

**Address to the Forward in Faith National Assembly  
By the Independent Reviewer, Sir Philip Mawer  
19 November 2016**

Mr Chairman, Bishops, members of Forward in Faith

I am honoured to be invited to give what you have kindly described as the Keynote Address at your 2016 conference. As you will understand, an occupational hazard for ombudsmen and independent reviewers is that if they open their mouth on any subject, what sounds as a sweet note to some may sound discordant to others. So my address to you today, and more particularly my responses to any questions you may put to me after it, have inevitably to be circumscribed if I am to preserve my impartiality and therefore my ability to do my job.

However, I value the opportunity you have given me to say something about my approach to the role of Independent Reviewer. It is an opportunity which I particularly value because over ten years experience as a regulator – mainly of politicians as first the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and then the Prime Minister’s Independent Adviser on Ministers’ Interests – you can judge for yourselves how much success I had there! – has taught me the value of being open and transparent in setting out the way in which one tackles the job. I firmly believe in the importance of following a clear and consistent process; of basing oneself on the evidence; and of contributing as best one can to helping an institution - in the current case, the Church – to prevent problems from arising in the first place rather than waiting until they escalate to the level of a complaint or grievance.

Of course, I have made clear to other groups in the Church that, against this background, I shall equally be happy to come and talk to them. And as my term of office progresses, I am keen to gather the fruits of learning about practice on the ground, about what works and what doesn’t, so that that information can be shared for the benefit of the whole Church.

You will find that what I have to say is largely not about procedures but about principles and approach. If it had been about procedures, this after-lunch session would indeed truly have proved to be the graveyard slot. Moreover, I have given ample guidance to everyone already, in a Note published at the end of last year, about how the Resolution of Disputes Procedure set up under the arrangements embodied in the House of Bishops Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests will work in practice. So, encouraged by your Director, Dr Colin Podmore – whose former work at Church House, Westminster I of course know well and continue to value highly – I am going to offer you a more personal reflection on the first two years of my term of office.

Before I do so, Colin encouraged me to say something about myself. That is always a dangerous invitation to offer any speaker. But don’t worry. You already have a brief biographical note on me and I won’t repeat that. What I will share with you is a little of something we all share, though each in our own unique way – our journey of faith. My journey is one that continues. With one early exception, my wife and I have always worshipped in the church of the parish in which we lived. That experience has taken us sometimes up and sometimes down the candlestick – but we have been enriched by it all. I have never had a Damascus Road experience and sometimes envy - and sometimes don’t - those who have. Rather, I have absorbed my Christian faith and my love of the Church of England gradually through my eyes and ears: through church music, as a choirboy and ever since; through the resonant language of the Prayer Book (1928 version in my case); through

the beauty and stillness to be found in church buildings, great and small; and most of all through the faithful and devoted witness and companionship of so many priests and people who I have encountered along the way.

I have always seen through a glass darkly but have constantly returned to a belief that the best rule of life is that embodied in the two Great Commandments – to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself. As I see it, our task on earth is simply to try to leave it a better place than we found it upon entry. And I cannot think of a better maxim for any regulator or independent reviewer than the words of the prophet Micah: that what God requires of us is simply to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with Him. Acting justly, loving mercy, walking humbly – what better guidance could any independent reviewer have?

It will be clear from what I have said so far that:

- I love the Church of England – its history and traditions; its contribution to national life; and its honest and open messiness as it struggles to model what it is to live in Christian communion in the modern world.
- I value its place and its contribution (and that of the wider Anglican Communion) within the church universal.
- I care about the rich variety of the Church of England – the gifts which each of its many strands bring to it, to the wider church and to the proclamation of the Gospel.
- Through hard experience, I know that none of us has a monopoly on wisdom. It is only through prayer and God's good grace that we can carry out any of the difficult tasks before us.

So how does all this translate into being the Independent Reviewer? Well you will understand it is not a job you seek. Ombudsmen and women are dogs that walk alone. Their enquiries and reports rarely satisfy everyone – indeed, because the matters brought to them involve the expression by Party A of a grievance of which Party B (and sometimes Parties C, D and E) is the alleged cause, they are quite likely to end up satisfying no one. So spare an occasional thought for them – and perhaps an occasional prayer too.

