

## **Context**

The Church of England has stated that it is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender. It also accepts that some within the Church are unable to receive the ministry of female clergy and the leadership of women in all ministries. In that light, provisions were made in the 2014 House of Bishops Declaration for the pastoral and sacramental ministry of those who do not fully accept women's ministry, with the intention of enabling mutual flourishing.

However, more provisions are needed to enable, empower, and overcome the continuing challenges women address in their ministry. The formation of a Diocesan Women's Ministry Group seeks to encourage women in their ministry, to support and challenge the Diocese and its members, actively seeking to address that which diminishes woman and their ministry. This is with the hope of strengthening the Church and its mission through the flourishing of women in ministry.

## **Theological Context**

Both men and women are made in the image of God, and within the Bible, one finds feminine images of God alongside masculine ones like Father and Lord. God is compared to a mother bear (Hosea 13:8), a mother eagle (Deuteronomy 32:11-12), and a mother hen Matthew 23:37, Luke 13:34). In the Book of Proverbs, Wisdom is characterised as female, and the way God cares for His people is likened to that of a mother (e.g. Isaiah 66:13). Women, therefore, have a place alongside men in witnessing to the nature of God.

This is enriched by the Holy Spirit falling on men and women alike. When the Holy Spirit came in power on the Day of Pentecost (Joel 2:28–32) both men and women were present (Acts 1–2). Peter interpreted the events as a fulfilment of the prophecy in Joel (Acts 2:17-18):

“In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy [...]

Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.”

There are material implications which stem from the spiritual equality we have in the New Covenant which Paul lays out in Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” In this New Creation, we are free to explore and exercise the gifts God has given us for His glory irrespective of gender, race or social class.

## **Vision**

The Diocese of Leicester wishes to see all women freely able to explore their sense of calling at whatever level and in whatever context, and to be able to carry out their ministry – authorised, licensed, ordained, or lay – in a healthy, safe and supportive environment.

## **Mission**

To help realise this Diocesan vision, the Diocesan Women's Ministry Group will accompany, champion, and equip women's ministry in the diocese. We will accompany women, giving them a safe space to share their concerns and experiences of ministry. We will use data and insights to ensure the challenges faced by women are heard by the diocese and its leadership, and we will advocate for change wherever necessary. We will equip women in ministry with talks and discussions so they can be more confident of their vocation and mission.

## **Terms of Reference**

To support the creation and development of women's ministry both lay and ordained.

To encourage and seek to ensure that women are provided with the 'equal' opportunity to lead across all aspects of ministry, regardless of location, or size of community. Paying particular attention to the opportunities for women to lead larger churches, develop and plant new, resourcing churches and fresh expressions of church alongside ministerial leadership.

To seek the elimination of gender bias from diocesan communication and practice (e.g. in job advertisements and recruitment processes).

To ensure that those who make appointments and have responsibility for employees, office holders and volunteers are given training on unconscious bias.

To work with those in key roles related to vocations and development to ensure that their approach and policies support women's ministry and its flourishing as a fully formed part of diocesan life and mission.

To ensure that health and wellbeing considerations pertaining to women are considered fully and that the Diocese seeks to support women in ministry as they move through the various stages of life.

The group is expected to provide a regular review of the work of women in ministry within the diocese.

## **Membership**

- The chairperson is appointed by the Diocesan Bishop.
- The group is to have six members and a chairperson.
- The members must be drawn from authorised, licensed, ordained, or lay members who minister within the diocese, who live and worship within the

Leicester diocese or who work for the mission of the diocese. e.g., Bishops Lodge, Diocesan Board of Finance, Diocesan Board of Education, Launde Abbey, St Phillips Centre.

## **Governance**

The Women's Ministry Group is commissioned by, and reports to, the Bishop of Leicester. The group will be able to submit reports to the Bishops' Leadership Team and seek approval to take papers to (pending the new diocesan governance arrangements from 1 August 2024) the Bishop's Council and diocesan synod. This will give the group the opportunity to have its research noted by the diocesan leadership and its recommendations enacted at that level or to have motions put to a synodal vote.

The Women's Ministry Group will also be able to reach church leaders and members across the diocese through diocesan social media channels and Diomail.

## **What and How**

The group will meet quarterly.

The programme will include.

- Virtual drop-in surgery meetings for women to share their achievements and challenges
- The opportunity to provide a safe shared space for the mentoring of women's ministry.
- The opportunity to raise concerns confidentially, where the flourishing of women's ministry is under threat.
- Support and training resources to be placed on the learning hub.
- An annual gathering followed by a short service to be held for all women who minister within the Diocese to meet and discuss their hopes and concerns for the Diocese and its mission and ministry.
- The group will look to the national Church of England's guidance and proposals for women's ministry and to share/reflect and discuss these in relation to the wider Diocese.
- The group will work to meet its strategic aims, as informed by the annual women in ministry gathering, and as considered and agreed with the Bishop.
- This group will use diocesan communications such as Diomail, as it seeks to make a connection with all those who are exploring authorised, licensed, or ordained ministries, asking them to register as part of the women's ministry within the diocese, so that they might participate in updates and-events held or organised by the group.