

AWESOME Summary Document

“We believe it is important that evangelicals in the Church of England with different understandings of Scripture’s teaching and divergent views on women presbyters and bishops should treat each other as evangelicals and Anglicans.”

This was a key paragraph from our first statement last January. But an important question we need to address is what we actually mean by this. On one level it is easy to say this but as with all such statements the important thing is when the ‘rubber hits the road’.

In AWESOME as has always been clear we represent the full cross-spectrum of ordained women from permanent deacons to those who are very clear that women should have been bishops yesterday. Therefore speaking about ‘AWESOME’s need for recognition’ could be slightly confusing. This recognition plays out on different levels: Network; membership - breaking down into the needs of our permanent deacons and also our members who have taken the orders of presbyters and may be called to be consecrated as bishops; and finally relationally.

Network - as a Network AWESOME has grown in recognition, however there is still the important question of whether we are seen to be a liberal force. In the light of the above statement it is important that when dealing with one another the assumption should be one of trust and generosity rather than otherwise.

Membership:

- Permanent Deacons - There is a serious need for female permanent deacons to be assured a place within the church. Realistically this means those leading conservative churches ensuring that there are jobs and training opportunities for them. So often the move is towards having another man, often leading to male only leadership teams.
- Female Presbyters and those potentially called to be bishops - there is a pressing need for us to work out how we will relate to one another practically both now and if/when this becomes reality. I am not talking here about the Code of Practice or a Legislative Solution but about how we intend to relate to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Too often in the past relations have been characterised by marginalisation - and here I am not referring to the marginalisation of the ‘traditionalists’, but to the marginalisation of evangelical ordained women. I know that this will be hard for those in Reform to take on board, however there is a clear perception and witness that this has been and continues to be the experience of women who are clearly under Scripture, exercising gospel ministries and longing to work with their traditionalist brothers and sisters.
 - It is not unheard of for ordained women to be excluded from the main stage of pan evangelical gatherings planned pre-dominantly by conservatives, on the grounds that they are not gifted speakers

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- Nor is it unheard of for ordained women to be excluded from gatherings where large scale decisions are made which will affect the future of our constituency
- Nor is it unheard of for comments to be made which bring ordained women into disrepute treating them all as major threats or figures of fun.

We were delighted with the wording of that original statement but we really do need to know how we will know that it means something. How will we know that if one of us were to be a bishop, ordained by the Church of England, living under Scripture and preaching the gospel, how will we know that we will not be ostracised by and made to feel as if we were not only less than we should be, but also effectively living in sin because we do not interpret the scriptures as you do. That is how many women around the country feel today and realistically we need to know that if a statutory solution is found it will not just institutionalise this marginalisation within evangelicalism.

We desire to enable evangelical women to remain within the evangelical fold, to mentor them and to nurture them, we fear that as things stand they will alienate them further, as realistically other evangelicals find it hard to see beyond a certain narrow reading of male and female roles and the Trinity which they deduce must lead to inexorably to a particular form of church structure. There is very little hope if conservatives cannot even begin to understand how the Scriptures can be read in the way we do and so are unable - if we are brutally honest - to see us and treat us, in real terms as fellow evangelicals.