

2015.09.22

4.5 DEPUTY M. TADIER OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMITÉ DES CONNÉTABLES REGARDING RATE REBATES TO THOSE DENIED THE RIGHT TO MARRY IN CHURCH OF ENGLAND CHURCHES:

Given that ratepayers who are in a same-sex relationship could be denied the right to marry in the Church of England ... I think it should be will be denied the right to marry in the Church of England churches under the proposals of the Chief Minister relating to same-sex marriage, what redress, if any, will the Comité be proposing to compensate such individuals, perhaps via a rate rebate since the Parish churches are maintained through Parish rates?

Connétable L. Norman of St. Clement (Chairman, Comité des Connétables):

I am grateful to the Deputy for the question because it enables me to remind Members of the status of Parish rates. The law states that rates shall be applied for the payment of the general expenses of the Parish. Therefore Parish rates are neither specific to the use of an individual ... or to the use an individual ratepayer makes for the Parish facilities, nor to the service provided to any particular property. Therefore no redress, as suggested by the Deputy, would be appropriate.

4.5.1 Deputy M. Tadier:

It would be helpful to know exactly how much money is given to the Church of England by parishioners every year, and I would be grateful if the chairman of the Comité cannot produce that now, whether he would be able to circulate it at some point. Presumably they do know what that figure is.

The Connétable of St. Clement:

That figure is a matter of public record in each Parish's annual accounts, and it is voted for by the parishioners. It is no secret. It is there and probably found on each Parish's website and I suggest the Deputy might like to look there.

4.5.2 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Would the Constable agree that the community users of our churches are significant? It includes funerals, christenings, collection points of charity, all sorts of other community uses, so surely the Constable perhaps should be saying that this is an important part of our community and should be maintained by the Parish for all and it is not just about weddings at churches but also a greater question may exist. The Parishes do not currently assist in the financing of any other churches other than the established church, should that not be considered in the future as well, as they are also important focuses in our community?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

The Parishes are required to maintain the fabric, the structure, of the Parish church buildings. Nothing else. Nothing more. Nothing less. That is what they are required to do. It is up to the congregation and the Church of England itself for maintenance, decoration and everything else that goes into the church. Of course they are important, historic buildings dating back many centuries, therefore it is appropriate I think that the public make a contribution to the maintenance of those particular buildings, which do play an important part in the fabric of Parish life and the culture of Parish life, the history of Parish life. They are central to Parish life as much as the Parish Hall is, and I think they are used by many people who are not necessarily of the Church of England faith or indeed of any faith whatsoever. The church halls, the churches themselves run their events. They are important to the Parish for all parishioners. Not just those of a particular faith.

Deputy A.D. Lewis:

And the maintenance of other religious buildings in the Parishes?

The Connétable of St. Clement:

I do not think there has been any other request, certainly in my Parish, if there has been a certain appeal by a church ... I can remember a few years ago the Catholic church was refurbished in St. Clement - St. Patrick's - and the Parish did make a contribution towards that. I think Parishes do have the ability to do so if they so wish and their parishioners wish to do so. When you think about it, the Parishes are the most democratic and open institutions that we have. [Approbation] Because every penny that is spent or gained ... parishioners fix their own rate. They do not fix their own taxes. We do that. But they fix their own rate and every bit of expenditure that the Parish has is fixed by the parishioners, not by the taxes, no. I mean we decide that. So I think when you think about it, the most democratic and open system that there is in Jersey.

4.5.3 Connétable J.E. Le Maistre of Grouville:

Could the Constable just confirm that no money is actually going to the Church of England, it is really for the upkeep of the churches and I for one think that they are a valuable asset to us, part of our culture ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Is there a question, Connétable?

The Connétable of Grouville:

No, Sir. [Laughter] Just asking him to confirm, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I do not think that calls for an answer, Connétable.

4.5.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I love the fact that we have just had an election in St. Helier for a Procureur which is so democratic that it managed to entice 1.18 of the entire voting electorate of the Parish. That is how democratic Parish systems can be. I agree that they can be democratic and I would ask the Comité to take on board the fact that we do live in a modern society where many of their ratepayers and electorate are non-religious, maybe atheists, agnostic, maybe in same-sex relationships, and they will be denied the right to marriage in what is essentially a State affiliated organisation. I would ask them to give the answer whether or not they are a discriminatory body, as the Comité des Connétable body, or whether they support non-discrimination? If they do support non-discrimination as a principle, how can they justify giving money to organisations which do discriminate actively on this day when we are supposed to be supporting equality rather than doing the opposite?

The Connétable of Grouville:

Am I allowed to say that is rather a silly question? If the Deputy does not like the law which is being proposed, and we have not yet debated, then he needs to vote against the law. Not to ask the ratepayers of the various Parishes to compensate people for a law which this States has democratically approved. That would be silliness in the extreme. Of course the fact that there was a small turnout in the Procureur's election last week has got nothing to do with this question whatsoever, but every voter in St. Helier had the opportunity to go out and vote. They chose, in the main, not to. But what was good about that election is that every Anglican, Catholic, Jew, atheist, non-conformist, agnostic had the opportunity to go and vote but they chose not to. [Approbation]