

FROM The Rural Dean – Women in the Episcopate Vote

Dear All

In the forthcoming session of General Synod a vote will take place with regards to progressing the legislation to make it possible to ordain women as Bishops in the Church of England. Though many people I meet express impatience and incredulity at the time it has taken to get to this point, the many delays have been because of a desire to hold the Church together as best as possible whilst moving forward to allow women to have a full role in the life and leadership of the Church. After many conversations recently I do think it would be helpful for us all to know what is happening and what the implications are, as media reports are notoriously difficult to decode!

What is **not** being debated next week is the principle of ordaining women to the Episcopate, that discussion has taken place and the Church by notable majority has chosen to move forward with this.

What **is** being debated is the structure that will make provision for those who are not in favour of the ordination of women, as Bishops or even as Priests, to still feel they have a place within the Church of England. The draft legislation for this went through the last Synod, but was sent back to the Bishops to look at again and offer any amendments they wanted to the legislation, with a request that they not make any substantial changes to that which Synod had already agreed. It is felt by many of those who are in favour of the ordination of women as Bishops, including 'WATCH' (Women And The Church), that the Bishops HAVE substantially changed the legislation making particular provision for those opposed to the ordination of women and that to go ahead with the amendments in their current form would potentially enshrine discrimination and change the way in which Bishops have authority within their own Dioceses.

Some people are writing to their General Synod Reps to ask them to send the legislation BACK to the Bishops to reconsider the legislation, others would prefer the legislation to continue to progress – you may wish to make your position known. Our own rep in the House of Laity is Emma Forward - emmaforward@yahoo.co.uk

I requested that Revd Hilary Dawson, Rector of Colyton Mission Community give a summary of the situation and she has written below.

Thank you for your time and attention

yours

Alastair

The Rector of Colyton writes:

42 out of 44 dioceses voted in favour of the measure that would allow women to be ordained as bishops. The House of Bishops has now made two amendments to the proposed legislation that will come before General Synod next week. There is a very real concern that one of the amendments has significantly changed the measure, with serious implications for the way the church understands itself and for the equality of men and women in the church, in ministry and in leadership roles. It also raises concerns for the synodical process.

There is now a danger that many years of hard work could be undone and that the measure could be voted down. Senior women clergy last week called for the debate to be adjourned and the legislation returned to the House of Bishops for further reflection. Please see their letter below for further information.

The Letter to the House of Bishops:

Following the House of Bishops' amendments many people have asked for the perspective of senior women clergy regarding the Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure as it now stands.

We the undersigned wish to express our deep dismay at the introduction of Clause 5(1)(c), which has serious implications for the way the Church understands itself and undermines women so profoundly that we are now unable to support the Measure.

We recognise that bishops voted in favour of this amendment in good faith, believing that further assurances for those unable to accept the ministry of ordained women would help secure the Measure's passing.

However, with the introduction of this clause the Measure is likely to be defeated. It is therefore our hope that the General Synod will adjourn the debate in July and return the legislation to the House of Bishops for further reflection. This will give the opportunity for the Measure (as passed by 42 of the 44 dioceses) to be returned to General Synod for approval later in the year.

The Venerable Christine Allsopp (Archdeacon of Northampton)

The Revd Canon Sarah Bullock (Bishop's Advisor for Women's Ministry Diocese of Manchester)

The Venerable Annette Cooper (Archdeacon of Colchester)

The Venerable Penny Driver (Archdeacon of Westmorland and Furness)

The Very Revd Vivienne Faull (Dean of Leicester)

The Venerable Karen Gorham (Archdeacon of Buckingham)

The Revd Canon Jane Hedges (Canon Steward & Archdeacon of Westminster)

The Venerable Canon Janet Henderson (Archdeacon of Richmond)

The Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin (Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons)

The Revd Rosemary Lain-Priestley (Chair of the National Association of Diocesan Advisers in Women's Ministry)
The Very Revd Catherine Ogle (Dean of Birmingham)
The Very Revd June Osborne (Dean of Salisbury)
The Venerable Jane Sinclair (Archdeacon of Stow and Lindsey)
The Revd Canon Celia Thomson (Canon Pastor, Gloucester Cathedral)
The Venerable Rachel Treweek (Archdeacon of Hackney)
The Very Revd Dr Frances Ward (Dean of St Edmundsbury)
The Venerable Christine Wilson (Archdeacon of Chesterfield)
The Revd Lucy Winkett (Rector, St James's Piccadilly)