



DIOCESE OF BRISTOL

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Clergy Partnered with Clergy (CPC) Protocol

Revision and review

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1. Background and Scope

- 1.1. Every vocation is a gift from God and a blessing to the church. Where two vocations to ordained ministry emerge within a couple, this is a double blessing. However, the way in which clergy are trained, deployed, and remunerated can give rise to some logistical complexities when both members of a couple are ordained – both for the couple and for the Diocese. This protocol aims to provide clear information and support, so you can better understand your options and opportunities and find ways for both of you to flourish in your ministries.
- 1.2. The Diocese of Bristol seeks to equally value the vocations of both of you as gifts to the church and the world. There is no assumption about gender roles within your ministry, and you are both encouraged to participate in leadership and decision-making in ways that reflect your individual callings, with neither role being defined by gender.
- 1.3. This Protocol relates to ordained clergy licensed or with PTO in the Diocese of Bristol, and to ordinands sponsored by the Diocese, who are married to, in a civil partnership with, or engaged to another ordained person. This protocol uses the language of partner to refer all of these relationships.
- 1.4. Where ministry spans diocesan boundaries, this Protocol applies to the Bristol element and envisages formal liaison with the other diocese relates to clergy who are married to, in a civil partnership with, or engaged to another member of the clergy.
- 1.5. Clergy who are in the Diocese and are partnered with clergy entering the Diocese, sponsored by the Diocese, or individuals who are

candidates for ordination should be made aware of this Protocol and provided with a copy at the earliest point of contact.

- 1.6. When clergy are partnered with a clergy person from another denomination, decisions about deployment and the conduct of ministry are made independently by each denomination according to their own criteria and policies.
- 1.7. This policy looks to enshrine three main principles:
 - 1.7.1. The equal valuing of both vocations with no gender assumptions.
 - 1.7.2. The independence and accountability of each clergy person with clear line management and safeguarding arrangements.
 - 1.7.3. The pastoral care and wellbeing of clergy.

2. Conflicts of Interest and Safeguarding

- 2.1. When you are partnered with another clergy member within the same Diocese, Deanery, Parish, or other ministerial setting, conflicts of interest must be carefully managed. A conflict of interest occurs when competing loyalties, financial arrangements, or other material arrangements are or could be thought to be in conflict with your role as a minister.
- 2.2. We recognise that your ministries might overlap. It is important that we work with you to address any potential conflicts of interest as early as possible. This will most likely be a conversation with your Area Dean, Archdeacon, Training Incumbent, or another relevant person (such as the Dean, Bishop's Chaplain, or Diocesan Director of Ministry).

- 2.3. Once identified, conflicts of interest should be declared, and you should withdraw from the situation if required. 'It is a delusion to think we can be impartial when there is a conflict of interest' (Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy 9.7¹). This may mean that certain arrangements of ministry are not appropriate for you. It is important to recognise any potential imbalance of power; due to seniority, oversight, or other influence and to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure independent accountability.
- 2.4. The Safeguarding implications of ministry in the same place as your partner need to be considered, and you should seek and follow the advice of the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer.
- 2.5. You must pay due regard to all Safeguarding guidance and practice issued by the Church of England. In particular, you should note the *Key Roles and Responsibilities of Church Office Holders and Bodies Practice Guidance* (October 2017)² which states that the Parish Safeguarding Officer 'should not be the incumbent or his or her partner' (p. 23).

3. Pastoral Care of Clergy Partnered with Clergy (CPC)

- 3.1. Before accepting any new roles, Clergy Partnered with Clergy are encouraged to seek the support of another clergy couple for informal support regarding the challenges that they might face. Please contact the Director of Mission and Ministry Support or the Dean of Women's Ministry should you require a referral to a clergy couple.

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/clergy-guidelines-2015.pdf>

² <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/roles-and-responsibilities-practice-guidance.pdf>

- 3.2. The Adviser for Clergy Wellbeing is available to support you both in navigating the unique challenges that can arise from being clergy partnered with clergy. They can provide confidential guidance on managing the balance between personal and professional life and addressing any emotional or relational concerns. This includes resources for maintaining healthy boundaries, improving communication, and supporting each other's vocational and personal growth. You are encouraged to reach out for tailored support to help you both flourish in your ministry and personal life.

4. Deployment of Clergy Partnered with Clergy

- 4.1. The Diocese of Bristol does not have specific expectations about the types of roles each of you should take. Applicants to posts will be considered in their own right, independent of your partner's role with recruitment being in line with Safer Recruitment guidance
- 4.2. Full-time parochial ministry can be demanding on any clergy household. We encourage you to establish sustainable ministry patterns and boundaries that work for your household. Be sure to keep your Church Wardens and Area Dean informed and that they are aware of and supportive of your arrangements.
- 4.3. When one partner is appointed to a post, the Archdeacon will reach out to the other partner to discuss possibilities for ministry within the Diocese. All roles will normally be advertised, and we follow Safer Recruitment guidelines. While we cannot guarantee a post for both partners, we will support you in finding the best opportunities.

