives. When this occurs, it is important that we bear with one another in love.