

GENERAL SYNOD

SOUTHWARK DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION

The Diocese of Southwark passed, on a division by Houses, the following motion:

“That this Synod, recognising the significant degree of compromise the draft Measure asks of all parts of the church, whole-heartedly supports the consecration of women to the episcopate, and requests the General Synod to debate a motion in the following form:

“That this Synod:

- (a) noting the significant support the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure has received in the Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity of diocesan synods; and
- (b) desiring that the draft Measure be returned to the Synod for consideration on the Final Approval Stage substantially unamended so that it can be seen if the proposals embodied in it in the form in which it has been referred to the dioceses can attain the level of support required to achieve Final Approval

request the House of Bishops not to exercise its power under Standing Order 60(b) to amend the draft Measure”.

The substance of this motion is now to be moved in the General Synod.

1. The proposals embodied in the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure have received considerable and substantial support across the Church of England.
2. 42 out of 44 dioceses passed the motion:

“This Synod approves the proposals embodied in the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure and in draft Amending Canon No. 30”
3. In the two dioceses where the motion was lost, it failed on very narrow margins. The voting tables are produced in GS 1847 and so it is not necessary to repeat them here. However it is worth noting the strong level of support that the draft measure has received amongst bishops, clergy and laity.
4. The Southwark Diocesan Synod was asked to consider the motion that is now before the General Synod as the final diocesan debates on the draft legislation were happening. The deaneries of Camberwell and Charlton which asked the Southwark Diocesan Synod to consider the motion were concerned to support the question that the Article 8 reference asked and which was being answered in a resoundingly positive way by dioceses across the Church. The deaneries also recognised the hard work that had gone into achieving the draft legislation and an amendment moved in the Diocesan Synod recognised the significant degree of compromise that the Measure asks of many.
5. It is significant that the current draft measure has been the only set of proposals that have managed to achieve the necessary levels of support in the General Synod. Other proposals have thus far failed.

6. The intention that lies behind this motion is simply to recognise that the current proposals are those that have received support in the General Synod and overwhelming support in Diocesan Synods and to ask, in the light of this, that the proposals be permitted to proceed to final approval stage without substantial amendment to see if the final test of two-thirds majority in each House can be reached.
7. Those proposing this motion were concerned to honour the process that has been ongoing for many years and has now brought us to the current position of having a draft measure that has received the substantial support of the wider church.
8. The motion recognises that the House of Bishops can make amendments to the draft legislation and certainly this DSM does not seek to fetter that right nor would it wish to do so. Rather it calls on the House not to exercise its powers in order to see if the current proposals might gain enough support at final approval. It could be argued that at the moment the only proposals that appear capable of attracting enough support are those embodied in the draft Measure. Equally well it may be that these proposals do not receive the necessary majorities at final approval and then would be the most appropriate time to return to other models or alternatively to start afresh.
9. In particular the Southwark motion is aimed at encouraging the House of Bishops to avoid making an amendment that might result in a further Article 8 reference to the Dioceses. Such a reference would be required under the Constitution of the General Synod if the House were to amend the legislation such that ‘the substance of the proposals embodied in’ the Measure were changed. Under the Constitution the Presidents, Prolocutors and Chair and Vice-Chair of the House of Laity have to determine whether the requirements of Article 8 have been complied with, on the basis of legal advice received by them. That would include determining whether any amendments made by the House of Bishops changed the ‘substance of the proposals embodied in’ in the Measure. Given the high level of support for the draft Measure as it stands, it may be thought that Diocesan Synods might feel alienated from the process if they perceive that their views have been disregarded.
10. If the draft Measure were not to proceed to the Final Approval Stage in its current form that would certainly raise many questions in the mind of General Synod members as well as many others within the church and without. Were there to be any attempt to amend the draft Measure in ways that the Synod had already rejected, we would argue that the current process was being curtailed prior to its natural conclusion.
11. The search for draft legislation to permit the consecration of women to the Episcopate whilst making provision for those unable to accept this development has occupied the time, effort and energy of many people over many years. To date the only proposals that have emerged through the lengthy series of reports, debates and deliberations to have consistently received support are those in the current Measure. All the Southwark Diocesan Synod motion seeks to do is to ask that they be permitted to proceed to final approval stage unamended to see if they can reach the necessary level of support to become law.

The Revd Dr Rosemarie Mallett (Southwark 216)