

IN THE DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

AND IN THE MATTER OF A REFERRAL IN RESPECT OF THE REVEREND SAMUEL ERLANDSON

JUDGMENT

1. By Reference dated 29th April 2025 the Bishop of St Asaph referred to the Disciplinary Tribunal of the Church in Wales the matter of Reverend Samuel Erlandson ('The Respondent'), a Clerk in Holy Orders. The grounds for the referral were that Mr Erlandson had, between the 19th June 2024 and the 22nd November 2024, 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 FACTS

2. On 23rd November 2024 the Respondent pleaded guilty to 3 offences of possessing indecent images and was sentenced by the Llandudno Magistrates Court to 32 weeks imprisonment, suspended for 18 months together with ancillary requirements. He was placed on the Sex Offenders Register for 10 years.
3. The convictions relate to a period between 19th June 2024 and 22nd November 2024 and the making of 4 Category C indecent images of a child and between the same dates the making of 1 Category B image of a Child involving non-penetrative sexual activity. The third charge related to the possession of 2 extreme pornographic images.
4. The Reference from the Bishop enclosed the relevant certification of conviction from the civil authorities. In accordance with Section 11 (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 3 November 2025.
5. The notices relating to the Disciplinary process were passed to Mr Erlandson via his Probation Officer and we were told he did not intend to appear before us. We have nothing from him by way of explanation or mitigation as to the penalty we should impose.

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 for a criminal offence from a secular court is treated as conclusive proof that the acts therein specified were committed by the person named in the certificate. The burden on the Proctor is therefore to prove that the conduct set out in the certificate gives 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.

OUR DECISION

- 10.** 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 Erlandson knowingly entered into a course of conduct by downloading the images and that the conduct, in the eyes of both the Church and wider society, is inherently wrong. We thus find the charge proved.

THE PENALTY

- 11.** 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.
- 12.** The Panel was unanimous that only the most serious sanctions available to the Tribunal would be appropriate in a case of this nature. We considered whether disqualification from holding a position in the Church in Wales without limitation of time was appropriate, but the gravity of the offending, in direct opposition to the extensive work that the Church in Wales has conducted to make safeguarding a priority and the level of outrage that right minded people would justifiably feel were he to continue to be able to hold himself out as a Priest persuade us that the only appropriate sanction that is consonant with the gravity of his offending is to order the Bishop of St Asaph to depose Mr Erlandson from Holy Orders and to expel him from the office of Cleric in the Church in Wales.
- 13.** In accordance with Section 19 of Chapter IX of the Constitution, Mr Erlandson has 28 days 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