

1. In July 2000, General Synod passed the following motion proposed by the Archdeacon of Tonbridge:

That this Synod ask the House of Bishops to initiate further theological study on the episcopate, focussing on the issues that need to be addressed in preparation for the debate on women in the episcopate in the Church of England, and to make a progress report on this study to Synod in the next two years.

2. In order to carry out the theological study referred to in Archdeacon Judith Rose's motion, the House of Bishops established a working party which began its work in April 2001.

The membership of the working party is as follows:

The Rt Revd Dr Michael Nazir-Ali (Bishop of Rochester, Chairman)

Dr Christina Baxter (Principal, St John's College, Nottingham)

The Rt Revd Wallace Benn (Bishop of Lewes)

The Very Revd Vivienne Faull (Provost of Leicester)

The Rt Revd David Gillett (Bishop of Bolton)

The Revd Deacon Christine Hall (University College, Chichester)

The Rt Revd Christopher Herbert (Bishop of St Albans)

The Rt Revd Christopher Hill (Bishop of Stafford)

Professor Ann Loades (University of Durham)

The Rt Revd Dr Geoffrey Rowell (Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe)

The Ven Dr Joy Tetley (Archdeacon of Worcester)

In addition there are two ecumenical representatives:

The Revd Dr Anthony Barratt (Vice Rector, St John's Seminary, Womersley - The Roman Catholic Church)

The Revd Dr Richard Clutterbuck (Principal, The West of England Ministerial Training Course - The Methodist Church)

two consultants:

The Revd Prof Nicholas Sagovsky (University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne)

The Revd Canon Professor Anthony Thiselton (University of Nottingham)

and three staff assessors:

The Revd Preb Dr Paul Avis (General Secretary, CCU)

Mr Philip Mawer (Secretary General, House of Bishops)

Mr Stephen Slack (Legal Officer, Archbishops Council)

In attendance:

Dr Martin Davie (Theological Consultant, House of Bishops, Secretary to the Working Party)

Mr Jonathan Neil-Smith (Secretary, House of Bishops)

Mr Adrian Vincent (Executive Officer, House of Bishops).

3. At its first meeting on 23 April 2001 it was agreed that:

The work should be in three stages. Firstly an examination of the theology of the episcopate. Secondly, on the basis of that theology, to ask whether it was right to have women bishops. Thirdly, to address the issue of communion and the impairment of communion, if the Church was to ordain women to the episcopate.

It was also agreed that in accordance with classical Anglican theology the working party should constantly bear in mind the witness of Scripture, as well as tradition, reason, and the lived experience of both women's ministry in general and the ministry of ordained women in particular. In addition, the ecumenical implications of any move by the Church of England would also need to be examined.

4. The six meetings of the working party which have been held so far have concentrated on the first stage of the process, while not neglecting some of the issues raised by the others.
- The members of the working party have considered the origins, nature and development of the episcopal office, the relationship between episkope and episcopacy, and the way the episcopate relates to the presbyterate and the diaconate.

They have done this by looking at a number of documents which explore the nature of episcopacy from a variety of different perspectives, the Bishop of Rochester's paper *Women Bishops - the Task Ahead*, the Cameron report *Episcopal Ministry*, Professor John Webster's paper *The Self Organizing Power of the Gospel: Episcopacy and Community Formation*, the diaconate working party report *For Such a Time as This*, two papers from the Islington clerical conference of 1966, *The New Testament Concept of Episkope* by John Stott and *Bishops and Order* by R E Nixon, and a paper from Dr Paul Avis on *Episcopacy in Relation to the Foundation and Form of the Church*.

- The members of the working party have also begun to look at relevant Biblical material, and to consider how this

material should shape our understanding of the ministry of women in the Church today. In order to begin to get into this material they have looked at an unpublished chapter by Professor Richard Bauckham on 'Junia the Apostle', an extract from Professor Thiselton's new commentary on 1 Corinthians, and a variety of commentaries on 1 Timothy introduced by the Bishop of Lewes. In addition, the Bishop of Stafford introduced a discussion of R. Alastair Campbell's book *The Elders* which explores how the leadership of the Church developed during the New Testament period.

