Ecclesiastical Law Society

NEWSLETTER
of
THE ECCLESIASTICAL LAW SOCIETY

Michaelmas 2026

No. 2/2026

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Spinello Aretino, 'Saint Michael and Other Angels', about 1408–10 (The National Gallery, London)

EDITORIAL

As this Michaelmas edition of the Newsletter goes to press, the practical consequences of legal and regulatory change for churches and faith bodies are once again coming sharply into view.

Questions concerning the care and funding of places of worship remain particularly pressing. The new Places of Worship Renewal Fund represents an important change of approach in England, moving from assistance with the VAT cost of eligible works towards capital support for repairs and improvements. The implications for listed places of worship, and the position in the devolved nations, will continue to merit close attention.

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 is another area in which churches will need to translate a new statutory framework into proportionate arrangements on the ground. The need for clear and practical guidance is especially evident for places of worship that depend heavily upon volunteers and host a wide range of services, community activities and occasional events.

Alongside these developments, charity law, safeguarding, burial and funeral regulation, and the governance of the Church continue to generate questions of direct relevance to the Society's members. The value of informed exchange between lawyers, clergy, church officers and scholars is therefore as clear as ever.

This term's Bitesize programme continues the Society's commitment to accessible legal education, with sessions on the law of marriage and on the nature and place of Canons. We hope that members and friends of the Society will join us, and will continue to make use of the growing collection of recordings and resources available through the website.

The Trustees are also taking the opportunity to reflect on what members value most about belonging to the Society and what they would like to see from us in future. For some, the Journal may be at the heart of membership; others may particularly value lectures, conferences, online events, networking and fellowship, or simply the opportunity to support the Society's wider work in promoting the study of ecclesiastical and canon law.

We will shortly be inviting members to complete a brief survey, and very much hope that as many of you as possible will share your views. Your responses will help shape the Society's priorities and ensure that membership remains relevant, worthwhile and responsive to the interests of our community. Please look out for further details and a link to the survey.

The Trustees are grateful, as always, for members' engagement with the work of the Society, and for the generosity of those who contribute their time and expertise to its lectures, publications and events.

With every good wish for the Michaelmas term.

Ed.

NEWS & NOTICES

CONSULTATION: WHAT DO YOU VALUE ABOUT ELS MEMBERSHIP?

The Trustees are considering the future direction of the Ecclesiastical Law Society and, in particular, what members value most about belonging to the Society.

For some, membership may be principally about receiving the Ecclesiastical Law Journal. Others may particularly value lectures, conferences, online seminars, professional development, networking and fellowship, or the opportunity to support the Society's wider charitable work in promoting the study of ecclesiastical and canon law.

We would therefore be very grateful if members would complete a short survey which is being prepared in order to help the Trustees understand what you value now, what you would like the Society to offer in future, and how we can make membership more relevant and worthwhile.

The survey should take no more than five minutes to complete. Responses may be submitted anonymously, although there will be an option to provide contact details if you would be willing to discuss your views further. A link will be sent to you when the survey is open.

Thank you for helping the Trustees shape the next stage of the Society's work.

REPORT FROM THE DAY CONFERENCE 2026 – BURIAL LAW AND CHURCHYARDS: FIT FOR THE FUTURE?



The Society's 2026 Day Conference took place on a beautiful summer's day at St Peter's, Eaton Square. It was very well attended, and the London setting provided an unexpected bonus: as the conference coincided with Trooping the Colour, those present were able to enjoy the fly-past overhead just before we had lunch. It made for a particularly memorable lunchtime treat to what proved to be a thoroughly engaging day.

The subject, *Burial Law and Churchyards: fit for the future?*, was both fascinating and timely. Professor Lisa Webley, the Law Commissioner for Property, Family and Trust Law, spoke about the Law Commission's report and proposals for reform. Dr Julie Rugg, Senior Research Fellow at the University of York and Director of the Cemetery Research Group, brought her extensive knowledge of cemeteries and funeral practice to the discussion. Ian Blaney, partner at LBMW and Registrar of the Dioceses of Lincoln and Derby, completed the programme, drawing on his practical ecclesiastical law experience and his work chairing the ELS working party that responded to the Law Commission's consultations.

