

IN THE DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

AND IN THE MATTER OF A REFERRAL IN RESPECT OF RIGHT REVEREND ANTHONY EDWARD PIERCE

JUDGMENT

1. By Reference dated the 10th April 2025 the then Archbishop of Wales, Andrew John, and the Bishop of Swansea and Brecon jointly referred to the Disciplinary Tribunal of the Church in Wales the Right Reverend Anthony Edward Pierce ('the Respondent'), the grounds of the referral being that the Respondent engaged in conduct giving just cause for scandal or offence contrary to Chapter IX, Paragraph 9(c) of the Constitution of the Church in Wales ('The Constitution').
2. The grounds for the referral were that on the 12th March 2025 the Respondent was sentenced to a period of 4 years and one month imprisonment, was placed on the Sex Offenders' Register indefinitely and was made the subject of a Barring Order.
3. The Reference from the Archbishop and Bishop enclosed the relevant Certificate of Conviction from the Crown Court. In accordance with S11(4) of Chapter IX of the Constitution the preliminary stage of the Tribunal Proceedings was dispensed with and the matter set down for full hearing on 3rd November 2025.

THE BACKGROUND

4. The conviction relates to various dates between the late 1980s and early 1990s when, whilst serving as Parish Priest in West Cross Swansea, the Respondent committed acts of indecent assault on a parishioner, a boy aged approximately 14-15 years at the date of the first offences. The assaults took place at the vicarage, when the Respondent was trusted to look after and care for the boy and included the uninvited and unwanted touching and masturbating of the boy's penis.
5. At the time of the incidents giving rise to the convictions, the Respondent was a Parish Priest, but in 1999 he was elected Diocesan Bishop of Swansea and Brecon. The matters before us are limited to those giving rise to the conviction, although likely because of his subsequent appointment from which he retired in

2008, the referral to us came from both the Diocesan Bishop of the Diocese in which the offences took place, and the [then] Archbishop of Wales.

THE LAW

- 6.** The Proctor, Ms Helen Randall, of Counsel, brings the case and the burden rests on her to prove the case upon the balance of probabilities. However, in accordance with Rule 31 of the Tribunal's rules a certificate of conviction in criminal proceedings is to be regarded as conclusive proof that the acts therein specified were committed by the person named in the document. This only issue before us, therefore was whether the Proctor was able to prove that the set out in the Certificate constituted conduct giving just cause for scandal or offence.
- 7.** In deciding the issue before us we follow the decision of the Provincial Court of the Church in Wales in the matter of the Reverend Clifford Smith Williams, with judgment being handed down on 1st November 1997.
- 8.** The Provincial Court decided that for an offence alleging just cause for scandal or offence to be proved, the Tribunal must be satisfied of three matters. First, we have to be satisfied that there was a course of conduct knowingly entered upon by the Respondent. Secondly, we have to be satisfied that the course of conduct must, in the eyes of the Church, be judged to be inherently wrong. Thirdly, we have to be satisfied that the course of conduct must bring such discredit upon the Respondent and the Church that, in the eyes of a person of reasonably robust persuasion, such a person would describe it as scandalous or offensive.
- 9.** Given the facts that prompted this Referral we do not need to trouble ourselves with a detailed consideration of precisely what scandalous or offensive mean. We accept the meanings ascribed to them by common usage.

WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT

- 10.** The Respondent did not appear before us, but we have a letter addressed to our Registrar dated 19th June 2025 from the prison where he is incarcerated. He indicated he did not wish to attend the hearing or be represented and that he was truly sorry for what happened 35 years ago and for the hurt caused. We received no further explanation, nor mitigation from him, but did later receive two character references (sent directly to the Tribunal by the authors).