- The members of the working party have also begun to look at ecumenical documents relating to the issues of episcopacy and the ordination of women. So far they have looked at the Most Revd Professor John Zizioulas' address to the 1988 Lambeth Conference, the Green Paper on the ordination of women as bishops produced by the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Conference report *Episkope and Episcopacy*, and an article entitled *The Ordination of Women: An Ecumenical Problem* by the Orthodox philosopher and theologian Elisabeth Behr-Sigel.
 - Finally, they have begun to consider the issues of how to handle differences within the Church on the ordination of women as bishops, and how to make provision for those opposed to their ordination, by reflecting on the Eames Commission material *Women in the Anglican Episcopate* and the way in which the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod has been working in the Church of England.
5. Some significant issues which have arisen during the working party's discussions are the following:

- i. How should a Christian understanding of the relationship between men and women be reflected in the way the Church is ordered?
- ii. Is it appropriate to use the language of representation as a way of understanding the role of the ordained ministry within the Church, or does the use of such language tend to focus attention on the minister rather than on the activity of God?
- iii. If it is appropriate to use the language of representation, do arguments about inclusiveness in terms of representing both the Church and Christ as the risen and ascended Lord apply to all the ordained, priests as well as bishops?
- iv. What is distinctive about episcopal ministry? Is a bishop more than just the president of the presbyteral council? What is there in the apostolic and prophetic aspects of episcopal ministry which affects women becoming bishops?
- v. If there is a significant element within the Church which does not accept women bishops, what would be the implications for (a) the bishop's role as a promoter of unity in the local Church, (b) the collegiality of the House of Bishops, (c) relationships in the worldwide Anglican Communion, especially with partner dioceses, if the Church of England decided to proceed in this direction? In addition, what would be the implications for the consciences of those in favour of ordaining women as bishops if the Church decided not to do so?
- vi. Ecumenically, some churches will not go further in terms of visible unity if the Church of England excludes women

from certain positions of oversight. For others, women bishops may be a more serious obstacle to unity than women priests. Are there implications here for our ecumenical priorities?

6. As well as engaging in the work just outlined, the working party has also launched a process of wide consultation by inviting written submissions from individuals, groups and the other provinces of the Anglican Communion, and by asking selected individuals to come to talk to the working party in person.

So far there have been more than 400 written submissions to the working party and, of those which express a definite opinion, are fairly evenly balanced for and against the appointment of women bishops in the Church of England.

These submissions have consisted of letters written by individuals, letters written on behalf of churches such as St James' Piccadilly, or Emmanuel Wimbledon, and letters that are the result of activity by a number of special interest groups.

There have also been submissions from the Church Union, Forward in Faith, WATCH and from a working party set up by the Barking Episcopal Area of the Diocese of Chelmsford.

There have been brief replies from the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Church of Hong Kong, the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea, the Church of North India, the Church of the Province of Southern Africa, The Episcopal Church of

Rwanda, the Episcopal Church of the Sudan, and the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East.

More detailed material has been received from the Anglican Church of Australia, the Church of Ireland, the Episcopal Church U.S.A., and the Scottish Episcopal Church. We have also been told that we may expect a considered response in due course from the Church in Wales.

The submissions received from this country highlight a number of issues on both sides of the debate.

- There are basic theological issues about God's intention for the relationship between the sexes and how this should be reflected in who is ordained by the Church.
- There are ecclesiological and ecumenical issues centring on the questions of whether the Church of England possesses the authority to move to ordaining women as bishops and the consequences of any such move on our ecumenical relationships.
- There are issues of experience centring on the question of whether the ordination of women as priests has enriched the life of the Church or caused division.
- There are missiological issues to do with how the Church can most effectively witness to the Gospel in our contemporary culture.
- Finally, there are practical issues to do with the likely consequences for the Church of ordaining women bishops,

and the arrangements that would need to be put in place to help those who could not accept such a development.

