

***Ethics:* What has the Church done to end gender inequality and discrimination?**



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If I asked you to name an organisation or institution that you thought worked hard to challenge gender inequality and discrimination, your first thought would probably not be the Church, and I wouldn't blame for this. As a body, the Church has not always been at the forefront of equal rights, and it can often feel that the Church is lagging behind society.

Quite often, the Church has pointed towards the Bible and to Church tradition to defend the differences between how men and women are treated by the Church. It is important though to remember that the attitudes of society to women and men have changed significantly even in just the last 50 years, and many of the laws that protect people from discrimination based on their gender are relatively new.

In the Bible, when we read about the life of Jesus, we hear about his disciples. The twelve disciples, as they are known, are male and are companions of Jesus. For some, this is a clear indication that men are called to positions of leadership and particularly ordained ministry. But look a bit harder and there are women disciples too. Often they are unseen, and they rarely speak, but they are there. We know of Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary, and Joanna. When Jesus died on the cross, it was the women that stayed with him whilst the men hid, and it was the women who were the first to see the risen Christ on the first Easter morning. And all of this took place in a society where women were really marginalised and had little freedom outside the home. For others in the Church these things show how Jesus valued and included women, and therefore it is right that both men and women are called to leadership in the church and to ordained ministry.

In the Church of England, for a long time, only men could be admitted to ordained ministry and it wasn't until 1994 that women could be ordained as priests. At that time, becoming a bishop was still out of the question for women – this didn't come until much later in 2014. There are still differences between how men and women are treated in the Church of England. For instance, there are many priests, bishops, and church members who don't agree that women should be ordained. There are guidelines called the Five Guiding Principles, designed to help people with different views to be able to work together. The first Principle states; "the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those whom it has duly ordained and appointed to office are the true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy and thus deserve due respect and canonical obedience". In reality, it can be quite difficult still for women in the church, but progress is never easy!