Why say 'yes' to this particular role – apart from the fact that you have been asked to do it by not one but two Archbishops? Because it seems to me that, whatever your views on the theological and ecclesiological arguments about the role of women in the church's ministry, what the House of Bishops with the endorsement of the General Synod has done in enunciating the 5 principles and establishing a framework of procedures to underpin them is a brave and worthy attempt to model a way for Christians to live with their differences. Doing what each of us can to ensure a successful outcome to the experiment is an obligation on us all.

Why is it so important? Essentially, because if we allow it to fail we will grievously damage the mission and witness of the Church – the mission of God – in a world which more than ever needs to learn and re-learn how to know Him and His Son.

How is it all going? Well I am delighted to say that, after what might be seen as two 'test cases' in year one, this year I have, so far at least, been entirely unemployed – a situation in which I rejoice. It may be that this is because parishes which find the ministry of women bishops and priests theologically difficult have been busy debating and passing the resolution required of them under the House of Bishops Declaration before the 2 year deadline for passing such resolutions was up. It could be that now that part of the process is over, the

difficult part is about to begin, that is the making in each case of appropriate arrangements for the provision of Episcopal ministry to the parish in question.

However, it may also be that bishops, dioceses and parishes are simply getting on with the job and are successfully rising to the challenge of implementing arrangements within the framework established by the Declaration. Let us hope so. No doubt you will be better sighted on that than I am.

Conscious that time is limited and wanting to hear from you how you think things are going, I will not detain you much longer. I simply want to say two things in closing – one about me as Independent Reviewer; one about you, as representatives of those within the Church of England who hold a traditional catholic position.

As Independent Reviewer, I have been and will continue to be guided by the principles of openness and transparency about process (coupled with a proper degree of confidentiality about the conduct of any individual inquiries which may be in progress) to which I alluded at the start of my address. That is why I was in touch from the beginning of my appointment with a range of key groupings and individuals within the Church, including the Society of St Wilfrid and Saint Hilda; why I will continue to try to keep in touch with all of these groupings; why I invited the Archbishops to publish my first annual report; and why I published towards the end of last year the Notes on the operation of the Resolution of Disputes Procedure which I mentioned earlier. Should your PCC unfortunately find itself in a position in which it thinks it needs to invoke that Procedure, please read those Notes carefully. Indeed they are worth a read whatever the stage at which your parish stands in the process. All the documents I have referred to can be found on the web - at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/about-general-synod/house-of-bishops/declaration-on-the-ministry-of-bishops-and-priests.aspx>

More widely, all of us need to hold firmly in our minds the 5 guiding principles and the 3 supporting concepts - of simplicity, reciprocity and mutuality – set out in the House of Bishops' Declaration. They are what will guide me and they are what should guide you. They are not a menu from which one can pick and choose according to what one believes will best advance one's cause. Rather, as the House of Bishops has itself said they “need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively”. So, for example, when you think about what ‘mutual flourishing’ means in your context, ask yourself not only what it would look like for you but what it would look like for those who do not share your theological convictions on this particular issue, not least for women in ministry themselves. Strive for the Highest Common Factor rather than the Lowest Common Denominator in every situation. And of course doing that is not just an obligation on you but on everyone else involved too, whatever their position on this issue.

Mr Chairman, I believe that the House of Bishops Declaration – with the principles it embodies and the disputes resolution procedure that underpins it – offers the prospect of a secure and fulfilling place in the Church of England for **all**, whatever view they may take about women's place in the Church's ministry. It is our shared task to make sure that that **is** the outcome – a sure and fulfilling place for all. I hope that, encouraged by the progress we make in doing that, all groups, including the members of Forward in Faith, will be freed to celebrate the contribution each one makes to the mission and ministry of God in England. And I pray fervently that the catholic group – with such a rich inheritance, not least in worship and in social action – will have the confidence to play its full part in that process.