The combination of legal, historical and practical perspectives made for a lively discussion and gave everyone plenty of food for thought. Burial law may appear at first sight to be a rather specialist subject, but the questions raised are of real and growing significance: how burial space should be managed, how churchyards and cemeteries can continue to serve their communities, and whether the present legal framework is equipped to meet future needs. These are technical questions, but also deeply human and pastoral ones.

There was much to reflect on during the day, not least the challenge of balancing respect for the dead and the bereaved with the practical pressures facing those responsible for churchyards and burial grounds. The different perspectives offered by the speakers brought the issues vividly to life and underlined just how important it is that any reform should be workable in practice as well as sound in principle.

It was a thoroughly absorbing day, and the questions and contributions from those attending greatly enriched the discussion. We came away with a much clearer sense of both the complexity of the issues and the importance of getting any future reform right. The Society is enormously grateful to our speakers for sharing their knowledge and experience so generously, and to everyone who joined us and helped make the conference such an interesting, thought-provoking and enjoyable occasion.

AGM 2026

The seventh Annual General Meeting of the Ecclesiastical Law Society as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation was held at St Peter's, Eaton Square, on 13 June 2026, during the Society's annual Day Conference.



The Chair, Lee Coley, welcomed members and reflected on another busy year for the Society. He recalled the success of last year's *Nicaea Received* conference, which had been a particularly important ecumenical gathering, and thanked those responsible for sustaining the popular Bitesize online events. He also celebrated the continuing publication of the *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, which maintains its exceptionally high standard.

Lee reflected on the breadth of the Society's work, including consultations, working parties and the conversations taking place through lectures, seminars and online events. At a time when the Church continues to face scrutiny on many fronts, the need for a sound legal framework, good governance, calm counsel and careful advice is as important as ever. The Society continues to make a distinctive contribution in each of these areas.

The meeting recorded its thanks to Stephen Hogg, who had stepped down as Finance Officer, for his forensic attention to detail and particular insight into governance structures. Thanks were also expressed to Russell Dewhurst, who had handed over the communications brief following his appointment as Archdeacon of Hastings, for his clear and intelligent advice.

Rebecca Chapman was welcomed to the communications role, together with the Revd Dan Grayson as the Society's new Systems Officer. Members were also updated on the new financial arrangements, with Darren Broadbent of Forrest Burlinson now dealing with the financial aspects of the former Finance Officer role. Lee thanked the Rt Revd John Ford for his continuing service as Executive Secretary and Ola Olajide, who had stood down as a Trustee.

Those present then observed a period of silence in memory of members who had died during the previous year.

The formal business of the meeting followed. The minutes of the 2025 AGM were approved, subject to one spelling correction, and the Trustees' Annual Report and accounts were received by the meeting.

The Rt Revd Christopher Hill was re-elected as President of the Society. As no nomination had been received for the role of Vice-Chair, the Trustees agreed to consider the position at their next meeting.

Four charity trustees were elected: the Revd Christopher Smith, Rebecca Cattermole, the Ven Dr Chigor Chike and Adrian Roberts-Walsh. We warmly welcome Chigor and Adrian as new Trustees, and congratulate Christopher and Rebecca on their election for further terms.

The meeting also received the report of the Editor of the *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*. Members expressed their appreciation for the consistently high standard of the Journal and for the work involved in maintaining its quality.

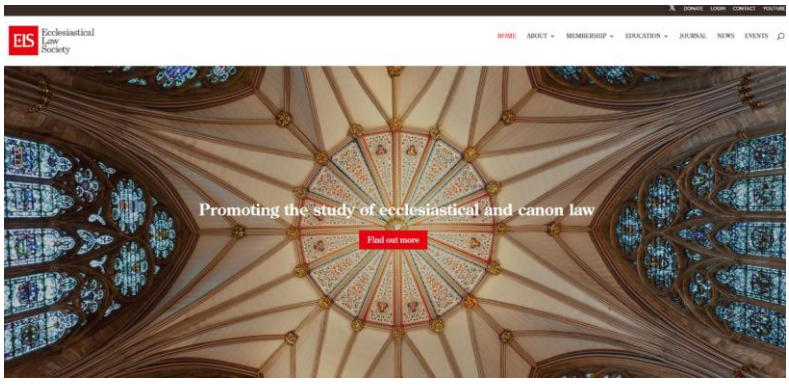
Finally, members heard the welcome news that Baroness Hale will give the Society's Northern Lecture in Leeds on 8 December 2026. Further details of the title, venue and booking arrangements will be announced shortly.

