

Synod supports women bishops legislation

At its October meeting, the Peterborough Diocesan Synod voted in favour of the General Synod's draft scheme to facilitate the ordination of women as bishops.

Although General Synod has already agreed in principle that there is no theological objection to women bishops, it has asked all 44 Church of England dioceses to vote on a specific motion as part of the consultation and legislative process. Only if a majority of dioceses agree to it can the process continue towards a final vote next July.

During the Synod, which took place in Peterborough Cathedral, Bishop Donald dispensed with a Presidential address in order to give more time to the debate. He had outlined the issues dispassionately at a previous, open, meeting of the Synod last July.

He did however have the last word in the debate before voting took place. He said that he was cross that the Code of Practice, which will spell out in detail how those who are opposed to the ordination of women will be treated under the proposed legislation, had not been produced so that the package could

be considered as a whole. (At his teaching meeting in July, Bishop Donald had explained that the lawyers had declared that a code of practice could not be drawn up until the Measure was passed in principle, a ruling that Bishop Donald and others regretted.)

However, he affirmed that if the proposed Measure is passed, "I will be included in consecrating women as bishops." He also said that if the provision for people opposed to women bishops rests with the diocesan bishop, he would be "as generous as I possibly can be to those who disagree. I will do all I can to hold you in the diocese and help you feel that you are loved and wanted."

Nineteen people contributed to the debate. It focused on the

motion passed down from General Synod for which no amendments could be tabled. There was however a following motion which dioceses are also debating, requesting a more specific provision of bishops for those unable to accept women in the episcopate. The wording and voting figures for both is below. There is not space here to record all that was said, but this is a digest of the main points made.

A number of people, irrespective of whether or not they support women bishops, expressed concern about the uncertainty in the Measure of the arrangements that would be made for churches and clergy unable to accept the ministry of a woman bishop.

Canon David Bird (Northampton) confessed that he was heavy hearted. "I can't win here. I've supported women in ministry, and I've supported people who can't accept their ministry. The church isn't a democracy. We have a different law, the law of love. The minority who disagree are significant and the law of love must take them seriously. This compels me to seek the way forward to keep all on board but I'm not convinced that the motion does that."



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Revd Stephen Trott

(Northampton) suggested that it was a flawed piece of legislation. He was one of several speakers who wished that a single clause measure had been put forward, which would not have required current arrangements for parishes which cannot accept women's ministry to be repealed without replacement arrangements being specified at this stage.

Revd George Rogers (Peterborough) agreed. "I'm voting against not because I'm opposed to women bishops but because we're replacing one wrong with another," he said.

Revd Mark Lucas (Kettering) suggested that delegation of ministry to another bishop for those who cannot accept women in the role "is not enough. The legislation is seriously un-Anglican and ungenerous."

Michael Truman (Kettering) said he intended to stay in the Church of England. "We have a mission to bring this country back to a Christian way of life and we can't do that if we're weak. It's not about turning the clock back, but providing care. I work with female clergy and I hope they feel I do so courteously. Both ends of the church need protection. A code of practice will not do; it relies on too many ifs and buts."

Marietta Lichfield (Kettering) wanted to safeguard the Anglo-Catholic tradition for her children's children. "You should never sign anything you don't understand," she said. "The code of practice isn't even written. Minority groups are usually treated with extra care. Don't push us out."

However, speaking in favour of the motion, the **Archdeacon of**

Oakham, the Ven David Painter, disagreed with those who said that the legislation was flawed; rather "it's a very serious piece of legislation and the fruit of a great deal of thought and prayer," he said. "There is so much evidence of the richness and blessing that women's ordination has brought to the Church of England and we shall be faithless if we hang back this time."

Dennis Allsopp (General Synod) called on Synod to "look at reality. We have had women clergy for 20 years. They make up one third of all clergy, and 50 per cent of those in training are women. Seventeen dioceses have so far voted in favour of the motion with majorities of over 80 per cent." He pointed out that General Synod members are not delegates, and don't have to reflect the views of the dioceses when they vote next July. Some, he suggested, had "kept quiet" about their

"Both ends of the church need protection"

views at the last election and that their opinions do not fully reflect the view of the wider Church. "How will you feel?" he asked, if the Measure fails by a few votes in the House of Laity next July. "Many more years of dithering and paralysis will ensue. Full concessions are embodied in the proposal."

Revd Lee Francis-Dehqani (Rutland) agreed. He said it was a myth that the Act of Synod (under which we currently have "flying bishops" - Provincial Episcopal Visitors) had kept the church together. "People should come clean and say that they'll never vote for any legislation that allows the ordination of women as bishops" whatever provisions are made for them, he said. There's a suspicion in

the parishes that the people in General Synod don't fully respect their views and General Synod is coming into disrepute because of that."

Sue Cutts (Towcester) called on Synod to "consider all the women and people not in the church. Women feel that the basis of the Christian faith is undermined by the church that says you can be a Christian but we can't accept you as an equal."

