

Women and the episcopate

Some background notes

Background

- In 1994 the first women were ordained as priests in the Church of England, with provisions for those who could not in conscience accept the ministry of women priests.
- The 1998 Lambeth Conference asked all Provinces of the Anglican Communion to affirm that *"those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to, the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans"*.
- In February 2005, General Synod took note of the Rochester Report "Women Bishops in the Church of England?".

Background

- In July 2006 General Synod affirmed the majority view of the House of Bishops that admitting women to the episcopate would be a proper development. It also voted to go forward with drafting legislation to enable women to be ordained to the episcopate while making provision for those who are unable to accept the ministry of women bishops.
- In July 2010, General Synod voted in favour of the draft legislation which would be accompanied by a national Code of Practice to be drawn up by the House of Bishops.

The Process

- The draft legislation has now been referred to the dioceses for approval, and votes must be returned by **14 Nov 2011**. If a majority of dioceses approve, it will return to General Synod for final approval, followed by Parliamentary approval and Royal Assent. To pass, there needs to be a majority in both houses of Clergy and Laity.
- The Oxford Diocesan Synod can also consider further ('Following') motions proposed by members of the diocesan synod, related to the Measure and the Amending Canon. These motions must be debated and voted on separately from the main motion, and the motions and results returned to the General Symod office.

The Motion before Synod

"That this Synod approve the proposals embodied in the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure and in draft Amending Canon No.30. "

What does the Measure do?

- The Measure provides for the consecration of women bishops as well as priests while providing for those who cannot accept this by means of a code of practice which is not part of the Measure.
- In more detail the most important clauses are:
 - **Clause 1:** in addition to providing for women priests and bishops, this clause repeals the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993. This means the existing arrangements of passing Resolutions A and B (see footnote for definitions) will lapse after some short term transitional provisions described in Schedule 1. It is expected that the Act of Synod providing for Extended Episcopal oversight will also be rescinded.

What does the measure do?

- **Clause 2:** imposes a duty on the Diocesan Bishop to make a diocesan scheme providing for a male bishop to celebrate the sacraments and provide pastoral care when a parish requests this. It allows but does not require him or her to delegate other aspects of Episcopal ministry to the male bishop. If the Diocesan Bishop does not himself ordain women priests then the scheme must provide for ordination of women in the diocese and the pastoral care of female clergy.
- **Clause 3:** describes how a parish requests the ministry of a male bishop or a male priest by means of letters of request in a specified form. One form of letter relates to ongoing Episcopal ministry and pastoral care, the second is used during a vacancy to request the appointment of a male priest.

What does the measure do?

- **Clause 5:** requires the House of Bishops to draw up a Code of Practice. However the Code of Practice cannot be finalised and approved by General Synod until after the legislation has Royal assent.
- **Clause 6:** imposes a duty on Diocesan Bishops and others to have regard to the Code of Practice.

What happens next?

- Tonight we are not being asked to vote on the motion but rather send our reflections or results of a straw poll to the Diocesan Secretary *by the 16th September 2011* who will inform the debate in Diocesan Synod on the *12th November 2011*.
- If a Deanery Synod has passed a 'Following Motion' the text is asked to be reported at the same time.
- The result of the debate and any successful Following Motion(s) in Diocesan Synod will be formally communicated to General Synod as soon as possible.

Some questions?

- Has the General Synod decided to move towards women bishops?
 - The majority opinion of General Synod, even among some of those who cannot accept the ministry of women bishops, was that we should move on. A majority wanted to see adequate provision for those opposed.

Some questions?

- Was more robust provision in legislation for those who cannot accept the ministry of women bishops considered?
 - Yes in various forms, but nothing that was proposed obtained a majority in all three houses of General Synod. In particular, none of the attempts to give a male bishop independent authority, not delegated from the Diocesan Bishop, including the Archbishops' amendment in July 2010, received sufficient support. The Archbishops' amendment gained an overall majority but was narrowly defeated by the clergy in a vote by houses.

Some questions?

- **What is the purpose of the Code of Practice?**
 - It is intended to make provision for those who are unable to accept the oversight of a woman bishop, in order to enable them to remain in the Church of England.
- **Do we know what form the Code of Practice will take?**
 - No. It is not currently available. It has been indicated that a draft version of the Code of Practice will be made available in early 2012, prior to final approval of the Measure by General Synod.
- **Can the present Measure be amended?**
 - The revision process in General Synod is complete. Only the House of Bishops can make changes before the Final Approval stage.

Some questions?

- Is there any way of influencing the final form of the legislation?
 - Although the main motion may not be amended, it is open for the Diocesan Synod to pass a Following Motion, expressing an opinion regarding the final form of the legislation.
- What if the legislation fails?
 - The earliest any new legislation could be introduced into General Synod would be in 2015 after a new Synod is elected.

Deanery Synod

The Deanery are asked to consider the following three questions

- Are you in favour of ordaining women as bishops?
- Should provision be made for those who are opposed and if so - Is this code of practice the right provision?
- If we do not all agree, must we wait until we do?
- Can we move forward and yet stay united (and in what sense)?

The Lambeth Conference Statement

The Lambeth Conference 1998 affirmed that *"although some of the means by which communion is expressed may be strained or broken, there is a need for courtesy, tolerance, mutual respect, and prayer for one another, and we confirm that our desire to know or be with one another remains binding on us as Christians"*.