

**Directions by the Bishop of Norwich to the Vicar and Churchwardens of Wymondham arising from the Visitation of the Benefice of Wymondham with Silfield and Spooner Row, and the Commissaries' Report dated 22 June 2021**

**Preamble**

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

1 John 4. 7-12

These directions arise from a visitation to the Benefice of Wymondham with Silfield and Spooner Row during 2021 conducted by Commissaries on my behalf.

I am enormously grateful to Bishop Graeme Knowles (former Bishop of Sodor and Man and Dean of St Paul's Cathedral), The Revd Gill Wells (retired priest with permission to officiate in the Diocese of Norwich) and Mrs Rebecca Gascoyne-Richards (retired partner at Lovewell Blake LLP) for their skill, dedication and wisdom. I believe that their report is a thorough and perceptive exploration of the issues identified in the Articles of Enquiry and I welcome the recommendations made by the Team. I am also grateful to those who have written to me, either with concerns or complaints, as well as some who have written in support of their vicar.

I have read the report and every letter and email sent to me with care. On the whole, they make for uncomfortable reading. These matters have monopolised a huge amount of my time since becoming Bishop of Norwich.

The visitation arose from a substantial number and range of pastoral concerns addressed to me by parishioners and others, as well as concerns which predated my appointment. I was struck by the Visitation team's feedback that they met a number of people who cried in front of them about the situation and their sense of loss from a building and community that they had loved and had sustained them in their relationship with God in Jesus. At the same time the Vicar and PCC have maintained a continuing grievance about the loss of the former vicarage at 5 Vicar Street and its replacement with a more modern property at 9 Applegarth. The Vicar refuses to accept that the Vicar Street property has been lawfully appropriated to the diocesan glebe by the Diocesan Board of Finance, albeit after the original exchange of the properties was carried out incorrectly by the DBF, and was void. That problem has now been rectified.

A number of complaints were made against the Vicar by parishioners and others under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 during 2019. The Vicar denies any misconduct, and those complaints have not been resolved. However, they reflect a deeply felt division of opinion between parishioners who are supportive of the Vicar and those who are not. The Vicar has, unfortunately, alienated many of those who spoke to the visitation team by her authoritarian style. It is recognised that there are parishioners who are appreciative of the Vicar's ministry and the work which she has done, but her refusal to admit that she has contributed in any way to the pastoral breakdown in the benefice, accept any error in the way she has interacted with people, accept the outcome of the parsonage exchange or any accountability to the Bishop or the Archdeacon, and to lead the benefice in the payment of any parish share during 2020 or 2021, do require a response.

It is acknowledged that the coronavirus pandemic during 2020-2021 has complicated life for those in the benefice, but the response of the Vicar has disappointed many parishioners. The pandemic has been used as a reason to bring to an end the long standing choral music tradition at Wymondham Abbey and the Abbey has remained largely closed to daily prayer and visitors. Significant changes have been made to the ordering of the Abbey, to remove elements of new works and interpretative material funded by a recent National Heritage Lottery Fund grant, without the requisite faculties or approval from the grant funders.

The financial position of the PCC remains uncertain and has not had the transparency or financial management it requires, but it is clear that the pandemic, combined with a dramatic reduction in giving by unhappy parishioners, has affected the PCC's finances in an unhelpful way. The number of those volunteering to serve at the Abbey has fallen off. Very few funerals were conducted at the Abbey in 2020, and funeral directors have reported difficulty in contacting the Abbey to arrange services. Emails from me to the Vicar have frequently been ignored or gone unanswered.

The Vicar has met with me to discuss the Visitation report, and in the light of the findings in the visitation report and our meeting, I am setting out now, in this Determination, for the public record, my directions to the Vicar and Churchwardens. I am also making available the Visitation report and the responses to the Articles of Enquiry, by prior arrangement at my office, for any parishioner of Wymondham, or anyone previously on the electoral roll of Wymondham Abbey.

