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### COMMON APPLICATION FORM

By David Phillips

Clergy applying for posts or laity acting as Parish Reps may well have encountered the Church of England's Common Application Form. A revised version has been issued and there are a couple of notable omissions.

The first is that in early drafts a question was proposed for candidates to state that they comply with the Bishops guidelines "Issues in Human Sexuality". What they were trying to avoid was some clergy being asked about their sexuality whilst others are not. This question has not been included but more importantly we know that parish reps are being discouraged or prevented from asking questions about sexuality. Given that clergy can now be in Civil Partnerships and some Bishops seem unwilling to ask clergy if they abide by the guidelines this is a serious problem. It is essential to be sure that clergy are modelling Biblical standards in their own lives, that is a requirement not only of Scripture but also of our Canons and Ordination services. This is a clear instance where parish reps must obey the Lord whatever an Archdeacon or Bishop may say to them. One way around the problem is to ask someone to explain their own view or teaching on sexuality, but I have seen even this blocked by a Bishop who wanted the question to be about how the clergyman would help people to think through the issue, rather than what he himself believed or taught. We have come to a parlous state in the Church of England.

The other omission is any question about marital status. The problem here is that like the world we are encouraged to see a person's work as a clergyman and their home life as completely separate. There is also, it has to be admitted, the fear that some single clergy are discriminated against or that wives as well as the husband are being interviewed. The underlying problem is that we are just mimicking the world whereas one of the Biblical requirements, again echoed in our Ordinal, is that the minister must be able to govern his own household. Again, we know that referees will usually make mention of the home situation, but even here references are often not made available or only seen very briefly after a decision has been made.

Related to the questions about marriage are instances where men are appointed but parishes are not told that their wife is ordained. We know of at least one instance where a parish had passed resolution B, requiring their minister to be male, only to discover that his wife was ordained and was licensed to the parish too.

There is also the issue of clergy who are remarried. We know that not everyone takes the same view on this but where a PCC is of the view that the clergy should not be remarried they will have to spell this out in the profile and make sure they ask the question of all the candidates to be fair. In North America there have been Bishops who have been remarried 2 or 3 times, this can happen now with clergy in England too and so you can no longer make assumptions.

In the face of all this encroachment of the world into the Church we must continue to uphold Biblical standards. You must be forthright, stand your ground when people tell you not to say what you have said and ask questions. If you don't, then by default the freedom to do so will be lost. The current legislation on re-marriage of clergy allows discrimination if a significant number of people in a religious group hold that clergy should not be remarried. If everyone just accepts the situation that option will be lost in the Church of England.

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