The meeting concluded at 2.21pm.

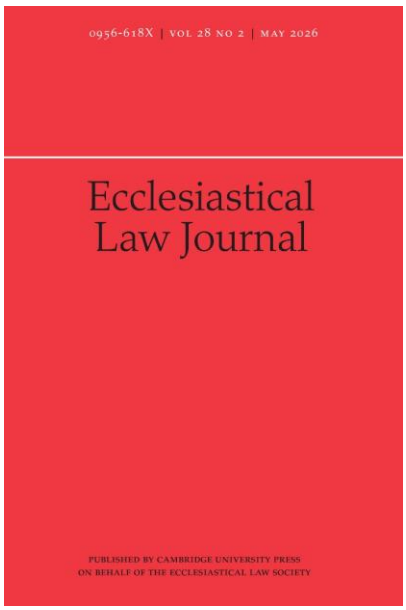
With thanks to the Rt Revd John Ford, the Society's Executive Secretary, for providing the minutes on which this report is based.

ELS WEBSITE

A reminder to readers that the ELS website, www.ecclawsoc.org.uk has a wealth of resources dedicated to advancing our charitable objects, which are to promote education in ecclesiastical law. In particular do have a look at our Education page, and be sure to check back regularly for upcoming talks and Events!



LATEST ELJ PUBLISHED: A ROUND-UP



We apologise that the hard-copy version of the May issue has been so delayed. Our publishers, Cambridge University Press, have experienced technical difficulties which have been beyond the Society's control to resolve. We have sought repeated updates from CUP and have now been informed that the May issue will be posted to members shortly. It offers a characteristically wide-ranging selection of scholarship, commentary and regular reports.

The principal articles begin with Professor Norman Doe's examination of the York Provinciale, inviting readers to "move over Lyndwood" and consider this important source of provincial canon law. Morag Ellis KC, Dean of the Arches, provides an extensive legal perspective on the Office of Notary Public and its relationship with the Church of England, both ancient and modern.

The commentary section turns to questions of discipline, impartiality and good decision-making. Matthew Denis Perreault examines the state of clerical discipline in the Anglican Church of Canada, while Joseph Lee considers the requirements of impartiality and the avoidance of bias and conflicts of interest. The series Rediscovering Anglican Priest-Jurists also continues, with Norman Doe and George Bush exploring the life and work of Thomas Sherlock, Bishop of London from 1748 to 1761.

The regular parliamentary and synod reports include Frank Cranmer and Simon Stanley's review of developments in Parliament between October 2025 and January 2026. Simon Stanley reports on the July 2025 group of sessions of the General Synod of the Church of England, Frank Cranmer covers the June and September 2025 meetings of the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, and Jason Lingiah reports on the 2025 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

The issue is completed by a substantial collection of book reviews and case notes. The books considered range across the Canons of the Quinisext Council, Thomas Aquinas and medieval canon law, comparative approaches to law and religion, and the use of churches and churchyards as assets for mission. The consistory court cases cover memorials, equal access and church alterations, reservation of grave spaces, exhumation, major reordering works and the sale of church treasures.

The latest edition has been published and sent to members of the Society who receive it without additional charge. Members have access to the entire run of Journal back issues online.

To use this facility, go to www.ecclawsoc.org.uk and click Login. If you aren't sure of your password, click "Forgot Password" enter your email address. When you have logged in, click on the "Members" menu title, then "Journal Archive" and follow the link.



DATES FOR THE DIARY

Details and dates of events and lectures (online and in person) will be published on our website as soon as details become available!

2026 Lectures

The Rt Revd Jonathan Baker on "Faithfully to execute: the ministry of the Bishop Suffragan"



10 November 2026, 18:00 - 19:30
The Grosvenor Chapel
South Audley Street, Mayfair, London W1K 2PA

Details and boking available here.

The lecture is free of charge but spaces are limited and prior booking is essential, using the form below. Booking through the website closes 24 hours before the event (or when the event is full) but please contact the Communications Officer on communications@ecclawsoc.org.uk for late availability requests. This lecture is open to members and non-members. It will not be live-streamed.

Norrthern Lecture: Baroness Hale of Richmond



We are pleased to announce that this year's Northern Lecture will take place in **Leeds** on **Tuesday 8 December 2026**, organised by our former chair Lizzie Wilson. **Baroness Hale of Richmond**, widely known as **Lady Hale**, will give the Society's Northern Lecture in Leeds on 8 December 2026.