In the light of all of this, I direct that the Vicar and Churchwardens should have in place the following:

### **Accounting and Finance**

1. Up to date and accurate management accounts should be presented to the PCC at regular intervals, not less than quarterly, and a copy of the latest version of those accounts should be made available to any person on the electoral roll immediately upon request. *Reason: the PCC and the wider church community need to have a clear understanding of the parish's income and expenditure. The obscurity of the PCC's finances over the last two years is wholly unsatisfactory for a church charity. There can be no objection to transparency over the PCC's accounts*
2. The management accounts should include separate details of income and expenditure attributable to the Abbey Hall and Spooner Row. *Reason: to enable a proper view to be formed as to the viability of these separate assets, and to provide clarity over the income and expenditure of the PCC generally.*
3. Proper controls should be introduced over expenditure, so that clear limits are placed on the authority of any one person, including the Incumbent, to authorise expenditure without prior reference to the PCC. *Reason: Proper financial controls and 'rules of business' are entirely appropriate to a charity in the management of its finances to ensure that the risk of financial misappropriation is minimised.*
4. A copy of management accounts provided to the PCC and a copy of the rules of business agreed to control expenditure should be supplied to the Director of Finance at the Diocesan Board of Finance within one month of their presentation to/approval by the PCC. *Reason: to ensure that integrity is maintained over the PCC's financial record keeping and to ensure that parish share is not unreasonably withheld by the benefice.*

5. The payment of Parish Share should be recognised as the first expenditure priority for the PCC, and a payment of account of at least 50% of the outstanding Parish Share request for 2020 and 2021 should be paid to the Diocesan Board of Finance as soon as reasonably practicable. *Reason: parish share is intended to reflect the cost of ministry to the parish. The failure of Wymondham to pay any parish share in 2020 or 2021 has left a significant shortfall in the diocesan revenue account, and may suggest that the financial position of the parish has fallen into a state of disarray.*

### **Clergy Discipline**

1. The existing complaints made against the Incumbent should be brought to a conclusion, and not allowed to remain unresolved. *Reason: These matters have been outstanding for some time, and ought in justice to be resolved without further delay.*
2. No further action is proposed to be taken on all the complaints other than:
  - 2.1 the allegation made in relation to the damage alleged to have been caused to Mr Pointer's car by the Incumbent, which complaint should be referred back to the Tribunal;
  - 2.2 the allegations by the Archdeacon concerning the Incumbent's failure to obtain necessary faculties – these should be reviewed in the light of the review by the DAC and Archdeacon under paragraph 1 in the section below entitled 'Fabric and Faculty Jurisdiction', and the outcome of any retrospective faculty petition which may be made.  
*Reason: no useful purpose would be served by pursuing the other allegations at this distance in time, although it is a matter of regret that these have gone unresolved and that the Incumbent has done so little to bring about reconciliation with the complainants.*
3. The Bishop's direction that no further action be taken on the other complaints is subject to the right of the complainants to request that this direction be reviewed by the President of Tribunals. *Reason: these directions cannot remove the statutory rights of the complainants to request a review under s13(3) of the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003*
4. The Incumbent is directed to meet with the complainants in person (including all those whose complaints made in 2019 and 2020 failed to meet the test of being of sufficient substance to engage the Measure) and to apologise to them without reservation for the behaviour which gave rise to the allegations which they raised. *Reason: to ensure that the Incumbent does all within her power to bring about reconciliation with those who made allegations, and to set an example of repentance for the church community at Wymondham.*

### **Spooner Row**

1. Given the housing development anticipated at Spooner Row and its recent establishment as a civil parish in its own right, a regular weekly pattern of worship at Spooner Row should be reinstated as soon as possible. *Reason: The worshipping community at Spooner Row has not been well served through the pandemic lockdown, and priority should be given to restoring public worship there on a regular basis.*
2. Consideration should be given to pastoral reorganisation that might a) create an ecclesiastical parish of Spooner Row or b) join Spooner Row with another benefice where it would be able

to flourish apart from Wymondham, perhaps Besthorpe and Attleborough. The Incumbent should engage with the Archdeacon and Rural Dean to explore this possibility. *Reason: Recognising that the ecclesiological traditions at Wymondham Abbey and Spooner Row may be significantly different, it may be appropriate to explore a distinct future for Spooner Row, either alone or in conjunction with a more sympathetic benefice.*