The replies received from the other Provinces of the Anglican Communion have enabled the working party to begin to see where the Anglican Communion as a whole currently stands on the issue of women bishops, and although the replies received represent only a small part of the Communion they have enabled the following provisional conclusions to be drawn:

- There is a move within the Anglican Communion towards ordaining women as bishops, and there is a school of thought that the decision to ordain women as bishops was implicit in the decision to ordain them as Priests/Presbyters.
- This having been said, the Communion is in a variety of different places on this issue.
 - i. In some churches, such as Papua New Guinea, the issue has not yet been considered (or is not even on the agenda for consideration).
 - ii. In some churches, such as the Episcopal Church of Scotland and the Anglican Church of Australia, legislation for the ordination of women as bishops is in process, but agreement to the move has not yet been reached.
 - iii. In some churches such as ECUSA, Hong Kong, North India, and Ireland the idea of women bishops has been accepted and women Bishops can be ordained (although women bishops may not actually be in post).

- iv. It seems probable that in due course there will be a female Metropolitan and possibly even a female Primate in either Canada or the United States
- In some places where legislation for the ordination of women as bishops is being considered, such as Australia and Scotland, the legislation includes models for alternative Episcopal oversight in line with the suggestion made by the Eames Commission. However, the principle of alternative oversight is by no means universally accepted (there is no provision for it in Canada for example), and a variety of forms of such oversight have been suggested.
7. As part of its process of consultation the working party has already met with Archdeacon Rose, Bishop Victoria Matthews from Edmonton in Canada, and representatives from both WATCH and Forward in Faith. It is also hoped that it will prove possible to meet with Bishop Mark Dyer and the Most Revd Professor John Zizioulas (the co-chairmen of the International Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue).
8. Having reported its progress to the House of Bishops at its January and May meetings, the working party will make a presentation to the General Synod in July as required by Archdeacon Rose's original motion. The presentation will be led by the Bishop of Rochester, but with other members of the working party also taking part, and will be followed by discussion.
9. The working party has a number of pieces of work which it hopes to undertake in this stage of its activities. These include:

- A paper from Deacon Christine Hall and Professor Ann Loades on personhood and transformation for ministry.
- A paper from Dr Christina Baxter on the concept of representative ministry.
- A note from Professor Nicholas Sagovsky on a Christian understanding of justice.
- Reviews of relevant literature including material from Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Bishop Kallistos Ware on the ordination of women in the Orthodox church, from Francis Sullivan on the development of ministry in the early church, from Antoinette Wire on the place of women in the Corinthian Church, and from Ute Eisen on women office holders in early Christianity.
- A discussion between Professor Thiselton and Professor Gerald Bray on the interpretation of 1 Corinthians, and continuing input on the Biblical material from New Testament scholars.
- A consideration of the relationship between the common vocation of all the baptised and the specific vocation to the ordained ministry.
- An exploration of relevant Patristic material.
- An examination of the issues surrounding the ordination of women in our partner churches in Scandinavia.
- A re-examination of the recommendations of the Eames Commission and the future of special provision for those opposed to the ordination of women.

- Reflection on the likely ecumenical consequences of any decision to appoint or not to appoint women bishops in the Church of England.
10. Having concluded the present stage of its work, the next stage will be for the working party to begin to discuss how to handle the issues which have been raised in the material it has looked at and the submissions it has received. The aim will be to see if it can reach a common mind on these issues, and if this is not possible to see if it can suggest constructive ways of handling those matters where agreement does not exist in such a way as to enable the members of the Church of England to go forward together.

Although the work of the working party will focus on an examination of the theological issues surrounding the nature and function of the episcopate and the possibility of the ordination of women as bishops in the Church of England, it will be open to the group to produce practical recommendations if this seems desirable.

The working party will aim to complete its work before the current Synod comes to an end in 2005.

Following consideration of the working party's report by the present Synod, it will be for the new Synod to consider draft legislation, if it so desires.

+ Michael Roffen, Chairman
31 May 2002

Dr Martin Davie, Secretary

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