

Church Society & Michael and Kate Andreyev

Executive Summary

This is a short summary of a full briefing paper put together by Lee Gatiss for the use of Church Society (CS) Council and Church Society Trust (CST) Directors with regards to the situation at St. Peter's, Stapenhill in the Diocese of Derby which is a Church Society Trust patronage parish — and our relationship with the Vicar, the Revd Michael Andreyev, and his wife, Mrs Kate Andreyev.

1. St Peter's Church, Stapenhill

St. Peter's is a parish in the Diocese of Derby. Church Society Trust is the patron of the parish, with certain legal rights, during a vacancy, with regards to the appointment of a Vicar. The Revd Michael Andreyev moved there as a Non-Stipendiary Minister in 2002. He became Vicar (with Freehold) in 2006. He is married to Mrs Kate Andreyev.

During the course of Revd Andreyev's tenure as Vicar of the parish, the churchwardens report that:

- the electoral roll shrank from around 300, with a usual Sunday attendance of 200-250, to a roll of about 100 and an attendance of around 80;
- congregational giving went from around £58k to £26k;
- there were eventually no longer any staff;
- there was eventually virtually no youth or children's work;
- it appears that the majority of the church membership lost confidence in the Vicar.

Local clergy report that, over the same period, there were arguments within the church for several years. It appears from the reports that several of them considered Mr Andreyev as having an authoritarian and aggressively dictatorial leadership style, and as having the view that pastors ought to be unquestioned benevolent dictators.

2. Vote of No Confidence

In October 2017, about 50 people from St Peter's signed a letter to the Bishop of Derby (copying in the Archdeacon of Derby, the Bishop of Maidstone, and the Director of Church Society), expressing their "Vote of No Confidence" in the Revd Michael Andreyev. The reasons they gave for this were, in their words, his:

- Fundamental disagreements with successive youth leaders
- Bullying of the group leaders
- Aggressive and volatile behaviour
- Failure to trust
- Inability to work with people
- Presiding over a decline in all areas of ministry.

3. Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM)

Subsequent to this, in 2018, a complaint of bullying was made by one of the former Churchwardens against Revd Andreyev, under the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM). Evidence from members of the congregation of St Peter's was provided in support.

The complaint also raised concerns about Mrs Andreyev's conduct, with allegations about: her attempting to take control of Bible study groups and women's ministry; her "relentless pursuit" of members of the congregation whom she "hassled and deluged with correspondence"; and ways in which she misrepresented the situation when she spoke at the Parochial Church Council (PCC). There were complaints of a "dictatorial" leadership style on the part of both of the Andreyevs, who "expected total obedience and loyalty" from people, and that Revd Andreyev's behaviour was considered "unacceptable and extreme" and "intimidating."

After discussion with the Bishop of Derby, as part of the CDM process, and on the understanding that Revd Andreyev would move on and not be part of future ministry at St Peter's, the churchwarden agreed to not put the matter to Tribunal for review. In June 2018, Revd Andreyev duly announced to St Peter's that it was his intention to not be part of the future ministry of the church.

Revd Andreyev informed the church that he would not be resigning, but would go on leave until he had a new place to go. He was officially given 6 months' leave, with a view to finding another job in that time. Church Society Trust became aware of this development at their July 2018 meeting.

That 6 month leave period continued to be extended. After more than 3 years on leave Revd Andreyev remains on full pay and benefits in the Vicarage, during which period he has played no active role in St Peter's or any church.

4. Irretrievable Pastoral Breakdown

In November 2019, the PCC of St Peter's unanimously passed a resolution that there had been "irretrievable pastoral breakdown" between the congregation and Revd Andreyev (in full awareness of the impact and import of such a phrase in church law).

5. Church Society's Involvement

Mrs Andreyev has contacted various members of Church Society and Church Society Trust about the situation she and Revd Andreyev were in. She put forward a different narrative about the situation, concerned that "our reputation as a ministry couple is upheld and not affected in any way."

Church Society and Church Society Trust have no authority to intervene or interfere either in a fragile parish situation or a clergy discipline issue, especially where they are being dealt with by the duly constituted authorities in the Church of England. It has consistently held to that position throughout these interactions, and followed current best practice with regards to referring allegations to the correct authorities. Church Society has also

gone out of its way to try and be of help as far as possible in this difficult situation, at considerable cost in terms of time, effort, and money.