### **Fabric and Faculty Jurisdiction**

1. The DAC and the Archdeacon should be asked to undertake a thorough review of the Abbey church to assess the level of compliance with existing faculty conditions and to report this to the Chancellor. *Reason: the Visitation Report noted that a number of works appeared to have been carried out without the benefit of a faculty.*
2. The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC should apply for a faculty to authorise retrospectively any changes to the Abbey and its furnishings, especially during the period of Covid lockdown, for which a faculty has not been granted. *Reason: To comply with the requirements of ecclesiastical law, including the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018 and the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 (as amended)*
3. Consideration should be given to the surrendering of the historic records at present held in the Muniment Room to the County Records Office. *Reason: to secure the preservation and archival of these important records.*

### **Choral Music**

1. The PCC should reconsider its policy in prioritising weddings over concerts. With reasonable diary planning there should be ample scope for the Abbey to host both weddings and concerts without difficulty, as has happened perfectly satisfactorily in the past. *Reason: There is a long tradition of choral music concerts at Wymondham Abbey, and it would be wrong to dismiss this. Arrangement of these concerts requires a degree of forward planning but this should not be inconsistent with arrangements being made for weddings or other occasional offices.*
2. In re-establishing a pattern of regular worship at the Abbey, consideration should be given to retention of the long established SATB tradition of choral music, for which the Abbey was justifiably famed. *Reason: to cater for the significant element in the Abbey Community for whom this musical tradition was important*
3. Proper access to the Abbey should be made available to the choir or any music group to enable them to rehearse or give concerts, as well as to prepare for and sing at services on Sundays and on other days. *Reason: Access has been deliberately and unreasonably limited during the last 18 months in particular. The coronavirus pandemic does not justify the continued exclusion of the choir or other music groups from the Abbey.*

### **Legal Matters**

1. The Applegarth property must be tidied up and any dilapidations made good with a view to the property being let on the open market to a suitable tenant within three months. This is a matter of urgency. *Reason: The property is falling into a state of disrepair, and this decline*

*needs to be arrested without delay. The Norwich Diocesan Board of Finance will undertake the necessary works of tidying, repair and maintenance.*

2. The Diocesan Board of Finance should take the property in hand, if necessary by service of a notice under section 8 of the Church Property Measure 2018, to ensure that the property can be put into good order to be let or sold, or managed as part of the glebe. *Reason: as in paragraph 1 above*
3. The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC should be advised in writing by the Diocesan Board of Finance that the discussion about the future of the property at 5 Vicar Street is now closed. (This has already been done). *Reason: to avoid the waste of further resources on this issue. The Incumbent's stubborn refusal to accept that the Applegarth property is now the parsonage, and that the Vicar Street property is no longer the Vicarage is irrational and unsupported by legal opinion.*
4. The Diocesan Board of Finance should continue its efforts to identify a suitable alternative parsonage property for the benefice, and the Incumbent and PCC must co-operate in the identification of a new parsonage property to which the Incumbent will then be required to relocate within 12 months of the date of these Directions. *Reason: to bring to an end the unsatisfactory situation in which the Incumbent does not wish to move to the existing parsonage property and has allowed it to fall into disrepair; to provide the Incumbent with a reasonable alternative parsonage property with which she can be content.*
5. The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC should be directed to waste no more time and money in pursuing the recovery of the property at 5 Vicar Street. *Reason: see above*

