

## Women in the episcopate

**The debate in General Synod in July 2008 concerning the ordination of women to the episcopate has generated a great deal of media coverage and not a little speculation and misunderstanding. The Bishops of Peterborough and Brixworth, having discussed the matter with the Bishop's Council, offer the following observations.**

We are aware that there will be a variety of reactions to the vote in General Synod. The fact that the motion was passed by a two-thirds majority reflects a very strong affirmation of the ministry of ordained women. We are also mindful that a third of the Synod voted against it. We believe that this minority represents a significant number of people and their parishes, whose presence and ministry among us we also value and affirm.

The partial and at times misleading reporting of the decision by sections of the national media has perhaps obscured the very precise wording of the Synod's decision. While re-affirming the view of the majority that women should be admitted to the episcopate, it also affirmed that 'special arrangements be available, within the existing structures of the Church of England, for those who as a matter of theological conviction will not be able to receive the ministry of women as bishops or priests'.

It resolved that these should be contained in a **statutory** national code of practice and requested that the drafting group should prepare draft legislation and a draft code of practice for the consideration of Synod in February. It will be for the Synod, and in due course our own diocesan synod, to decide whether the draft code is (to borrow the Archbishop of Canterbury's word) 'robust' enough to provide assurance for those who disagree with women bishops.

We recognise that there is a great deal of work to be done before suitable legislation can be drawn up and agreed, and that discussion will be continuing for some years before it is enacted. **We therefore have the space for quiet reflection and continued listening to each other before the final decision about the legislation is made.**

We therefore urge everyone

- to pray for those who will be responsible for drawing up the legislation and the code of practice;
- to continue the fruitful discussions and exchanges of views that have already occurred, so that we can all grow in our understanding of each other, and work with each other, in our common task of bearing witness to Christ in the world;
- to participate fully in the process of discussion of the legislation through deanery chapters, deanery and diocesan synods; and
- to refrain from pre-emptive actions or statements before the exact details of the legislation and code of practice are published and agreed.

Finally, it remains our intention in this diocese to work for unity in mission and ministry with all priests and church members alike. By maintaining good relationships of mutual affection and respect we have the opportunity to model to the world a new way of dealing with differences and realising in our own experience our Lord's command to 'love one another as I have loved you'.

Therefore we ask all to seek from God the grace to be charitable with one another, moderate in tone, gentle in spirit, patient in listening, gracious in dissent and supportive of all who seek to lift high the name of Jesus Christ in the world.

The Rt Revd Ian Cundy  
Bishop of Peterborough

The Rt Revd Frank White  
Bishop of Brixworth

**The General Synod motion moved by the Bishop of Gloucester:**

That this Synod:

- a) affirm that the wish of its majority is for women to be admitted to the episcopate;
- b) affirm its view that special arrangements be available, within the existing structures of the Church of England, for those who as a matter of theological conviction will not be able to receive the ministry of women as bishops or priests;
- c) affirm that these should be contained in a statutory national code of practice to which all concerned would be required to have regard; and
- d) instruct the legislative drafting group, in consultation with the House of Bishops, to complete its work accordingly, including preparing the first draft of a code of practice, so that the Business Committee can include first consideration of the draft legislation in the agenda for the February 2009 group of sessions.

**The motion was carried by a division of the three houses of Synod.**

House of Bishops – For 28, Against 12, Abstentions 1

House of Clergy – For 124, Against 44, Abstentions 4

House of Laity – For 111, Against 68, Abstentions 2