- 11.** The first was from a male who was an Undergraduate at Swansea University in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He attended the Respondent's parish church and the Respondent's home on many occasions, was never the victim of anything inappropriate and, together with others felt that the Respondent was a dedicated and hard-working force for good in the Community.
- 12.** The second letter before us was from an ordained minister whose friendship with the Respondent dates back to the 1960s. He too emphasises that the Respondent during many years of ministry both as a Priest and a Bishop has done much good in his pastoral and teaching ministry and in the support of others. He asks us to accept that the Respondent has given many years of faithful service to the Church in Wales.
- 13.** Whilst we of course accept that individuals and communities will have experienced much that is good from the Respondent's ministry, in our judgment this must now be seen in the light of the serious criminal offending which the Respondent carried with him and which he failed to disclose for many years, most notably when he was elected to the position of a Diocesan Bishop. To have said nothing then (or before then) about the behaviour which he has now admitted was in our judgment a gross breach of trust.
- 14.** Furthermore, we are asked in the second letter to consider the environment at the time of the offending and how matters have changed since then. The writer says *'Bishop Anthony's behaviour was as wrong when it happened as it is now, but our understanding of the impact of such actions has changed. I think we have to be careful not to make judgements of past events based on current thinking'*.
- 15.** We are unable to accept this proposition. Child sexual abuse is child sexual abuse whether it happened 35 years ago or now. The damage it causes has not altered with the passage of time and in our judgment the fact that understanding of that damage may have developed over the relevant period provides no mitigation to the gravity of the Respondent's actions. In any event, in the criminal proceedings the Respondent was sentenced in accordance with the law as it stood at the time of his offending, and received an immediate custodial sentence of over four years.

OUR DECISION

16. We have no doubt that the facts which led to the convictions were scandalous and would, in the eyes of a person of reasonably robust persuasion, be regarded as both scandalous and offensive. The information before us shows that Mr Pierce knowingly entered into a course of conduct which is undoubtedly inherently wrong, in the eyes of both the Church and wider society. His failure to confess what he had done when he was considered for preferment is an indication of a clear hope that he would never be found out.

17. We thus find the charge proved.

THE PENALTY

18. Chapter IX of the Constitution of the Church in Wales sets out at Paragraph 18 the powers of sentence open to the Disciplinary Tribunal. They range from the most minor, an absolute discharge, to the most serious, the deposition from Holy Orders and expulsion from the office of a Cleric in the Church in Wales.

19. This is clearly a case which demands the most serious of sanctions. We briefly considered whether disqualification from holding a position in the Church in Wales, without limitation of time was appropriate, but the gravity of the offending, the gross abuse of trust and the concealment of his subsequently acknowledged wrongdoing persuade us of the high level of outrage that right minded people would justifiably feel were he to continue to be able to hold himself out as a Bishop or Priest. We find that the only appropriate sanction that is consonant with the gravity of his offending is for Mr Pierce to be deposed from Holy Orders.

20. The Church in Wales has never before found itself in the circumstance of deposing a Bishop from their Orders. Section 42 of Chapter IX of the Constitution envisages the duty falling to the Bishop of the Diocese where the cleric holds, or last held, office. It does not make separate provision for Bishops, although a Bishop clearly falls within the Constitutional definition of a Cleric. However, we are mindful that powers of deprivation of Bishops (and other disciplinary sanctions) were vested in the Metropolitan prior to disestablishment.¹ For the avoidance of doubt and uncertainty, we believe the appropriate way forward is for the Archbishop and the Diocesan Bishop jointly to execute a deed of deposition.

¹ See Halsbury's Laws of England (1st edition, 1910), Ecclesiastical volume, para 726.

21. We therefore direct the present Archbishop of Wales, jointly with the Diocesan Bishop of Swansea and Brecon, to depose the Right Reverend Anthony Edward Pierce from Holy Orders and to expel him from the office of Cleric in the Church in Wales.

22. It is worth noting here the effects of a deed of deposition. Section 42 (3) of Chapter IX of the Constitution state that the effects of a deed of deposition are the same as a deed of relinquishment. Such effects are set out in the *Canon to amend the Canon Law Relating to Clerical Disabilities* dated 19 April 1990. The effects include:

(a) he or she shall be incapable of officiating or acting in any manner as a cleric of the Church in Wales, and of taking or holding any preferment therein, and shall cease to enjoy all rights, privileges, advantages, and exemptions attached to the office of cleric in the Church in Wales;

(b) every licence, office, and place held by him or her for which it is by law an indispensable qualification that the holder thereof should be a cleric of the Church in Wales shall be ipso facto determined and void;

23. In essence, the individual is returned to the status of a lay person in the eyes of the Church in Wales with effect from the date of the deposition. A deposition does not call into question the validity and lawfulness of Episcopal actions previously undertaken by a deposed Bishop (such as Confirmations and Ordinations).

24. In accordance with Section 19 of Chapter IX of the Constitution, Mr Pierce has 28 days within which to lodge an appeal to this decision with the Registrar of the Provincial Court. If no appeal is lodged, this order shall become definitive.

17th November 2025

Mark Powell KC, President of the Disciplinary Tribunal
The Venerable Matthew Hill, Archdeacon of Carmarthen
Dr. Delyth Hurley