## **PCC**

1. The PCC must publish its minutes on the Abbey website and noticeboard with 21 days of each PCC meeting, together with copies of minutes of the Standing Committee and any other papers discussed in the minutes. *Reason: so that there is clear transparency in the decision making of the PCC.*
2. A PCC Secretary should be appointed who is not a Churchwarden. *Reason: to ensure a separation of roles and to reduce the risk of undue influence being exercised by the Incumbent over a person holding the offices of both PCC Secretary and churchwarden*
3. The Electoral Roll Officer should not be one of the Churchwardens. *Reason: although there is nothing to prevent the ERO from standing as a churchwarden or for any other office, the ERO must be careful to ensure that there is no suggestion that the electoral roll has been 'managed' to exclude or include particular individuals or those likely to vote for or oppose a particular candidate for office*
4. The nomenclature "Senior Warden" should be dropped. *Reason: the usage has no standing in Canon Law, all the four Churchwardens having equal standing.*
5. The meetings of the Standing Committee should be properly minuted, and copies of these minutes appended to the minutes of the following PCC meeting. *Reason: so that there is clear transparency in the decision making of the PCC.*

## **Safeguarding**

1. The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC should undergo refresher training in safeguarding matters arranged by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team within three months, and be asked to sign a written undertaking to comply in all respects with national church and diocesan safeguarding policies. *Reason: this training should be regarded as mandatory in following the current duty to have regard to the church's safeguarding policies, for the purposes of s5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.*
2. The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC should implement any changes to their working practices reasonably recommended by the Diocesan Safeguarding Team within three months of being requested to do so. *Reason: this should be regarded as mandatory in following the current duty to have regard to the church's safeguarding policies, for the purposes of s5 of the Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016.*

## **Coronavirus**

1. A weekly pattern of public worship on Sundays and mid-weekdays should be re-established in the Abbey church at the earliest opportunity. *Reason: to comply with the requirements of Canon Law*
2. The Abbey church and the church at Spooner Row should be re-opened for daily private prayer between 08.00 and 18.00 each day. *Reason: to reflect the role of these buildings as places of welcome, prayer, worship and reflection in their respective communities*

## **Pastoral Care and Ministry**

1. Morning and Evening Prayer shall be said in Wymondham Abbey or Spooner Row daily. *Reason: to reflect the Incumbent's Canonical duty set out in Canon B11*
2. No request for occasional offices, such as the solemnisation of matrimony, funerals, baptisms and the administration of Holy Communion to the housebound sick or elderly is to be refused without the approval of the Archdeacon. *Reason: to restore public confidence in the Abbey and Spooner Row as places where these important community offices may be celebrated.*
3. The Incumbent will produce and implement a clear plan for the restoration of pastoral care of the elderly, sick and bereaved. *Reason: to restore public confidence in the Abbey and Spooner Row as places where pastoral care may be found and received.*
4. The PCC should give careful consideration to the future use of the Abbey Hall and its financial viability, and offer all those groups and organisations which were previously using it the opportunity to return to doing so as soon as possible. *Reason: the PCC's finances do not justify the Hall being left without generating an income; for pastoral reasons it may be desirable to rebuild relationships with those previously able to use the Hall*
5. The PCC should appoint a new sub-committee of the PCC to manage the Abbey Hall, on which the Incumbent should not sit. *Reason: the Incumbent has exercised an unhelpful influence over the lettings policy for the Hall, which needs to be used to generate an income*

6. The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC should waste no further money on legal fees in connection with the School Room. *Reason: The School Room is owned by another body, the Reverend William Papillon's Charity, and is not a PCC asset.*
6. The Incumbent, Churchwardens and PCC should abandon their efforts to appropriate the field and the School Room owned by the Papillon charity for alternative uses. *Reason: The School Room and field are owned by another body, the Reverend William Papillon's Charity, and are not PCC assets.*

It is my earnest prayer that the parochial life of Wymondham and Spooner Row will find new stability and much needed healing so that God's love may be revealed. This will take a change of heart on the part of the Incumbent to a more conciliatory and collaborative way of working, as well as major bridges to be built to and from parishioners, former attendees of Wymondham Abbey and the wider town. It is only then, priest and people moving forward in reconciliation and hope together, that the community will be able to flourish in its life together and seek to reflect the light of Jesus Christ.

+Graham Norvic:

All Saints' Day 2021