

**WOMEN IN THE EPISCOPATE**

**NOTE BY THE PRESIDENTS**

1. In July the Synod voted by majorities in each House for setting in train the process for removing the legal obstacles to the ordination of women to the episcopate. It asked the House of Bishops to complete, by this month, the assessment which it was already making of the various relevant options. It also instructed the Business Committee to make sufficient time available in February 2006 for a further Synod debate with a view to possible decisions.

2. The text of the motion was as follows:

‘That this Synod

- (a) consider that the process for removing the legal obstacles to the ordination of women to the episcopate should now be set in train;
- (b) invite the House of Bishops, in consultation with the Archbishops’ Council, to complete by January 2006, and report to the Synod, the assessment which it is making of the various options for achieving the removal of the legal obstacles to the ordination of women to the episcopate and ask that it give specific attention to the issues of canonical obedience and the universal validity of orders throughout the Church of England as it would affect clergy and laity who cannot accept the ordination of

women to the episcopate on theological grounds; and

- (c) instruct the Business Committee to make sufficient time available in the February 2006 group of sessions for the Synod to debate the report, and in the light of the outcome to determine on what basis it wants the necessary legislation prepared and establish the necessary drafting group.’
3. The working group established by the House and chaired by the Bishop of Guildford has completed its assessment and the House has agreed its publication (GS 1605). It is now being circulated to members of Synod.
4. The Business Committee has scheduled three opportunities at the February Synod for considering the subject of women in the episcopate:
  - an initial time on the Monday for **reflection on the ecumenical responses** now received on *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* (the ‘Rochester report’) as set out in GS Misc 807
  - on Tuesday morning a **take note debate on the assessment in GS 1605 (the ‘Guildford report’)**
  - a debate on Thursday morning when Synod will be able to **determine what should happen next.**
5. In the light of discussions in the House of Bishops and the Archbishops’ Council we offer the Synod the following reflections on the choices which it now faces.

6. In the introduction to their assessment the members of the Bishop of Guildford's group write: **'We do not minimise the difficulty of the choices facing the Church. There is no course of action, including the status quo, that is free of pain and risk.'** This is a good starting point for approaching the debate scheduled for the Thursday.

### **Possible outcomes**

7. There are, in principle, a range of possible outcomes to that debate. One, as foreshadowed in the motion passed last July, would be for Synod to conclude that it was ready now to reach a clear view as between the possible options and, accordingly, to pass a motion establishing a drafting group to work up the chosen option in more detail and prepare the necessary legislation.
8. Another would be for Synod, recognising the significance of the choice facing it and the relatively short period since the publication of GS 1605, to conclude that it wanted a little more time for members to reflect and consult on the report, in the light of the February debates, before choosing an option and establishing a drafting group. In that case the Synod might wish to pass a motion instructing the Business Committee to schedule a further debate in July.
9. A third approach would be for Synod to conclude, in the light of GS 1605, that the search for an acceptable way forward required a much more extensive time of reflection across the Church before any choice could be made and legislative drafting begun. In this case the Synod might wish to pass a motion initiating a formal process of consultation in dioceses and deaneries preparatory to further consideration in Synod.

Given the time necessary for such a process of consultation, the earliest date for subsequent consideration by Synod would probably be July 2007.

### **Some considerations**

10. In considering the advantages and disadvantages of these possible approaches, and variants of them, we believe that Synod will want to weigh carefully the following considerations. The first concerns the nature of the decisions to be taken. At this stage Synod is not debating actual legislation but whether it is ready to give a specific mandate to those who would be appointed to prepare legislation. No drafting group can work in a policy vacuum. Before any legislative drafting can begin, Synod will, therefore, have to have reached a view on what broad approach it wants the group to take, even though it may leave many of the details for the group to think further about in order to identify possible solutions and report back to Synod in the usual legislative process.
11. What flows from that is that any decisions reached at this stage in relation to women in the episcopate are necessarily provisional. The various steps involved in the full process of legislative consideration are, for reference, set out as an annex to this note. Nothing that might be decided at this early stage fetters the ability of the Synod to consider matters afresh when it comes to consider the legislation itself and any amendments that members of Synod may wish to suggest at that stage.
12. That does not mean that decisions reached before a Measure is drafted are of second order importance. On the contrary, the Synod is approaching a significant fork in the road. The

length and complexity of the legislative process mean that to set off in a particular direction which did not have the potential of ultimately commanding sufficient support would cause much difficulty. While simple majorities suffice at most stages, to receive final approval any legislation of this kind has to receive a two-thirds majority in each House of the Synod, following endorsement by a majority of diocesan synods.

