



CNI

PRESS WATCH -

Blueprint for Church schism revealed as conservative Christian leaders plot separate Anglican structure

A blueprint for schism seen by *Christian Today* reveals extensive plans by conservative evangelicals to form a rival Anglican structure to the Church of England in the UK, Harry Farley reports in *Christian Today*.

The proposals, born out of concerns about liberal teachings on homosexuality, include suggestions for a new synod, new liturgy, an appointments system for new bishops, new church canons and new statements of belief.

First muted at Renew, a conference of traditionalist church leaders last autumn, the 15-page discussion document outlines how the new faction could take shape and establish credibility as an alternative Anglican church.

'Widespread credible bishops serving conservative evangelicals here in England today seems an unlikely dream,' the document notes before going on to outline how traditionalists concerned about a liberal drift on issues like sexuality could appoint their own bishops.

Entitled *Credible Bishops*, the document defends the role of bishops to ordain 'biblically faithful' church leaders and says this is not always possible within the CofE.

'But that does not mean we should give up on having bishops altogether. It may mean that credible bishops have to be consecrated by other means, with the support of the wider Anglican Communion.'

It goes on to outline plans 'to consider irregular ordination' and 'irregular options for oversight' outside the CofE for conservative churches.

The document was leaked to Christian Today after one conservative church in Newcastle went ahead and made one of its clergy a bishop.

Rev Jonathan Pryke, of Jesmond Parish Church, was consecrated by the presiding bishop of a renegade Anglican faction in South Africa outside the authority of the Church of England. (See CNI News May 9).

Pryke, 57, was ordained as a 'bishop in the Church of God', a statement from his church confirmed, and will now oversee the ordination and planting of new Anglican churches conservative on the issue of homosexuality.

Peter Ould, an Anglican priest from Canterbury, told Christian Today the split had come after evangelicals felt marginalised within the CofE.

'This consecration in Jesmond raises some serious questions for the leadership of the Church of England,' he said. 'On the whole the conservative Anglicans I have spoken to have seen it as a schismatic move that they don't support.

'At the same time there is serious concern that those who share their theological convictions are not being appointed to similar senior roles within

the institutional Church. The debacle over the appointment of Philip North and the fact that there is still only one Bishop who is a conservative evangelical (Rod Thomas) and that he is not in a Diocese but has a roaming brief means that the sense of marginalisation and rejection grows steadily.

'This needs to be addressed, and be addressed urgently.'

But the proposals discussed at the annual Renew conference reveal a much larger scale rebellion against the established Church.

The move could lead the hundreds of churches associated with the conference to breakaway from the official CofE to form a conservative alternative Anglican body.

The level of detail includes suggestions for 'proactive and social media savvy' publicity as well costing for the new bishops offices and staff.

'Much more needs to be done to achieve this credibility than merely appoint a few people as titular bishops,' the document reads.

'There must be a draft system for appointments to episcopal ministry to avoid the charge of cronyism or short-termism. There must be plans for canons and statements of belief to shape our ministries in ways that exhibit humble submission to Anglican doctrine.

'There must be plans for some kind of synodical meetings as without these there is a deficit of congregational feedback to episcopal leadership.

'There must be credibly funded support structures to release bishops to do their ministry of pastoral care and oversight.

'There must be safeguarding procedures of the highest standards to protect the reputations of churches served by bishops.

'Drafting new liturgies for ordinations of presbyters affords us the opportunity to reform the liturgy in ways that will increase the credibility of our bishops with evangelicals – for example by including a revised vow of submission and providing for bishops to reaffirm their own vows.

'Combined with a transparent and publically available set of canons and disciplinary

procedures for bishops this will do much to increase the credibility of episcopacy with evangelicals who have not seen the polity implemented well.'

It comes after GAFCON, a grouping of conservative Anglicans around the world, announced plans for a 'missionary bishop' to oversee parishes in the UK discontent with their more liberal local bishop.

Linked to GAFCON is Anglican Mission in England (AMiE), a group of Anglican churches already established as rivals to the CofE. AMiE sponsor the Renew conference alongside Reform and Church Society – two other conservative evangelical groupings – and it is likely they will be at the heart of plans for new bishops and a fully separate Anglican structure.

+++++

First published on Christian Today, pm of May 9, 2017

+++++

