



Statement from the National Association of Diocesan Advisers in Women's Ministry (NADAWM) on the Appointment of the Bishop of Blackburn

Following the recent announcement that the suffragan Bishop of Burnley is to become the diocesan Bishop of Blackburn, the Executive Committee of the National Association of Diocesan Advisors in Women's Ministry would like to make this statement:

We write as a group which is committed to enabling the whole Church of England to flourish, attempts to inhabit well the Five Guiding Principles and has great respect for the Rt Rev'd Philip North. In particular, we recognize and commend his intentional work to recruit and support women clergy in Blackburn Diocese. In making this statement, we do not wish to criticise an individual, but to raise some concerns about process and principle which have implications for the wider Church of England.

The appointment of Bishop Philip will be the first time that a man who does not ordain women has become a Diocesan Bishop since the settlement in 2014. As such, it is a significant moment in the outworking of that settlement. While equivalence has been drawn between having a female diocesan and a male diocesan who does not ordain women¹, in that both cannot fully share the ministry of all the clergy of their diocese, we feel there is a significant difference. The former offers her sacramental ministry to all and will receive the sacramental ministry of all: it is up to individuals on grounds of their conscience to decline it (and receive alternative provision). The latter on grounds of his conscience and belief withholds his sacramental ministry from some and does not receive sacramental ministry from all. This difference means there is a particular pain for ordained women in the decision to appoint a diocesan bishop who does not ordain them, and this extends beyond the bounds of Blackburn Diocese where Bishop Philip's extraordinary personal ministry will soften the impact for some.

We feel that the nature of the announcements surrounding the appointment did not adequately acknowledge its significance, nor the pain it may cause to some clergy. In general, women clergy are deeply committed to mutual flourishing, but it is costly, and their forbearance and grace were not honoured in this instance. At a local level, we are grateful to hear that Bishop Philip is offering to meet with anyone who has questions about his appointment. However, issues of power must be recognised and there is a risk that women (and men) who are struggling might not have the support they require or opportunities to voice concern – especially as other key members of the leadership team have spoken so publicly and warmly in favour. Lastly, after events in Sheffield in 2017, the Mawer Report made some recommendations to help the Church of England handle well a future appointment of a Diocesan Bishop who does not ordain women. While the actions recommended were implemented, we are not aware of any evaluation of their impact on wider church culture. Certainly, as key stakeholders who represent and serve ordained women across the Church of England, we were not consulted on the degree to which the Church of England was ready for this significant step or how it might be best implemented.

We suggest that the Church of England considers the impact of this appointment in Blackburn Diocese, and beyond, particularly for women, and reflects on how to ensure the voices of women clergy are heard and honoured, as the settlement which aims for the flourishing of all continues to be worked out in our national church.

THE NADAWM EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Kate Massey (Chair), Rosemary Donovan (Vice-Chair), Amanda Barraclough, Amanda Bruce, Hazel Charlton, Rachel Firth, Esther Foss, Laura Jørgensen, Martha Mutikani, Chantal Noppen, Jo Tatum, Katie Thomas, Wendy Thomson

8th March 2023 International Women's Day

www.nadawm.org

¹ Philip Mawer, REVIEW OF NOMINATION TO THE SEE OF SHEFFIELD AND RELATED CONCERNS Report by the Independent Reviewer 2017