- 4.4. If no suitable role emerges for one partner, the Bishop may offer them Permission to Officiate (PTO). The partner without an appointment can approach the Bishop's Chaplain or the Archdeacon to discuss potential SSM roles (on a short- or long-term basis).
- 4.5. The Diocese of Bristol is committed to supporting CPC couples whose ministries span diocesan boundaries. If that is the case for you, The Director of Mission and Ministry Support can advise on who to contact in the Diocese of Bristol to answer particular questions and enable the appropriate arrangements.
- 4.6. During key times of change, and especially when one of you is appointed to a role outside the Diocese, we would expect you to be in touch with the appropriate Archdeacon in order to discuss arrangements for the transition and for the remaining partner's ministry in the Diocese.

5. Remuneration and Housing

- 5.1. If both partners are in stipendiary roles, you will each be offered a stipend at the diocesan rate.
- 5.2. Only one parsonage house or equivalent will normally be offered per couple. When both partners hold roles that usually provide housing, the decision on which house to use will consider the following:
 - 5.2.1. If only one of the roles is parochial, you will typically live in the parochial house.
 - 5.2.2. The availability and condition of housing, the needs of the CPC household, and the needs of the parish(es).

- 5.2.3. You will be fully involved in these discussions, but the final decision will rest with the Archdeacon.
- 5.3. If both partners hold parochial roles, the Archdeacon will work with you and the parishes to ensure that workable arrangements are in place, this will include consideration of a working space.
- 5.4. Travel expenses
 - 5.4.1. Clergy living within their benefice should view this as a place of work for the purposes of expenses and should therefore claim travel expenses in accordance with Parochial Expenses of the Clergy.
 - 5.4.2. Clergy who live outside their benefice need to treat their home as home and not as a place of work. Travel expenses are not normally paid between home and a place of work because this would not be allowable for tax relief. If the parsonage house is a considerable distance from the place of work, then a (taxable) travel allowance may be payable, by agreement with HR and the Archdeacon.

6. Job Sharing and Part Time working.

- 6.1. The Diocese has guidelines for flexible and part-time working, and we encourage you to review them.
- 6.2. Job sharing is an option the Diocese is open to exploring with you.
- 6.3. Whilst the incumbency of a benefice cannot by law be shared, it may be possible for an effective job-sharing CPC to take a parish role in

which one partner is the (part-time) incumbent and another is the (part-time) associate. Safer Recruitment will need to be followed for each appointment.

- 6.4. There is no guarantee that it will be possible for both of you to serve in the same parish. Such appointments are subject to a number of complex factors considered on a case-by-case basis.

7. Parenting and Parental Leave

- 7.1. There is no expectation on how a family with two ordained parents will manage childcare responsibilities.
- 7.2. The Diocese of Bristol is committed to offering all new parents Shared Parental Leave. You will each need to communicate your leave arrangements to the Diocesan HR department, as well as to Church Wardens and your Area Dean.
- 7.3. The Diocesan Maternity and Adoption Policy for Clergy and related policies about Parental Leave offer support to parents.

8. CPC in Formation: Selection and training

- 8.1. The Church of England does not discern joint vocations to ministry.
- 8.2. We value both of your individual vocations equally, and this will be reflected in your discernment, training, and curacy processes.

- 8.3. You should be aware that your individual formational needs may differ, and we encourage you to be open to how these differences might be addressed.
- 8.4. The Mission and Ministry Support Team will listen carefully to suggestions made by the couple as to how their vocations and ministries can best be enabled to flourish.
- 8.5. Support for CPC during formation is available separately from the formational process. As CPC in formation, you are encouraged to give realistic attention to the ways in which you will minister in the future and to think about particular needs and challenges that will come as a result of being CPC. In particular, challenges to the marriage or partnership should be recognised and given significant attention outside of the formal processes.
- 8.6. Once a candidate has been recommended for training, a conversation with an Archdeacon or the Director of Mission and Ministry Support will be arranged. This conversation is to set out what is in this protocol, but also to listen deeply and prayerfully about each of your callings and to support you as a couple.
- 8.7. Where both partners of a CPC are in full time training and looking to receive maintenance payments, one partner should apply for family maintenance and the other should apply for personal allowance and vacation allowances or travel payments. All of this is done through the Mission and Ministry Support Team.
- 8.8. When one partner is ordained and the other is in training, the expectation would be that the ordinand would not normally be on

placement at the church served by their partner. **No ordinand should be supervised by their partner on placement.**

- 8.9. When one partner is ordained and the other is in full time training, financial support will be available in accordance with the normal arrangements in place. The Diocesan Director of Ordinands will be able to advise on this.
- 8.10. If an ordinand moves into the Diocese to train for ministry, and their partner enters the discernment process during that training, then the Diocese of Bristol will support that vocational discernment. However, it will normally be the case that the sponsoring diocese for the partner already in training would also sponsor the partner beginning discernment.
- 8.11. If you wish to align your curacy timelines, you may delay ordination by up to two years (after this you would need to go to a candidate's panel). However, we do not normally offer maintenance payments for candidates who choose this delay.

