

The Court of Appeal has upheld the freedom of clergy to be office holders rather than employees with its judgement in the case regarding former Worcestershire vicar, Mark Sharpe.

The court has agreed with the initial judgement of the Employment Tribunal, which ruled that Mr Sharpe was not an employee of the Bishop, the Diocese or anyone else.

The Bishop of Worcester, the Rt Revd Dr John Inge said: "We are delighted that the Court of Appeal has taken this view of the matter. There has been considerable consultation with the clergy on this issue as well as discussions at General Synod, and clergy have consistently said that they don't wish to change their status as office holders. To become employees, clergy would lose the freedoms which are at the heart of the Church's ministry and this is not something that they want to give up.

"It is regrettable that UNITE fails to understand the context in which parish clergy exercise their ministry whilst the Church seeks to uphold the freedoms enjoyed by its clergy."

Bishop John continued: "Mr. Sharpe's claims of the various incidents which despoiled his ministry in Teme Valley South are disheartening to read. However I am encouraged to note that the clergy who have ministered in these churches both before and since Mr Sharpe's appointment have all spoken very warmly of the people there and their experience doesn't reflect any of the negativity that Mr Sharpe claims to have faced."

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