

Church of England Priest Resigns to Marry Same-Sex Partner

A Church of England clergyman has resigned from his post as parish priest in order to “marry” his same-sex partner.

Rev Clive Larsen, 60, of the Diocese of Manchester, resigned on Friday to avoid facing disciplinary action. His decision follows four other clergy who defied the church’s teaching and “married” their same-sex partners, but kept their licenses.

A “blessing” for his upcoming “marriage” to his partner, known only as “John,” took place on Saturday at St. Agnes Church in North Reddish, Stockport—the church that he had up until then officiated in.

‘Inclusive Church’

St. Agnes church describes itself on its website as an “inclusive and evolutionary space,” listing LGBT “Christian” pressure groups Changing Attitudes and Inclusive Church as some of its “guiding principles.”

The website also advertises crystal bowl healing and a shamanic drumming circle on its events page.

‘Blessing’ Service

A notice on the church’s website describing the ceremony stated: “A ceremony of commitment and blessing ... Clive will be resigning his post in the church from the day before.”

The service was conducted by Rev. Colin Coward, who is the founder of Changing Attitudes.

According to Peter Ould, writing on the Psephizo blog, the

service was also attended by trustees of Changing Attitudes.

It included a liturgy that was originally designed for civil partnerships, which said: "God the giver of life, God the bearer of pain, God the maker of love, bless, preserve and keep you."

Commenting on Larsen's resignation, Christian Concern's Chief Executive Andrea Williams said:

"Clive Larsen has realized that his position is untenable within the Church of England. Others such as Andrew Cain, Simon Butler and Jeremy Pemberton who continue to hold official high profile and responsibilities should follow his lead and resign."

Not Disciplined Previously

Colin Coward said that Clive Larsen had originally had intended to "marry" his partner whilst still a priest and then resign afterwards. But a stark warning was issued by the Bishop of Manchester David Walker, through an archdeacon, that he would face disciplinary action if he did so.

Larsen had previously left a post elsewhere after his marriage to his wife ended when he identified as homosexual. He has two daughters from this marriage.

He has lived with his current same-sex partner in the rectory for seven or eight years, and has not faced discipline for doing so.

Coward accused the CofE of "double standards" for this failure.

'Political Dimension'

In his blog post discussing the incident, Peter Ould highlights that although 'blessing services' for same-sex couples are frequently held throughout the Church of England,

this particular case “is significant because of the high profile people involved.”

In light of the fact that the ceremony was conducted by Changing Attitudes founder Colin Coward and other trustees, the service “had a political dimension to it.”

He writes:

“The particular political dynamics of this service mean that any failure by these two members of the House of Bishops to respond appropriately and in line with the official position of the Church of England and the pastoral guidance issued by the House of Bishops cannot be interpreted as anything but a deliberate decision to allow ‘facts on the ground’ to overrule due process and order.

“A failure by the Bishops of Manchester and Salisbury to deal robustly with this apparently illegal service, which was deliberately publicized by the participants as a challenge to the Bishops’ authority, would torpedo the good efforts of the Shared Conversations process in trying to build trust and confidence that the Church of England will handle this issue fairly as it moves forward in dealing with it.”

‘Shared Conversations’ a Divisive Agenda

The “shared conversations” took place earlier this month during the Church of England’s General Synod in York, and were focused around the topic of human sexuality.

Andrea Williams, a General Synod member, issued a joint statement with Wilberforce Director Dr. Joe Boot after the Synod gathering.

Andrea and Joe stated that the “shared conversations” process was in fact “an ill-conceived, pluralistic exercise that falsely placed LGBTI activism on a level playing field with the plain teaching of Scripture and the historic teaching of

the church which the bishops swore to uphold—as such the “listening” agenda itself was divisive, with the sole aim of softening opposition to revisionism and change.”

Andrea Williams added:

“I have participated in the shared conversations, but sadly I am left with little confidence that this process can prevent a sharp division. One vocal group in synod call what is sin, holiness. Of course, we can and we must relate to one another in our shared humanity, but we can’t stay together if the church wants to bless what is not holy.”

‘Lack of Confidence’

A group of 32 Synod members, including Andrea Williams, sent a letter to the College of Bishops on July 17 expressing a “a lack of confidence” in the “shared conversations.”

It stated:

“Since the beginning of the regional conversations, people from all traditions in the church have bemoaned the lack of serious engagement with the Scriptures. Sadly, despite promises to correct this matter, these concerns remain at the end of the process. We hope that the Bishops will ensure that our varied experience does not outweigh the uniting power of a commitment to truth and holiness as described in God’s Word.

We, the undersigned members of the General Synod, wish to express our lack of confidence in the process of the Shared Conversations. Whatever their stated purposes, the outcome has not led to a greater confidence that the Church will be guided by the authoritative voice of the Scriptures, and its decisive shaping of traditional Anglican teaching, in any forthcoming discussions.”