

Sherbornes with Pamber Resolution April 2026

Statement of Theological Conviction

The PCC of the Parish of Sherbornes with Pamber holds firmly to the view that the Bible contains and explains everything necessary for personal salvation and guidance for living life as a follower of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3 v 16 – 17, Article 6 of the 39 Articles of Religion). We believe that the Canon of Scripture is divinely inspired, authoritative, complete and without error or contradiction.

We also understand that the texts of Scripture were written at a particular time and place and into a particular context. We must therefore work hard, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and in the light of the full revelation of God's plan for salvation, to understand how they apply to our own context. Recognising that we are always learning and growing in our understanding as we mature in our Christian lives, we depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us as we seek to discern God's will, revealed in his Word, through study and prayer.

We recognise that faithful Christians—within the Church of England, across the wider communion and all denominations—have reached differing conclusions on the role of men and women within the leadership structures of the church. We do not doubt the sincerity of those convictions, nor do we presume superiority.

We believe that the Bible teaches clearly that women and men are created as equals, to bear the image of God over the whole of creation (Genesis 1 v 27 – 28). The fall of human beings into sin has distorted this perfect design (Genesis 3 v 16), and its restoration can only be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3 v 26 – 29).

In the New Testament, women are honoured as co-workers in the gospel. For example:

- Women are the first to proclaim the Good News that Christ has risen (Matthew 28 v 1 – 10, Mark 16 v 1 – 8, Luke 24 v 1 – 12, John 20 v 1 – 18)
- Women pray and prophesy in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11 v 5), indicating real spiritual authority in speech and service.
- Priscilla, alongside Aquila, instructs Apollos “more accurately in the way of God” (Acts 18 v 26), a striking example of doctrinal formation.
- Phoebe is commended as a Deacon of the church at Cenchreae and a patron/supporter (Romans 16 v 1–2).

- Women labour side-by-side with Paul in gospel work (Philippians 4 v 2–3) and are named among his fellow workers (Romans 16).

We do not read these texts as marginal. They are central to the Church’s understanding that the Spirit distributes gifts to women and men alike (Acts 2 v 17) for the building up of Christ’s body.

At the same time, we understand Scripture to teach a pattern of complementarity between men and women that is built into the fabric of creation (Genesis 2 v 8 – 25), and reflected in God’s good design for families and households (Ephesians 5 v 21 – 33).

As a PCC and wider church community, we do not all hold the same view on how this complementarity should be applied in the church. There are some who see no restrictions on the roles that should be open to women in our context today. There are others who have reached the conclusion that the headship roles of bishop and priest/presbyter should be reserved for qualified men, serving under the headship of Christ.

The rationale for this second understanding is rooted in the church’s identity as the “household of God” (Ephesians 2 v 19) and shaped by a particular understanding of New Testament texts including:

- 1 Corinthians 11 v 2 – 16 and its complex discussion of headship.
- 1 Corinthians 14 v 33–35—whatever its precise application—also indicates that there are forms of speech and adjudication in the assembly tied to order and authority.
- 1 Timothy 2 v 11–15 speaks of not permitting a woman “to teach or to exercise authority over a man,” and Paul grounds his instruction in creation order rather than local custom.
- 1 Timothy 3 v 1–7 and Titus 1 v 5–9 describe the overseer/elder office in male terms and connect it directly to authoritative teaching and governance.

We are aware of the detailed scholarly discussions around these passages (including the range of proposed meanings of “head”, “exercise authority,” the local situation in Ephesus, and the precise scope of “silence” in Corinth). These discussions have not been dismissed but have been carefully considered. Those who hold the complementarian view remain persuaded that the simplest, most coherent reading—especially given Paul’s appeal to creation and the consistent association of elder/overseer authority with doctrinal guardianship—is that

Scripture reserves the governing pastoral office in the church (and, by extension, the episcopal office as its historic development and culmination) to qualified men.

This reservation has nothing to do with gifting, competence, intelligence or holiness. Both Scripture and experience display many examples of women whose Christian maturity and ministry should be deeply esteemed. Rather, it concerns an understanding of Scripture's teaching about the Church's ordering of the office that bears governing responsibility, and the representative nature of that office, understanding the New Testament to distinguish between:

- Spirit-empowered ministry exercised widely across the body (prayer, prophecy, evangelism, teaching in various contexts, patronage, hospitality, mission), and
- the settled, recognised office of responsibility and doctrinal guardianship in the congregation (elder/overseer), which is presented as male.

This issue can so easily become a pretext for harm, therefore we want to state plainly what we are all united in rejecting. We reject any notion that women are spiritually inferior, less gifted, less rational, or less called. We reject sexism, dismissiveness, and the silencing of women's wisdom and voice. We also reject the idea that limiting one office necessarily limits the range or significance of women's ministry. Scripture itself honours women as prophetic voices, patrons, teachers, evangelists, and co-workers.

If our position is to reflect Christ, it must be marked by humility, repentance, and practical honour. That means we will actively cultivate and celebrate women's ministry among us, including roles that involve leading and teaching.

Our recent consultation process has reflected a diversity of views on this matter. It has also reflected a deep sense of unity in our resolve to remain committed to Christ and his Word, as well as to our mutual flourishing as we seek to grow in our knowledge, love and service. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we are seeking to develop a healthy culture where differing views can be discussed openly and with mutual respect. We are united in Christ by his death and resurrection, committed to his glorious gospel and to one another as we serve him, recognising that the individual gifts he has bestowed on us enable us to work together to grow his kingdom in the Parish of the Sherbornes with Pamber and beyond.

To help everyone to feel welcomed, included, and enabled to flourish and grow as part of our church family we would like to reaffirm the resolution that is currently in place as follows:

This PCC requests, on the grounds of theological conviction, and for the sake of unity within our church community, that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the House of Bishops Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests.

Specifically we would like to make the following requests and commitments:

Requests

- *That a male bishop carries out episcopal ministry within our parish. Specifically to include the supervision of our Rector, licensing of clergy and confirmations.*
- *That we are able to seek only male applicants for the role of Rector of the parish.*

Commitments

- *Encouraging and supporting everyone in our church community to discern their gifting and calling to serve God in church life.*
- *Offering opportunities for training in the use of gifts to everyone.*
- *Providing opportunities for exercising gifts in all areas of church life – including in roles that involve preaching, teaching and leadership – to all who have undertaken the appropriate training and who display biblical character requirements.*
- *Continuing to explore our theological understanding in this area and reviewing our status as a resolution parish accordingly.*
- *Praying for and encouraging all our bishops and clergy across our diocese and the Church of England.*

Sherbornes with Pamber Parochial Church Council April 2026