



Geoff Crawford / Church of England

General Synod has voted in favour of a motion asking the Archbishops' Council to explore a Code of Conduct for Parochial Church Council (PCC) members and lay volunteers.

The motion, brought by the Diocese of Chelmsford, sought to address an imbalance of accountability in relationships where lay volunteers currently face no significant consequences for persistent departures from acceptable standards of behaviour.

An introductory paper explained that, whereas clergy are subject to the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) process, there remains no proportionate and accessible means by which laity can be held to account for their actions.

The paper cited National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) advice that, while disagreement is a healthy part of decision making, it was recommended that charities should use a code of conduct for their trustees.

It highlighted instances of uncooperative or aggressive behaviour in meetings over a long period where there was no mechanism to remove a member from the PCC.

Introducing the motion, The Revd Dr Sara Batts-Neale from Chelmsford Diocese (pictured) said: "It's not news to discover that human beings sometimes fail to be loving, kind, patient, gentle or self-controlled. It's not news that sometimes human beings fail to love their neighbours. We are all a work in progress. growing in holiness.

"When [things] do go wrong, there is currently no way to change the composition of a PCC. There is a lack of clear accountability.

"There are big questions about why we, as the body of Christ, sometimes find ourselves in fraught relationships - not just about doctrinal or ecclesiological disagreements, but about the small and local challenges.

"A code of conduct can help guide us all in places whilst we prayerfully find the grace to live alongside each other in peace.

"We seek a review into a code of conduct to encourage healthy cultures, and to give a possible remedy for intransigent behaviours that damage people, the church, and hinder our ability to share the good news of Christ Jesus."

Originally a motion had been passed by the Braintree Deanery in , the motion was passed by the Diocese of Chelmsford in 2022.

The General Synod motion, as shown below, was carried with votes recorded as follows:

Bishops: 30 in favour, 1 against, 1 abstained

Clergy: 128 in favour, 23 against, 4 abstained

Laity: 105 in favour, 52 against, 8 abstained

Motion:

That this Synod request that the Archbishops’ Council carry out a review to consider:

- a. the possibility of drawing up a Code of Conduct for PCC members and lay volunteers,*
- b. the issues required to put in place a disciplinary process for their removal from the PCC in cases where this is not followed,*
- c. the resources required at national, diocesan and parish level to bring this about.*

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