



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

The Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford
Bishopscourt, Main Road, Margaretting, Ingatestone, Essex CM4 0HD
t: 01277 352001 bishopscourt@chelmsford.anglican.org

June 2019

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

You may have become aware of recent media coverage of a situation involving a child in a Church of England school in this diocese given support in the context of gender transition, and the resignation of a member of clergy, John Parker.

The story, which has been energetically promoted by a pressure group, centres on a vulnerable child going through an extremely difficult and sensitive period in their life. I am acutely aware that everything said in public on this matter has the potential to cause harm to this child. For this reason, I intend to limit this message to clarifying areas which would otherwise be damaging to ongoing pastoral relationships.

John Parker and I have always had a warm relationship, and I was sad to receive his letter of resignation. I certainly did not, as has been claimed, ask or imply that he should leave the Church of England on account of his views on the matter in question, or that he was not welcome. Apart from anything else, I could not have done so because until I received his letter of resignation, I had had no meeting or exchange of any sort with John since September 2018, nor did he ask for this.

Additionally, at no point either before, during or after the episode in question did John contact the Diocesan Education Department about his concerns, nor did he ever meet with, correspond or request a meeting with the Director of Education.

It is important to state these things not to further exacerbate the issue, but to reassure you, whatever your views on these issues, that the diocese of Chelmsford has not forced a priest from office. For myself, I continue to believe it is possible for us to live together with our disagreements on these issues and for these to be discussed openly.

Of course, we have boundaries, both in Canon Law and the law of the land, but within these we will continue to reflect and study together on the scriptures to find ways of living together in faith and love.

I support the actions taken by our Board of Education and the school in question. They have done right by the child. This does not mean that I or they do not understand and respect the concerns raised by John and others and we will continue to work with schools about their use of external training providers. This reflection had begun before the story became news.

However, this was never a hypothetical debate about gender transition: it was a real person in a real situation where real support had to be given.



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

www.chelmsford.anglican.org



The Church of England
in Essex and East London
Diocese of Chelmsford

The Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Chelmsford
Bishopscourt, Main Road, Margaretting, Ingatestone, Essex CM4 0HD
t: 01277 352001 bishopscourt@chelmsford.anglican.org

I hope and pray that you, my sisters and brothers in the Chelmsford diocese, will receive this letter in the spirit of reconciliation with which it is sent. The public debate of this issue and the false claims that have been made has done no good for the Church or the gospel. My door remains open for John to come and speak to me. I have been in touch to let him know this. But I am distraught that because of the way this story has played out a vulnerable child and their family are hurting more than they need to be. Please pray for this child. Please pray for this family. And please pray for the head teacher, the school and our own Diocesan Board of Education as they continue to provide care and support for a little one who is in need.

With the assurance of my prayers and with sorrow and penitence for any ways in which I have failed to pastorally hold together the rich diversity of people and traditions that make up our diocese of Chelmsford.

Yours sincerely

+ Stephen Chelmsford

The Rt. Rev'd. Stephen Cottrell
Bishop of Chelmsford



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

www.chelmsford.anglican.org