Mrs Andreyev has called publicly for various kinds of review or investigation into Church Society. Details of our repeated attempts at discussion, mediation, and conciliation are contained in the full briefing paper, as are details of the planned external review of Church Society by Dr Lisa Oakley. Church Society Council was willing to go to considerable efforts to accommodate Mrs Andreyev and assist with reaching a resolution. Her subsequent public letter to *Evangelicals Now* in April 2021, however, called for a point-by-point response to her allegations rather than any external investigation commissioned by or paid for by Church Society. In the circumstances, bearing in mind the limited options that appeared acceptable to Mrs Andreyev, the requested point-by-point response has now been collated. The full briefing paper contains that response and some of the background necessary to understand it. It has taken much time to compile.

The full briefing paper also contains a letter from the churchwardens of St Peter's, Stapenhill, expressing concern "that many of the things Kate says are inaccurate, or fail to reflect the real situation." Their account of the decline of the church, some of the behaviour of the Andreyevs towards the congregation, and the irretrievable pastoral breakdown that has occurred, is a very different narrative to that presented publicly by Mrs Andreyev.

6. Conclusion

Prior to this point, it has been our policy not to comment publicly on this case, as it was being dealt with by the properly constituted authorities within the Church of England and it is not our function to publicly interfere in that as a voluntary association / charity. We believe that in matters of safeguarding, bullying, abuse, pastoral breakdown, and clergy discipline, where an organisation (such as CS/CST) is not the competent authority, it should not be seeking to apply pressure behind the scenes to those following proper processes.

Our policy has been to imitate the one who when reviled did not revile in return, but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23), and to value others above ourselves, not looking to our own interests but to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4). This restraint has not been without cost for various individuals and for the reputation of Church Society.

We have also been concerned about the welfare of Revd and Kate Andreyev, and that defending ourselves from allegations and being transparent about information that differs from their public narrative could impede their ability and willingness to move on from St Peter's.

In this regard, the perspective of many of the congregation at St Peter's (and others), who experienced the Andreyevs at close quarters for many years but whose voice has not been given equal publicity, differs from that of the Andreyevs. Their account of the

Andreyevs' ministry is a deeply troubling one (aggressive, bullying, dictatorial, volatile, and authoritarian in nature) in which they are the victims and the Andreyevs are the perpetrators.

From our perspective, Revd and Mrs Andreyev have been reluctant and resistant to our efforts to find a resolution through due process, or through Christian mediation, or by means of an independent investigation. Social media and the Press have consistently been used, rather than procedures which would allow proper scrutiny of any concerns.

It was always our earnest desire and hope that the situation would be effectively and speedily dealt with by the properly constituted authorities in the Church of England. We believe in Anglican polity and do not seek to undermine it. However, we believe there has been a failure of church discipline at the diocesan/episcopal level here, leading to a prolonged crisis in St Peter's church which has been without an active Vicar for more than 3 years.

The primary failure here may be with the system of discipline available to the Bishops of Derby, which may be inadequate to deal with the issues surrounding the Andreyevs. Revd Andreyev retains Freehold status (part of an antiquated feudal system of clerical privileges), and its archaic system of protections for clergy restricts the ways in which concerns can be addressed. Those such as Revd Andreyev who are not on Common Tenure are not therefore subject to the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure 2009, and associated capability procedures. Therefore, if it were felt inappropriate for Revd Andreyev to continue in occupation of the vicarage on full stipend and benefits but without performing the functions of ministry, it seems this would require the Bishop to act.

The enormous frustration and distress caused by the CDM process may have contributed to the frustrations of the Andreyevs with our seeming inability to provide a solution that satisfied them (and perhaps their belief that it was our responsibility to do so). If there has been a failure in the realm of discipline and dispute resolution (an episcopal function) this appears to have had wide-ranging impacts on many others outside the original context, as the Andreyevs have sought for more effective help to get their desired outcomes from others who are unable to bring these about.

The voices of those in the congregation at St Peter's, Stapenhill have not been as publicly heard as Mrs Andreyev's. Some may have assumed that her version as presented on Twitter and elsewhere was the only one and must be true. The use of social media in such disputes is a debatable issue, but in this case it may well have exacerbated the situation. We have sought, as a national charity, not to take sides in a fragile pastoral relationship locally, and that continues to be our position.

LEE GATISS
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