

## GENERAL SYNOD

## HOUSE OF LAITY

**Unedited transcript of Dr Giddings's speech during the debate on the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure (GS 1708D) at the November 2012 group of sessions of the General Synod**

*Dr Philip Giddings (Oxford):* I want first, as Chair of the House of Laity, to welcome Bishop Justin as Archbishop-elect and express my very great appreciation for the speech he has just made. Sadly, although I agree with almost everything that he said, I cannot agree with his conclusion.

As Chair of the House of Laity, it is part of my role to ensure that the views of the whole House are heard, particularly on final approval business. Synod already knows that a substantial majority of the House and of laypeople generally are in favour of women bishops and of this draft Measure. Many speeches today are making that point. Therefore, I want to focus on a significant minority of laypeople who are opposed in principle to women bishops and to the content of the Measure before us.

Essentially, I wish to say that it is unwise to go ahead with a Measure dealing with fundamental matters of ministry and doctrine with a significant minority of our Church unable to accept its provisions. I do believe that we can find a better way.

On 7 February this year in Westminster Abbey, representatives of the Church of England and the URC took part in a service of penitence and reconciliation to mark the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Ejection of non-conforming ministers in 1662. In November 2003, this Synod endorsed the covenant for unity with the Methodist Church in 'a spirit of penitence for...our past divisions, believing that we have been impoverished through our separation and that our witness to the gospel has been weakened accordingly'.

Surely we do not want to make the same mistakes again? Can we not find a better way of taking this historic step of allowing the consecration of women as bishops without unchurching those who cannot in conscience accept it?

Last week I received a letter from a former distinguished lay member of this Synod who cannot in conscience accept the sacramental ministration of women bishops. He says, 'All I ask for is a place in that one CofE where I can continue and flourish with integrity and mutual respect, but it is precisely that which this proposed legislation denies me'. I do not agree with his views on sacramental ministry but I do not see why our disagreement requires that one or other of us has no future in the Church of England.

In 1992 I voted in favour of ordaining women to the priesthood but knowing it was unacceptable to many of my fellow Evangelicals because of their understanding of the biblical teaching on headship. I voted for that legislation because it was designed to ensure that those who could not in conscience accept it could remain with us. Today's legislative package will not achieve that.

Do we really believe that such diversity of opinion no longer exists? Legislation does not remove diversity of opinion. It is diversity. It is not prejudice. It is not simply refusal to

accept change. It is solidly theologically based judgement. That is not my view; that was recognized fully in the Rochester report. We may disagree with the dissenting minority but does that mean we have to exclude them from a future in this Church?

Those who have worked for reconciliation in various areas of life know that you cannot achieve a solution unless all parties agree to and own it. That is the missing piece in this legislative package. Those for whom the provision is intended do not own it.

We have been told that we have debated these matters long enough. Long enough perhaps for those who are in the majority and can impose their will, but not long enough to gain the consent of those who are opposed and whose consent is essential if we are to remain a united and growing Church committed to mission. We should not be in this position. We can and should find a better way.