FORM 3 (Rules 6 and 17)

Clergy Discipline Measure 2003

Statement in support of a Complaint, or in support of an Answer to a Complaint

Box for use only by the Registrar of Tribunals	*Statement submitted by:* *Name of maker of statement:* *Date of statement:*

In the matter of the complaint

Enter the name of the complainant.
Enter the name of the member of the clergy about whom a complaint is made.

made by The Board of Deputies of British Jews

against: Rev Dr Stephen Sizer

My full name is: Professor Peter Timothy Holt Unwin CMG

My contact address, including postcode, is:

1 Hawthorn Cottages, Wellington Avenue, Virginia Water, GU25 4HU

***Telephone & e-mail details are optional, but it could be helpful to the registrar and bishop to have them.*

**My telephone number is: 01344 844754

**My e-mail address is: tim.unwin@rhul.ac.uk

The matters in this statement to which I refer are all within my own knowledge, except where I indicate otherwise. If anything is not within my own knowledge then I set out the source of any matters of information and belief:

*You must explain in your statement how you know about each of the matters you describe, **unless** you know about them because you have **personally** seen or observed them.*

I have known Stephen Sizer since 1997, when he became vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, and have kept in contact with him since he moved to Southampton in 2017. I have read the latest accusations made against him by Marie van der Zyl on behalf of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, as well as Stephen's detailed and comprehensive responses to them. I am an academic geographer with a long interest in Middle Eastern affairs, international development and philosophy, and am therefore well-placed not only to comment on Stephen as a pastor and friend, but also on the merits of the wider case being made against him.

I have no doubt that the accusations against him are deeply flawed, and are intended to cause malicious harm to him as an individual and to the Church of England more widely. I therefore urge you to rebut them in the strongest possible terms.

Much of the case against Stephen is based on old arguments that were dealt with under the conciliation agreement reached with the Board of Deputies of British Jews in 2013. I wrote at that time in support of Stephen and you will have my comments on record. It is my understanding that a process was agreed at that time for dealing with future disputes, and it would seem that the Board of Deputies of British Jews in bringing these new accusations has failed to abide by that process.

As far as I can make out, there are only two new accusations that therefore warrant any further comment: his definition of anti-Semitism, and concerns over comments alledged to have been made by him in connection with criticism of Jeremy Corbyn. Both of these arguments seem to be tenuous at best. I have read the very detailed arguments that Stephen has written in defence of his position, and they seem to be a fair reflection of the issues.

My previous comments in 2013 have addressed the earlier accusations, and so let me therefore now briefly address four issues related to the two new accusations:

1) *The Board of Deputies of British Jews claims to represent the British Jewish Community*. In my understanding, there are diverse views within the British Jewish community, and the Board of Deputies cannot therefore claim to represent all British Jews. It is important in any decisions that you reach that you recognise this diversity of opinions.
2) *The accusations once again highlight and conflate problems associated with the IHRA definition of antisemitism*. These arise in part because of lack of clarity between the actual IHRA statement and the examples given. As many people have pointed out, the IHRA definition is very problematic, in part because it focuses explicitly on "Jews", but does not specify what is meant by "Jewish community institutions". As Stephen rightly notes, the IHRA definition specifically states that "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic". Yet, the IHRA illustrations also claim that "manifestations include the targeting of the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity". This deliberate confusion lies at the heart of many of the debates around the meaning of anti- Semitism,

My own view on this is very clear: criticism of the state of Israel is not a form of anti-Semitism, but criticism of Jews, either as individuals or a racial/ethnic group is. Likewise, criticism of the British government is not racist, but criticism of British people as a collective entity is. Stephen is not anti-semitic or racist therefore in the comments he has made about the Israeli government, in the same way that I am not racist in my criticism of the British government. The Board of Deputies of British Jews thus seems to be being disingenuous in claiming that Stephen is being racist. As Stephen rightly points out there are categorical differences between anti-Semitism, criticism of Zionism and criticism of the State of Israel.

3) *Conflation with criticism of Jeremy Corbyn*. The case made against Stephen by the Board of Deputies of British Jews seems to be prejudiced by their concern with trying to show that Jeremy Corbyn is also racist. By criticising Stephen they seem to be seeking to add ammunition to their criticism of Jeremy Corbyn, and appear to want to try to add the weight of the Church of England to their side by making these accusations. I do not have access to the full details of their arguments on this, since I am currently in China and cannot access all of the websites that I would need, but the basis of their argument against Stephen seems tenuous at best.
4) *The use of social media*. As in their previous case, the Board of Deputies of British Jews does not seem to understand the use of social media in encouraging debate. I would note here that the police concluded in respect to their earlier accusations against Stephen that there was no evidence of any criminal conduct on his behalf. The point must be reiterated now that simply reposting something on social media does not mean that one agrees with it. This practice is widely used to encourage intellectual debate. I frequently, for example, repost material with which I disagree, so as to encourage others to discuss it and help me understand better the issues raised. This is especially so when a "?" is used, and I note that Marie can der Zyl seems to have forgotten to include the "?" in her citation of purported evidence

May I also add that I find the tone of words and comments by Marie van der Zyl, such as "ad nauseam", "our community will expect", "promotion of terrorists" etc. to be unhelpful and inflammatory. They do not strengthen her arguments, but seem rather to be designed to be personally hurtful to Stephen.

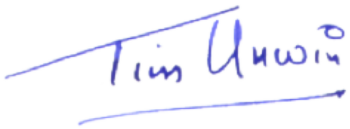
In brief, I know Stephen to be a loving and caring person who remains faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. He cares deeply for Jewish people, and while being critical of some actions of the State of Israel and extreme Zionists, he is most definitely *not* a racist.

Rather than permanently banning Stephen as the Board of Deputies of British Jews "expect" you to do, I would hope that you will see through their deeply flawed and malicious arguments, and provide a robust and clearly articulated argument in support of him, both as an individual and as a valued member of the Church of England, so that

the relationships between Christians and Jews in Britain can indeed be strengthened. Based on the comments in the case that Marie van der Zyl seeks to make, it would seem instead to be the actions of the British Board of Deputies that are designed to harm the relationships between Christians and Jews, rather than Stephen's words and deeds.

I believe the facts in my statement to be true. I am aware that the contents of this statement may be made public

You must sign and date this statement.

Signed: 

Dated: 25th November 2018