Further details of the lecture title, venue and booking arrangements will be announced shortly.

Lady Hale is the former President of the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom and was the first woman to serve both as a Justice of the Supreme Court and, previously, as a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary. Before her distinguished judicial career, she was an academic lawyer and Law Commissioner.

A full programme of further events and lectures for 2027 is being planned. Please save these dates for the Northern Lecture and keep an eye on the Society's website and future communications for full details of both the Northern and London programmes.

Bitesize Ecclesiastical Law

The Society's free online "Bitesize Ecclesiastical Law" series returns this term with two short introductory seminars, open to members and non-members alike. These seminars form part of our regular series of introductory 'bitesize' discussions of ecclesiastical law, focussed on the Church of England. They are intended to be accessible to everyone with an interest in the subject.

The introductory discussions are be recorded and posted to our Youtube channel. In the second half, the discussion is opened up to all attending the seminar, and this part is not recorded.

The seminars last 30 minutes in total. They are open to members and non-members and are free of charge.

Bitesize Ecclesiastical Law #19	"***What is the law of marriage?***"
13 October 2026, 5.30 – 6pm	We talk with Jess Gray, Deputy Registrar of the Dioceses of York and Sodor and Man and Sheffield, of Flint Bishop Solicitors

Book here.

Bitesize Ecclesiastical Law #20	"***What is a Canon?***"
17 November 2026, 5.30 – 6pm	We talk with with The Venerable Russell Dewhurst, Archdeacon of Hastings.

Book here.

ELS Lectures are free of charge and are open to members and non-members save where otherwise stated. Where held in person, spaces are limited and prior booking (through the website) is essential. Booking closes 48 hours before the event (or when the event is full), but please contact the Executive Secretary execsec@ecclawsoc.org.uk for late availability requests. If you find you can no longer attend, please cancel your booking to make the space available for someone else.

And, in case you missed it…

The *Ecclesiastical Law Society* has its own dedicated YouTube channel – you can sign up to subscribe and view past recordings of lectures and interviews here.

Recent additions include:

Bitesize Ecclesiastical Law:

"***What is an Archbishop?***" We talk with Louise Connacher, Registrar of the Province and Diocese of York and the Diocese of Sodor and Man.

"***What is a Licence?***" We talk with Kirsty Duxbury, Diocesan Registrar for Worcester and Sheffield, of Anthony Collins Solicitors

"***What is the General Synod?***" We talk with Jenny Jacobs, Clerk to the Synod.

LEGISLATION UPDATE

Thanks as ever go to Frank Cranmer for these useful contributions.

Church Appointments (Repeal of Discriminatory Provision) Bill

Under the provisions of the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829 and the Jews Relief Act 1858, no person of the Roman Catholic or Jewish faith may advise the Crown on appointments to offices in the Church of England or the Church of Scotland, and in a written statement on 10 September 2026, the new Prime Minister, a Roman Catholic, announced that he had transferred his 'constitutional responsibility to advise the Sovereign on Church appointments to the Lord Chancellor'.

The Church Appointments (Repeal of Discriminatory Provision) Bill, introduced by the Government on 15 September, would remove those bars by repealing the relevant provisions of the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829 and repealing the Jews Relief Act 1858 in its entirety: the Explanatory Notes are here. Mercifully, the accompanying Government press release refrained from describing it as "Andy's Law".

Clergy conduct and discipline

The Clergy Conduct Measure 2026 was given Royal Assent on 8 July; *inter alia*, it repeals the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003. The Measure will come into force on such day as the Archbishops of Canterbury and York may by order jointly appoint; and different days may be appointed for different purposes.

Draft Conversion Practices Bill

In June, the Government published its draft Conversion Practices Bill, which extends to England and Wales only. The proposed ban on conversion practices under the Bill will set the criminal threshold as conduct that aims to change someone's sexual orientation or transgender identity through abusive acts that seriously harm the victim. It will create two criminal offences: carrying out abusive conversion practices that cause serious harm, alarm or distress to the victim, and encouraging or assisting an abusive conversion practice performed outside England and Wales.

It would also create new civil Conversion Practice Protection Orders and offences for breaching them, to support victims and those currently at risk of abuse.

