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|  | **Bishops’ Adviser for Women’s Ministry** |
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**Role Description**

The principal duties of the Bishops’ Adviser for Women’s Ministry (BAWM) will include:

* Promoting and championing licensed women’s ministries in the Diocese
* To be an advocate for the full inclusion, flourishing and equality of ordained women in every part of church life.
* To enable and help women to be all that they can be (*this is in the light of all kinds of expectations as to who women in ministry should be)*
* Reviewing our Diocesan policies so that they demonstrate best practice around issues which particularly affect licensed lay and ordained women and would include family friendly policies such as maternity/parental leave and a menopause policy
* To be a listening ear to and a voice for women who experience the effects of both conscious and unconscious bias in the church with a particular concern to bring to light those aspects of bias which are often hidden
* Appointing 2 other voluntary advisers to work in the Archdeaconries where the postholder is not based
* To work with others for a Diocese in which women flourish especially with the Archbishop’s Adviser for Pastoral Care
* To advise the Bishops of the Diocese and their ministry officers as to the best practice for women engaged in vocational discernment, formation and deployment for all ministries in the Church
* Being a link between the national church and the Diocese of York via NADAWM
* Encouraging formal and informal networking and mentoring opportunities
* Signposting individuals in need to sources of pastoral support
* Link with the comms team for website material (events and good practice)
* Specialist training events like Hilda’s heirs
* Manage a small budget for travel and resources

*A wider rationale for the role is found as an appendix*

**Reporting and accountability**

**Line- Management:** Diocesan Chaplain when appointed in due course and Archbishop’s Chaplain in the meanwhile and through them to the YDLT

**Key Relationships:**

* Bishop of Hull as a woman Bishop
* Bishop of Whitby as the Bishop as champion for diversity
* Director of Mission and Ministry
* Archbishop’s Adviser for Pastoral Care

**Remuneration and time commitment:** The post is voluntary and the time commitment would be between the equivalent of 7.5% (half a day) to 15% (whole day) of working time.

**Budget:** £5000 to cover travel expenses and resources.

**Appendix: Rationale for this post**

**Introduction**

Radical and intentional inclusion is not simply a justice issue, but can act as ‘a wellspring of creativity’ which has the potential to inspire and revitalise church culture. The history of women’s ministry is one that throws into sharp contrast the many good things that women have brought to the Church of England and a culture which has at times been reluctant to encourage their gifts. There is a long history of women’s social, theological and ministerial involvement with the Church of England. One could, for example, think of Josephine Butler, a clergy wife, who campaigned against the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s; Mary Astell, who with the encouragement of Archbishop Sancroft advocated in 1694 for the creation of institutions offering higher education to women; or of the Victorian women sent into the mission field by CMS.[[1]](#footnote-1) But alongside these stories goes acknowledgement of resistance to women’s vocations to serve the church. The 1897 creation of parochial church councils, for example, explicitly refused membership to women (only overturned in 1919 as a result of the 1918 Parliamentary Reform Act). Debates about the ordination of women that began in 1913 eventually led to the 1993 Act of Synod which at the same time as making women’s ordained ministry possible, legitimised their exclusion (a moment described by Monica Furlong as concentrating all attention on ‘the rage of the defeated opposition’).[[2]](#footnote-2) No wonder that some recent stories have identified the ‘systemic disablement sustained by many women in their ministry.’[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Theological underpinning**

The Bible paints a varied picture of women’s relationships with faith and with religious leadership. In the Old Testament, women are shown operating in positions of authority (Deborah), offering prophetic ministries (Hannah) and as courageous strategists (Esther). But there are also terrible stories of seemingly legitimised oppression, violence and rejection, from the rape of Tamar and the casting out of Hagar, to the sacrifice by Jephthah of his own daughter.[[4]](#footnote-4) Jesus of course refused to accept the hierarchical and political expectations of his own time, setting God’s kingdom in the here and now rather than in some longed-for future and challenging his followers – male and female - to be agents of change and bringers of good news. In his interactions with the woman suffering from haemorrhages, the Samaritan woman at the well and the woman who anointed him with precious ointment at the Last Supper, we see a man who showed respect and gentleness to those who might have been considered beneath his attention (although we might wish to ponder the fact that none of those women are named). Jesus praised the marginalised and the lowly, he challenged the values of the world and he created a community based upon love, faithfulness and shared power. Jesus’ incarnation is a sign of God’s active presence in the world; a signifier of inclusivity and liberation that values the body rather than rejecting it.