9. CPC in Formation: Curacy

- 9.1. In a relatively small Diocese such as Bristol there is a limit to how much flexibility there is around finding suitable curacies. We encourage you to have early discussions with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands and/or the Adviser for Curacy about what you need to make a curacy work, and to identify areas of flexibility and compromise. This conversation should be early in the penultimate year of training (which may also be the first year of training).

- 9.2. As a matter of policy, curacies are not arranged in the benefice where your partner serves, and **no curate should be supervised by their partner.**
- 9.3. The Diocese will make best efforts to place CPC curates in a curacy that is accessible given their partner's location.
- 9.4. The primary considerations for curacies are your formational needs and the appropriateness of the training incumbent.
- 9.5. Where it is not possible to find you a curacy sufficiently close to your partner's location, then the Diocese will support clergy working across diocesan borders. The DDO or Adviser for Curacy will initiate conversations with neighbouring dioceses prior to formal release being given.
- 9.6. Learning Agreements between curates and training incumbents should reflect the particular practical needs of a CPC.

10. Separation

- 10.1. Due to the public nature of ordained ministry, the Bishop will take an interest in all clergy whose marriage or relationship breaks down. CPCs should be treated as any other clergy relationship in this regard.
- 10.2. Pastoral support will be provided to both parties and the future of their ministries considered.
- 10.3. Practical matters such as housing will be considered based on the circumstances and needs of all family members.

- 10.4. Under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 (section 30(1)(b)) the respondent to a divorce petition is automatically liable to sanction on certain grounds. While this is no longer an accurate reflection of civil law relating to divorce, the Bishop will normally consider the conduct of both CPC partners in any disciplinary matter arising from the breakdown of a relationship.

[This clause will lapse and be replaced by 10.5 when the Clergy Discipline Measure is no longer in force]

- 10.5. Under the Clergy Conduct Measure (2025) (section 56 (1)), when in respect of the marriage of a clergy person, a divorce order is made final or a judicial separation order is made, clergy are required to inform the Bishop of Bristol within 28 days. For CPC, whose marriage is ending, both should inform the Bishop within this timeframe.

- 10.6. CPC who are partnered by a Civil Partnership which is ending, should inform the Bishop of the ending of that Partnership within 28 days of either a dissolution order being made final or a judicial separation order being made.

Note: While this protocol is specifically for clergy partnered with clergy, appointing a non-ordained spouse or partner to an employed or voluntary post in the same parish should be approached carefully. This includes, but is not limited to, roles such as Licensed Lay Minister, Church Warden, treasurer, foundation governor, worship leader, and other key church positions. It is important to ensure there is no conflict of interest, safeguarding concern, or inappropriate influence in any of these appointments. You should always consult with Church Wardens, the PCC, your Area Dean, and other relevant church leaders to ensure that these roles are managed transparently and in a way that maintains the integrity of both the ministry and the wider church community.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What should we do if one partner is offered a post in the Diocese, but the other is not?

If one partner is appointed to a role in the Diocese, we will make every effort to explore suitable opportunities for the other partner. If no role is available, the partner without an appointment may be offered Permission to Officiate (PTO) in the Diocese or be supported in finding a short- or long-term role through discussions with the Archdeacon.

Can both partners serve in the same parish?

While it may be possible for both of you to serve in the same parish, this will be approached with caution. Safer Recruitment practices will always be followed. The Archdeacon and the Director of Mission and Ministry Support will examine with you the potential for conflicts of interest, safeguarding concerns, and the impact on both your home life, your ministry, and the life of the parish. Most importantly we will be looking to see that you are supported to establish clear boundaries and ensure that neither partner holds undue influence over the other, and that each partner has an independent pathway for any safeguarding concerns that may arise. It is important to discuss these matters thoroughly before committing to roles within the same parish.

How will the Diocese support us if we are in different dioceses?

The Diocese of Bristol is committed to supporting clergy partnered with clergy across diocesan boundaries. If one of you is serving in a different Diocese, we can connect you with the appropriate contacts and help coordinate arrangements to ensure both of you are supported. We will work with

colleagues in the different diocese to ensure that our care for you both is joined up over diocesan boundaries.

What happens if our relationship changes or we face difficulties in our ministry together?

The Diocese provides pastoral support to all clergy and if your relationship encounters difficulties or changes, we will ensure that both partners receive the necessary care. If you find it challenging to balance your ministry and relationship, the Adviser for Clergy Wellbeing is available to offer confidential support. Additionally, you are encouraged to seek the guidance of another Clergy Couple or a mentor to navigate any personal or professional challenges.

Is there flexibility in our ministry roles if one of us has young children or caregiving responsibilities?

There is no expectation for you to follow a specific model of ministry when managing childcare or caregiving responsibilities. The Diocese of Bristol is committed to offering flexibility through shared parental leave and other support measures. If you need to discuss adjustments to your roles, you are encouraged to speak with your Archdeacon or your Area Dean to ensure your needs are met in a way that supports both your personal and professional life.