

WOMEN IN THE EPISCOPATE

NOTE BY THE PRESIDENTS

1. In February the Synod welcomed the ‘Guildford Report’ (GS 1605). It agreed that an approach along the lines of ‘Transferred Episcopal Arrangements’ merited further exploration. In addition, it invited 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. The full text of the motion is reproduced at the beginning of the report from the Bishops of Gloucester and Guildford to the House of Bishops, circulated separately as GS Misc 826.

2. We invited the Bishops of Gloucester and Guildford to produce their report to help the House discharge the commission that the Synod had given it. We are very grateful to them for the intensive effort that they have put in over the past four months. We are also grateful to the Faith and Order Advisory Group for producing additional resources for reflection on some ecclesiological issues associated with the admission of women to the episcopate. They are being circulated to the Synod as GS Misc 827.

3. Earlier this month the House of Bishops met to take stock and consider what advice to offer the Synod in the light of the February motion and the further work undertaken since then. The meeting of the House was informed by an intensive and

fruitful exchange immediately beforehand at the annual Bishops' Meeting.

4. That meeting was enriched by the presence and participation of a group of senior women clergy and lay people. In addition we all had the benefit of an address from Cardinal Kasper of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Cardinal's paper is printed in GS Misc 827.

5. A brief summary cannot do justice to the value and high quality of the exchanges at the Bishops' Meeting but certain clear points emerged:

- **there was strong support for the recommendation of the Bishops of Gloucester and Guildford that the House of Bishops and the Synod needed now to reach a clear view on the underlying theological issue concerning admitting women to the episcopate.** The present phase of exploration and reflection initiated by the 'Rochester Report' in November 2004 now needed to be brought to a close;
- **the further exploration of 'TEA' by the Bishops of Gloucester and Guildford had failed to win over the substantial number who had expressed serious reservations about it.** Many of those who favoured admitting women to the episcopate still wanted to see legislation that was as simple as possible and avoided any suggestion that the ministry of women as bishops and priests would be treated differently by the Church from that of men;

- **among those opposed to women bishops, those who had initially been prepared to give TEA a cautious welcome indicated that they could no longer support it if it were to be developed and clarified in the ways proposed by the two bishops;**
- **none of the other possible approaches canvassed in the Guildford Report or in the report by the two bishops appeared to command sufficient consent to offer an assured way of proceeding, not least given the requirement for two-thirds majorities at the end of the legislative process.** There also remained considerable uncertainty over how best to meet the declared wish of the House and of Synod itself to maintain the highest possible degree of communion in the Church of England;
- **there was in all quarters a clear commitment to continued dialogue to try and find an acceptable way forward.** The exchange was an important moment for building trust and recognising a shared commitment to the well-being of the Church of England. A way needed to be found to create time and space within which solutions could be identified and owned.

6. Against that background, the House of Bishops reached the following conclusions. **First it agreed that the Synod should now be explicitly invited to reach a view on whether admitting women to the episcopate in the Church of England would be theologically justified.** Although last July's debate has been widely seen as a

discussion of the underlying principle, the resulting motion was in fact expressed in terms of process.

7. In order to make progress, there needs now to be clarity on the issue of substance. Is the admission of women to the episcopate in the Church of England judged to be consonant with the faith of the Church as the Church of England has received it and would it be a proper development in proclaiming afresh in this generation the grace and truth of Christ?

8. Having reflected carefully on the comprehensive analysis in the ‘Rochester Report’ and the many comments and contributions which it has stimulated, including from ecumenical partners, the majority of the House of Bishops have answered that question in the affirmative. The Archbishop of York will be moving the motion on the morning of Saturday of 8 July to welcome and affirm the view of the majority of the House of Bishops.

9. Secondly, if that motion is carried, the House wishes to commend to the Synod a way of proceeding which will allow a continuing process of dialogue and discernment over the best way forward. Until now the assumption has been that the Synod might be invited to endorse a particular set of arrangements in broad outline before a legislative drafting group was established. The House now believes, however, that a different sequence of events may prove more fruitful.

10. If women are to be admitted to the episcopate there are certain legal changes that need to be effected, both by way of Measure and Canon, to lift the present prohibitions. **The House recommends that a legislative drafting group**

now be established to prepare those provisions. They will be needed irrespective of what other arrangements may eventually be put in place.

11. The unresolved question, of course, is what those additional arrangements should be and what legal underpinning would be necessary or desirable for them. **The view of the House is that this question will best be approached by inviting the drafting group itself to prepare a range of options that it would then submit for consideration by the House of Bishops and then the Synod in advance of first consideration of the Measure.**

12. This is an unusual procedure and will place significant demands on the legislative drafting group. Nevertheless, it has a number of advantages. It will mean that the next stage of the process involves people from all three Houses of Synod. It will mean that the further exploration of options can be illuminated by the production, illustratively, of draft legal provisions, whether measure, amending canon, regulations or code of practice. It also allows for wide consultation. This process has, in the view of the House, the potential to identify more clearly where there are now significant areas of convergence and where there are specific choices that will have to be made.

13. If Saturday's motion is carried, the Archbishop of Canterbury will, therefore, move a motion on the morning of Monday, 10 July inviting the Synod to commend this process. The House considered very carefully whether it should, at this stage, invite the Synod to rule any particular options in or out. It concluded against doing so. The drafting group will need to make its own assessment in the light of the full range of views expressed in all previous

debates. It will also be able to draw on the invaluable analyses in the ‘Guildford Report’ and the ‘Guildford and Gloucester Report’, without being limited to the range of options considered there.

14. There is one further matter to which we need draw attention following discussion in the House of Bishops. Section 6 of the ‘Guildford and Gloucester Report’ begins with a careful consideration of Canon A4 and the question raised by the Bishop of Norwich in the February Synod about (re-)ordination. Canon A4 states that all those who are ordained or consecrated bishops, priests and deacons according to the Ordinal are not only lawfully so ordained but ‘ought to be accounted both by themselves and others, to be truly bishops, priests and deacons’.

15. The Bishops of Guildford and Gloucester accurately record that when women were admitted to the priesthood in the Church of England Canon A4 was not suspended. It remains in force, though its practical outworking has been qualified as a result of Part II of the 1993 Measure, which allows parishes to decline to receive the ministry of women priests.

16. The legislative drafting group will need to pay particular attention to this issue in its further work. Just as the 1993 legislation left Canon A4 intact, so, **legislation to admit women to the episcopate will not commend itself to the majority of the House of Bishops if it involves any amendment to Canon A4.**

17. For those unable to receive the ministry of women priests or in due course bishops this is, we recognise, a sensitive issue. Nevertheless we would remind them, and

indeed those on the other side of the debate, of resolution III.2 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. Among other things, it called on the provinces of the Communion **‘to affirm that those who dissent from as well as those who assent to, the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans.’** The House of Bishops remains committed to the search for a way forward that will enable the Church of England to continue to make that affirmation.

18. We are conscious that, for many, it is a matter of frustration that the Church of England is finding it difficult to come to a clear mind on the way forward. The decisions that we face do, however, affect our fundamental identity as Anglicans within the Church of God. They also challenge us to find ways of reaching out to those who discern the will of God for the Church differently. We believe that the proposals that the House of Bishops is inviting the Synod to endorse will provide a means of moving forward in a way that will continue to allow God’s Spirit to move among us and lead us into all Truth.

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