Legislation on assisted dying

As noted in the last *Newsletter*, the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill failed to make progress in the House of Lords in the last session of Parliament after about 1,000 amendments were tabled to it, and it fell at the end of the session. The Bill was reintroduced in the new session by Lauren Edwards (Rochester and Strood, Lab) on 17 July in the hope of invoking the Parliament Acts should it face opposition in the Lords a second time round; however, the Bill was defeated on second reading by 286 votes to 270.

Government support for listed places of worship

On 25 June, there was a short debate in the House of Lords on the Places of Worship Renewal Fund – the successor to the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme.

In reply, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at DCMS made the following points:

- 'The fund will provide upfront capital grants to restore listed places of worship, with funding targeted towards the places that need it most'; and under the LPWGS, many churches had not benefited because they could not raise the capital funds up front.

- The DCMS evaluation of the LPWGS showed that 80% of those who benefited said that they would have completed the works anyway, and the DCMS internal analysis of past payments under the LPWGS showed that it disproportionately favoured places with less disadvantage.

- The devolved administrations had received Barnett consequential funding at the Spending Review, taking into account any changes to the overall DCMS settlement. DCMS had made the devolved administrations aware that the Barnett consequentials covered the new Fund, and it was for them to consider whether or not to set up new arrangements.

- The new Fund's first priority was eligible projects in or serving places that face double disadvantage, and only after those were funded would other projects be considered. The second priority was areas with the greatest need as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Once eligible projects in those areas had been funded, projects with the greatest financial need, urgency of repair or community benefit would be considered.

In August, Historic Environment Scotland announced the creation of Scotland's Places of Worship Fund, which 'will support eligible listed places of worship across Scotland by helping them recover VAT costs associated with repair works'. It is expected to open for applications in autumn 2026.

The Department for Communities in Northern Ireland has published a public consultation on Historic Environment Policy. It closes on 23 October.

The Welsh Government has announced a call for evidence on Culture and Sport Strategy. Question 1 asks, "What is the situation now? What is the current state of play for culture, heritage, the arts, creative industries, sport and physical activity in Wales?" It closes on 18 December.

Religious practice: disclosure of information

On 7 September, in reply to a written question from Ben Obese-Jecty (Huntingdon, Con) about the mandatory reporting law in the Crime and Policing Act and confession, Satvir Kaur, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office, said *inter alia* that:

'The Crime and Policing Act 2026 does not provide any exemption from mandatory reporting on the basis of religious practice, or the setting in which information is received. In defining who is subject to the duty, the Act makes specific provision for those providing religious instruction to children beyond the regulated activity framework in Schedule 12. The Act also makes clear how the duty interacts with any wider expectations of confidentiality that a reporter may be subject to. Section 85 makes clear that submitting a report under the mandatory reporting duty does not breach any obligation of confidence

owed by the person making the report. This ensures that individuals who are subject to the duty can make reports as required by law.'

Tackling antisemitism

On 8 September, there was a debate in Westminster Hall on the safety of the Jewish community. In reply, Sarah Jones, Home Office Minister of State for Policing and Crime, said that the Government regarded tackling antisemitism as an ongoing programme and would take further measures where required. It had already provided an additional £25m in April for police patrols and disruption activity and had announced more than £250m in additional police funding over three years. In addition, antisemitism training would be rolled out across policing. The House of Commons Library published a research briefing in advance of the debate.

Reforming the law on divorce, dissolution and cohabitation

In June, the Government launched a consultation entitled *A fairer end to relationships*, which covered three discrete but linked areas: financial remedies on divorce and dissolution; financial provision for cohabitants on separation; and inheritance provision for cohabitants on death.

The consultation invited views on 'a "codification-plus" model of reform, which would bring settled case law principles, such as those of "needs" and "sharing", into statutory form', further targeted reforms including qualifying nuptial agreements to enable couples to make binding financial arrangements in advance of divorce or dissolution, a statutory framework of rights and protections for eligible cohabitants at the point of separation, and modernising the law on intestacy as it affects cohabitants and access to financial provision from a deceased partner's estate. It closed on 14 August.

And finally: Faith Ministers and the revolving door

In June it emerged, thanks to *Religion Media Centre*, that the new Minister for Faith was Lord Lemos, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at MCHLG, who succeeded Nesil Caliskan MP. Apparently, he was the tenth person to hold the role in ten years. In August, however, Florence Eshalomi MP (Vauxhall and Camberwell) replaced him. Given the rapid turnover in occupants of the role, one cannot help wondering about its utility.

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