**Background**

When the Church of England ordained its first women priests in 1994, it was suggested that each diocese should have an advisor in women’s ministry to offer support and advocacy to those newly-ordained women. Across the ensuing twenty-nine years, the perceived value in having such a post has not gone away; NADAWM (the National Association for Diocesan Advisors in Women’s Ministry), for example, describes itself as a group which is ‘a resource to the Church…as we all work together to make the Church of England a place where women can flourish in their calling.’[[5]](#footnote-5) Until recently, the role of Dean of Women’s Ministry in the Diocese of York was held by Elaine Bielby and the majority of dioceses still have a DAWM or Dean of Women’s Ministry.

**Issues and concerns**

Whilst recognising the enormous contribution that lay and ordained women bring to ministry in this diocese and across the Church of England, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are still barriers to their full flourishing. Although one pressure point has been eased with the 2014 vote to allow women to be ordained to the episcopate, campaigning organisations such as WATCH (Women and the Church) point out that the continuing option for parishes to refuse the ministry of ordained women can make some feel like ‘second class priests’. There have been questions since Phillip North’s appointment to Blackburn about how a non-affirming Diocesan bishop can act as a source of unity within his diocese and concerns expressed that women might struggle to flourish under his oversight.[[6]](#footnote-6) Research has shown that although numbers of men and women entering theological training are now broadly comparable, women are often older and therefore have less opportunity to reach senior positions, they can find themselves encouraged into SSM posts and they have fewer role models to inspire them. WATCH pointed out in 2021 that the Diocese of York had a below-average proportion of female stipendiary clergy and that there was nationally a ‘disproportionately higher number of male than female clergy in both stipendiary and senior roles.’[[7]](#footnote-7) It can be especially challenging for women from conservative Evangelical churches to hear and respond to a priestly vocation. Women of global majority heritage can feel particularly strongly that the Church of England does not want them in leadership positions – they are neither white nor male – and women still bear the bigger burden of caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents, making full-time ministry difficult. As NADAWM has identified, factors such as race, sexuality, class, poverty, age and disability can ‘compound barriers to women exercising their ministry.’[[8]](#footnote-8) It is not a level playing field. As the Transformations group suggested:

*‘There are significant differences between the ways in which women and men exercise ordained ministry…*

*Often this is not the result of individual choice….*

*There are cultural and institutional assumptions that work against the full integration of women clergy ….*

*Until these issues are addressed, the Church cannot embrace the breadth of gifts and experience offered by its ordained ministers.’[[9]](#footnote-9)*

**Becoming the Church God wishes us to be**

As part of our desire to be a Diocese committed to radical inclusion and welcome, where we reach people we currently don’t and grow missionary disciples, we affirm the many good things that women’s various ministries have given to us. We recognise that their differing experiences, their understandings and their individual callings by God to serve Christ in ordained or lay vocations continue to be a blessing to us and to others. At the same time, we accept that along with other groups, women in ministry have experienced marginalisation or systemic barriers that can inhibit their full flourishing.

1. Sean Gill gives a fascinating history in *Women and the Church of England: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Monica Furlong, *Act of Synod – Act of Folly?* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ali Green, *A Priesthood of Both Sexes: Paying attention to difference* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Who are NADAWM? | National Association of Diocesan Advisers in Women's Ministry](https://www.nadawm.org/who-are-nadawm/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [The Nomination of The Rt Rev'd Philip North as the next diocesan Bishop of Blackburn - Women and the Church](https://womenandthechurch.org/news/the-nomination-of-the-rt-revd-philip-north-as-the-next-diocesan-bishop-of-blackburn/) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [A Report on the developments in Women's Ministry 2020 - Press Release - Women and the Church](https://womenandthechurch.org/news/a-report-on-the-developments-in-womens-ministry-2020-press-release/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Who are NADAWM? | National Association of Diocesan Advisers in Women's Ministry](https://www.nadawm.org/who-are-nadawm/) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Transformations Presentation to the College of Bishops, September 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)