13. This is not to suggest that the Synod should depart from its normal rules and introduce special voting thresholds earlier in the process than is provided in the Standing Orders. There are good reasons for the rules as they stand. What it does mean, however, is that Synod needs to keep in mind that in order for women to be admitted to the episcopate it will not be sufficient for there to be clear majority support in each House for the general principle of removing the present legal obstacles. There will need to be a specific option that comes to command a wide measure of acceptance.
  
14. This is not only, nor even primarily, a matter of synodical arithmetic. Decisions about the episcopate affect our fundamental identity as part of the Church of God and need to be taken in the context of sustained and prayerful reflection. The Rochester and Guildford reports have provided rich resources for us as we seek to discern God's will for us. As Synod considers what the next steps should be, it is important that those decisions are seen as part of a continuing process of discernment guided by the Holy Spirit, who will 'lead us into all truth', a process with clear theological integrity

## **Moving to a decision**

15. Tuesday's take note debate on the Guildford report will provide the opportunity for members of Synod to listen to each other and deepen their understanding of the issues raised by each of the options which it assesses. Then on the Thursday there will need to be a motion before the Synod to test its mind on the next steps.
16. The House of Bishops has carefully considered what motion it should itself bring before the Synod on the Thursday in the light of its own consideration of the options set out in the Guildford report. The motion will, of course, be open to amendment in Synod in the usual way.
17. As last July's debate and voting confirmed, there is a range of views within the House of Bishops, as within each of the other Houses, on whether, and if so how, women should be admitted to the episcopate. A majority of the House believes that an approach along the lines of Transferred Episcopal Arrangements, as illustrated in the Guildford report, could help maintain the highest possible degree of communion within the Church of England in the event that women be admitted to the episcopate.
18. Equally, we are very conscious that this is a new option which raises a number of questions and has not yet been subject to the same degree of discussion and reflection as those other approaches – a single clause measure or a third/free province – both of which have their advocates in the wider Church. The House believes, therefore, that it would be unwise to attempt to reach a clear view at the February Synod as between the possible options. Some

further reflection is needed before Synod returns to the matter in July.

19. As a result, the Archbishop of Canterbury will, on behalf of the House, move the following motion at the beginning of Thursday's debate:

'That this Synod:

- a.) welcome the assessment made in GS 1605 of the options for removing the legal obstacles to the ordination of women to the episcopate;
- b.) consider that an approach along the lines of "Transferred Episcopal Arrangements", expressed in a measure with an associated code of practice, merits further exploration as a basis for proceeding in a way that will maintain the highest possible degree of communion in the Church of England;
- c.) invite the House of Bishops, as part of its ongoing work on the underlying issues raised by the "Rochester report", to produce for the July group of sessions a statement of the theological, ecumenical and canonical implications of such an approach;
- d.) instruct the Business Committee to make sufficient time available at the July group of sessions for Synod to determine, in the light of advice from the House of Bishops, the next steps, including a possible timetable for legislation.

- e.) invite all members of Synod to reflect prayerfully and consult widely on the serious decisions now facing the Church.’

+ROWAN CANTUAR:

+SENTAMU EBOR:

11 January 2006



Possible Synod timetable (on the assumption that the legislation represented both Article 7 business and Article 8 business)

- i) Drafting Group appointed. Oversees preparation of draft Measure and Canon for introduction to the Synod (*a year is likely to elapse between the decision to appoint a legislative drafting group and its report to Synod*);
- ii) Draft Measure and Canon introduced, given First Consideration by Synod and referred to Revision Committee to consider proposals for amendment (*the Revision Committee stage could also be expected to take a year*);
- iii) Report from Revision Committee considered by Synod, followed by the Revision Stage in Synod (*whether this needed to straddle more than one group of sessions would depend on the nature of the legislation and the number of amendments at this stage*);
- iv) Reference of draft Measure and Canon, as amended, to diocesan synods under Article 8. The approval of a majority of the synods is required for the legislation to

proceed further (*A year to 18 months would need to be allowed for this stage to allow dioceses the option for an initial diocesan synod debate, and possible reference to deanery synods before a formal diocesan synod vote. A reference of the legislation to dioceses at this stage in the process is mandatory, whether or not there has been pre-legislative consultation of the dioceses*);

- v) Report back to Synod from the Business Committee on the diocesan reference and Final Drafting;
- vi) Consideration by the House of Bishops;
- vii) Possible references to the Convocations and House of Laity under Article 7 (*this would not normally be at the same group of sessions as Final Approval*);
- viii) Final approval by Synod. A two-thirds majority in each House is required at this point;
- ix) Parliamentary scrutiny of Measure, including by the Ecclesiastical Committee (*this would probably take some months*);
- x) Royal Assent for Measure and Promulging of Canon by Synod.

