



The Church of England has welcomed Royal Assent today for an Act that will bring forward the introduction of the first women diocesan bishops into the House of Lords.

Notification of Royal Assent for the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act was given in the House of Lords shortly before Parliament rose for the General Election.

Under the terms of the Act, the Venerable Rachel Treweek, Archdeacon of Hackney, who is announced today as the next **Bishop of Gloucester** will become the first female diocesan bishop to join the Bishops' Benches in the House of Lords.

Archdeacon Rachel will take the place vacated by the Bishop of Leicester, Tim Stevens, who retires on July 11. She will be introduced into the House of Lords after the summer recess.

Bishop Tim, who has spoken of how the presence of female diocesan bishops will "enrich and strengthen" the voice of the bishops in the House of Lords, said: "The passing of the Act is good news for Parliament as well as the Church. It means that in the next Parliament for the first time the Bishops' Benches will be occupied by women as well as men.

"There has been overwhelming support from MPs and Peers for the Act during its passage through Parliament and we are grateful to the Government and other parties for ensuring that time could be found to take it through.

"As I look to my own retirement this summer, I know that membership of the House of Lords has been a significant part of my own ministry, as undoubtedly it will be for many of those women who will join the Bishops' Benches. It is heartening to know that with the passing of this Act, and the announcement today of the Ven Rachel Treweek as the next Bishop of Gloucester, that the seat that I will vacate in the Lords will be the first on the Bishops' Benches to be taken by a woman."

The Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry MP, Second Church Estates Commissioner, said: "There has been huge support for this provision from all sides of both Houses of Parliament and I welcome the announcement of Royal Assent for this Act.

"I am delighted that this coincides with the appointment of the first female diocesan bishop in the Church of England, the Ven Rachel Treweek, who will be introduced into the House of Lords after the summer recess. I am sure her presence as a Lord Spiritual will receive a heartfelt welcome not just in the Church of England and in the Houses of Parliament but throughout the country."

Under current rules, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishops of London, Durham and Winchester are entitled to sit in the House of Lords from the start of their appointments.

The new Act, which will come into force in the next Parliament, makes provision for vacancies among the remaining 21 places, which are normally

filled according to length of service, to be filled as they arise by eligible female diocesan bishops. The provision will remain in place for 10 years, equivalent to two fixed term Parliaments.

The legislation does not prevent male bishops from entering the House of Lords during this period as vacancies will be filled, as is currently the case, by the longest serving male diocesan bishop if there is no eligible female diocesan bishop in line at that time.

After the end of the 10-year period, the provision made by the Act will come to an end and the current arrangements under the Bishoprics Act 1878 for determining which bishops are to fill vacancies in the House of Lords will be restored.

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