

EXTRACT FROM COMPLAINT LODGED AGAINST REV ROSE WESTWOOD – concerning the decision at the 2014 Hastings Bexhill and Rye circuit meeting at the appointment of Rev Ian Pruden as Superintendent.

I was concerned about the image of the Church that such an arrangement might promote. The Church might have been described as being discriminatory because it failed to adequately advertise for applicants for the post. There might also be allegations of some kind of nepotism or favoritism being involved.

I took no side in this – except seek to make the point that we pause for thought and reach a proper decision on the issue of the selection of a new Superintendent under what I understood - from my conversations with Rev Luscombe - was a new ruling in S.O. 545 .

I recalled that Conference in 2013 adopted amendments to Standing Order 545 that came into effect in September 2014 – just prior to the meeting of 16th September 2014¹. I think that these amendments may be behind the thinking of those who saw urgency in the matter.

The interpretation of the new Standing Order in September 2014 is probably the cause of the trouble at the meeting in that month.

S.O. 545 and deadlines

The only deadline I see in S.O. 545² is in (3):

(3A) Any Circuit Meeting to consider extending an invitation under clause (2) or (3) above shall be held on or before the 20th September.

This clause comes under the heading “Extensions: Presbyteral Appointments.”

The matter under discussion at the Circuit meeting of September 2014 was not about an extension – but was about promotion to a permanent position.

I recall it being said, and it is repeated in the response Rev Westwood gave to my initial complaint, that what was being discussed was a “re-invitation³” The minutes, however, mentioned “an appointment”

Rev Westwood’s description of the matter as being a “re-invitation” was mis-leading.

¹ S.O. 545 Extensions: Presbyteral Appointments.

The Conference in 2013 adopted amendments to this Standing Order that will come into effect in September 2014.

² References are in line with Standing Orders published in 2014

³ cf Rev Westwood response (para 2 “he did not at any point offer of any objection to Ian’s re-invitation” and para 3 “Rev Heim was to chair the superintendent’s re-invitation”

The confusion, due, I believe to a mis-reading of Standing Orders, may account for an explanatory note in the minutes of this meeting. Without attribution, the minutes record:

“Because of appointment time scales, this could not happen with only three days left for discussion.”

We were at the sixteenth of the month – there were only three days left before the time limit in 545(3A) above.

However, there is no such time limit involved in choosing a Superintendent.

The source of this confusion may be Rev Westwood, for she raised the point of timing in her response to my grievance⁴.

“Mr. Timms clearly believed that there were other options to pursue, but seemed unaware that such options would have been discounted prior to this point in proceedings to allow for the stationing of a third minister as a matter of urgency.”

This was at the core of my point. I did not consider that the new rule introduced urgency. It had no bearing on the matter.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, Rev Westwood claimed that we were faced with “*a matter of urgency*”.

We clearly had two different interpretations of Standing Orders. Indeed, we had different interpretations of what the item was actually about – a *re-invitation* or an *appointment*. Rev Pruden had never held the post of Superintendent, he had been invited to be acting in that role – a re-invitation surely referred to the role of acting, not to the permanent post.

My reading of Standing Orders was ignored at this Circuit Meeting. The fact that I held a different understanding of Standing Orders to others did not warrant what occurred at the meeting. Whether my reading of them was right or wrong, I nevertheless had as right to discuss the problems I saw. There were, possibly, conflicting Standing Orders and they needed some discussion as to their meaning. I suspect that many in the meeting had not even read the relevant sections of Standing Orders.

I believe the above to be a “substantive issue” in that my considerations were not only based on the understanding and interpretation of Standing Orders, but also that the decision under

⁴ Westwood response 8b

consideration had implications which could reflect adversely on the integrity of the Church.