

NORTH WESTMORLAND BENEFICE

Equal Opportunities Policy

Introduction and statement of intent

Equity of opportunity, and equitable sharing in the resources of creation, are fundamental Christian beliefs that are at the heart of our work in the North Westmorland Benefice. We believe that God created every human being, without exception, in His image. As a result, everyone is cherished. Everyone is equally entitled to the fulness of life promised by Jesus, who showed God's love to all (including those who, in his day, were marginalised).

We are therefore committed to valuing all God's children in an inclusive church, which treats everyone with dignity, respect and fairness. We value the distinctive contributions of the diverse cultures and backgrounds in our churches and wider community. As a benefice, we are committed to social justice and resolutely oppose discrimination on any ground within our church, or in wider society. We ensure that no-one is discriminated against, or otherwise disadvantaged by unjustifiable conditions or requirements in relation to recruitment; training; consideration for promotion; treatment in employment or voluntary work; access to membership of our councils, committees, congregations or other groups; or access to the benefits, facilities and services we provide.

We strive towards a society which reflects the Kingdom of God, in which all are liberated from artificial, human-made barriers to their God-given entitlement to fulness of life.

A. Recruitment for paid and volunteer roles

We seek to recruit an appropriate mix of talent, skills and potential to each of our roles. We welcome applications from a wide range of candidates. We select candidates for interview based on their skills, qualifications, experience and commitment to our Christian values.¹

Safeguarding is of paramount importance to us. We always observe principles of Safer Recruitment, including:

- Complying with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Code of Practice.
- Requesting DBS certificate for roles involving working with young or vulnerable people.
- Taking up references confirming suitability to work in roles with young or vulnerable people.

¹ As an organisation seeking to deliver services within a Christian context, some of our roles carry a 'genuine occupational requirement' for the post-holder to be a Christian. Such roles include: senior leadership or management in our organisation; teaching or promoting the Christian faith; evangelism; leading or participating in worship, prayer or bible-study.

B. Discrimination

For the purposes of this policy, we understand that discrimination includes (but is not necessarily limited to) less favourable treatment towards anyone on the basis of age, skin colour, race, ethnic origin, nationality, ability² or body size, neuro-diversity, mental health, employment status, formal education or income, gender, housing status, religion or belief, sexual orientation,³ pregnancy or maternity/paternity arrangements, marital or relationship status, or criminal convictions.⁴

Discrimination can occur in a range of ways:

- **Direct Discrimination**, where one person treats another less favourably because of a particular characteristic;
- **Indirect Discrimination**, in which a criterion or practice is introduced which applies to all, but is discriminatory to one or more people because of their individual characteristics;
- **Harassment**, where a person's conduct related to the characteristics of another violates the dignity or wellbeing of that other person, or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment in relation to them;
- **Victimisation**, where a person is treated less favourably because they have asserted their own rights, or the rights of another person.

We undertake to respond openly, fairly and without prejudice to all who wish to take up the opportunities we have to offer as an employer, or as a service provider.

In making decisions and carrying out our work and worship, we are vigilant in ensuring that our environments are free from discrimination. We do not tolerate any form of discrimination.

If discrimination is encountered, we will proceed as follows:

- Where an allegation of discrimination is made against a holder of the Bishop's Licence or Permission to Officiate, the matter will be referred to the Archdeacon.
- Where an allegation of discrimination is made against an employee of the church, the matter will be dealt with in accordance with Diocesan HR policies.
- Where an allegation of discrimination is made against a member of our congregation in connection with their work for, or attendance at, our churches, the matter will be dealt with by the principal officiating minister, in consultation with the churchwardens and PCC of the relevant parish.

We will take care to ensure that all complaints are properly and impartially investigated, and appropriate action taken, in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

² We care for a number of ancient buildings. Although we take all possible, legally allowed, steps to alter or remove features of our churches to make them accessible for people with a disability, some barriers are impossible to overcome.

³ Currently, UK law (Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013) does not allow the Church of England to offer services of marriage to same sex couples. Equally, **standalone** services of blessing for same sex couples are not currently permitted under Canon Law.

⁴ To the extent these can be safely accommodated without comprising our commitment to safeguarding. See our Policy on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders.



We will ensure that no-one is penalised for raising a legitimate complaint or grievance through appropriate channels.

All complaints of discrimination should be raised in the first instance with the principal officiating minister, Revd Stephen Tudway, who will ensure that the complaint is properly directed. If the complaint concerns the principal officiating minister, it should be raised with the Archdeacon.

C. Parish life, including public worship

Our ministry works tirelessly to promote respect for other people and fair treatment for all.

We use inclusive language and images in our conversations, worship, literature and publicity. We recognise and value the aesthetic and traditional elements of worship, during which more ancient forms of language are sometimes used (including, especially, the use of the Book of Common Prayer or certain translations of the Bible). However, we are committed to placing the use of these historical language forms in context (for example, explaining that the terms 'Men' or 'Mankind' were traditionally and historically used to refer to all 'humankind').

We challenge discriminatory attitudes and actions of members of our congregations and service user groups and take steps to bring them to an end.

D. Invitational worship: corporate and collective

Conscious that our public worship is often attended by people who are unfamiliar with Christian worship generally, or with the Church of England in particular, we strive to ensure that it is invitational and accessible.

Our worship in church will normally be 'corporate' in the sense that it assumes that everyone present has chosen to be so, and shares common beliefs about the content (or is able to make a choice for themselves as to the extent of their participation).

Our worship in other contexts, for example in civic contexts, in schools, or when schools visit us in church, will be 'collective' in nature. Whilst distinctively Christian in character, this worship caters to a conscious gathering of people with a range of different religious and non-religious beliefs. We aim to deliver collective worship in which everyone can take part with integrity. No-one is compelled to participate in or assent to anything with which they do not fully agree.

E. Provision of services

This section refers to the whole range of services which a church might offer, beyond public worship, including (but not limited to): activities for children or the elderly; after-school clubs and youth groups; pastoral and bereavement support; coffee mornings and lunch clubs; foodbanks; fetes, shows, concerts and other community events.



We are committed to providing services on a fair and equitable basis, without discrimination, to cater to the individual needs of the service users, taking into account the individual characteristics of those who seek or might be expected to access them.

F. Evaluation and monitoring

We are committed to reviewing this policy and improving our practice in the light of information and experience.

APPENDIX: The Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together

As a community of Christians we are held together in the love of Christ. Our many differences are gifts that build us up in trust and mutual affection, but can also mar the image of Christ that we are called to reflect through our lives together. We recognise that many groups have not experienced the unconditional love of Christ and we commit to observing the Church of England's *Pastoral Principles for Living Well Together* as a means of admitting and addressing this reality. We note that the Principles have been judicially commended as a means of navigating disagreement. Reference should be made to the full document, or to the helpful 6-card pack, but in summary:

1. We **acknowledge prejudice** in ourselves and others
2. We **speak into silence**, being a place of welcome rather than ignoring difference
3. We **address ignorance**, seeking to understand different perspectives
4. We **cast out fear**, being open about our own views and open and respectful to other views
5. We **admit hypocrisy** and reject intrusive questioning in favour of attentive listening
6. We **pay attention to power**, understanding that inequalities of every kind have led to past abuse

Engagement with the principles is summarised by the acronym 'LOVE', in that we:

- L Listen attentively and openly
- O Open our hearts and minds without judgment
- V Value everyone's vulnerability and perspective
- E Express concern and empathy