The Ven Christine Allsopp (Archdeacon of Northampton) would have preferred a "single clause measure" but "we have made considerable compromises to be generous to those who cannot in conscience accept women bishops" for which General Synod has voted in favour "on five separate occasions. All that is possible is a good approximation and that is what we have. The Measure is the compromise."

Canon Margaret Johnson (Northampton) declared that "those who've heard the call of God to be ordained as women have been careful for a very long time. We've been told there's no theological objection to women being ordained bishops but we mustn't rock the boat. That's been a very hard place to be. This waiting has meant that some women haven't flourished in their ministry."

Some speakers called for a generous and trusting attitude, whatever their views.

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Revd Nick Wills (Kettering) said “We need to think long term,” he said. “I hope we’ll all be part of the church in 20-30 years’ time. We have the responsibility to ensure that the Church holds together and that the Bishop acts with integrity. We need to trust the bishops. We have the chance to enact a miracle to a polarised society and show how we can hold together difference.”

Canon Jonathan Baker (Peterborough) asserted that “there’s too much fear. The message of the Gospel is ‘fear not’. This isn’t ‘our’ church, it’s God’s church. The reason we have bishops and not committees is that we should have trust and mutual respect. The code of practice will provide a legal framework to be worked out with trust and respect in each diocese.”

And **Charles Selwyn-Jones** (Brackley) declared simply that he was “more interested in ability than in gender. I’ve known good and bad priests of both genders,” he said.

Motion and voting

“This synod approves the proposals embodied in the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure and in Amending Canon No. 30”, the motion having been referred to the Synod under Article 8 of the Constitution of the General Synod.

Voting was by houses:

Bishops for 1, against 0, abstentions 2
Clergy for 37, against 10, abstentions 2
Laity for 30, against 14, abstentions 5

The motion was carried.

Proposing a following motion requesting a specific appointment of a “traditionalist” bishop for those people unable to accept the ministry of a woman bishop to be included in the legislation, rather than arrangements being delegated to the diocesan bishop, **Mrs Veronica Heald** (General Synod) feared that “I will become effectively unchurched. I want to remain an Anglican but I face being marginalised. This motion will not create a church within a church,” she said. “It’s not a vote against women bishops but for fellow Anglicans. It’s about proper provision.”

A vote for the following motion could help the growth agenda, **Andrew Presland** (Higham) claimed. “Mission is of primary importance. The Measure is narrow and threatens the unity of the church. More tweaking could be done to get us to a better place for mission.”

Anne Toms (Wellngborough) said that she is an optimist and “I would like to see legislation carried overwhelmingly to let women be bishops. But I don’t see that is a possibility with the current legislation,” she said. “I would like to see one more chance to find a way forward that gets overwhelming support.”

Roy Cashmore (Rutland) also expressed concern for unity. We need to keep the church together to witness to the world,” and felt the following motion provision would support that.

The Ven Christine Allsopp (Archdeacon of Northampton) pointed out that the Measure requires every diocese to have a scheme providing for all. This motion is asking for more than already exists with the PEVs. Parishes will have their own bishop, and it would divide the church. How could a woman in a diocese work if another bishop doesn’t even regard her as a

bishop and has authority over a parish in her diocese. The revision committee [of General Synod] concluded that this wouldn’t work.”

Revd Eddie Smith (Brackley) agreed. He felt that it would make women diocesan bishops second class, effectively removing parishes from their oversight and not just providing for an alternative sacramental ministry.

Revd Margaret Johnson (Northampton) sought to clarify the relationship between catholics, evangelicals, and “the middle ground”. She pointed out that “many in favour of the ordination of women are Anglo-catholic and evangelical. I’m an evangelical. I’m an Anglican. There’s too much being said that implies that if you’re a faithful catholic or evangelical you will vote against the Measure and for the following motion. That’s not the case.”

Following motion and voting

“This Synod: Desires that all faithful Anglicans remain and thrive together in the Church of England and therefore, Calls upon the House of Bishops to bring forward amendments to the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure to ensure that those unable on theological grounds to accept the ministry of women bishops are able to receive episcopal oversight from a bishop with authority (ie ordinary jurisdiction) conferred under the Measure rather than by delegation from a Diocesan Bishop.”

Voting was by houses:

Bishops for 0, against 1, abstentions 2. Clergy for 9, against 35, abstentions 3. Laity for 20, against 27, abstentions 2.

The motion was lost.

Funding the mission

Synod later turned its attention to other business including the annual accounts and reports, and the budget for 2012. The report and accounts had been circulated in advance and showed a small operating deficit for 2010. The Synod “took note” of it.

Paul Stothard, chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, presented the budget for 2012-13 (which is available on the diocesan website). During

discussion it was pointed out that according to national statistics, giving to the Peterborough Diocese amounts to 2.99 per cent of church members’ disposable income, below the national target of five per cent.

Clergy stipends were due to increase by two per cent in the year, while inflation was forecast to possibly reach five per cent. We are currently some £600,000 short in the pension

fund, and an additional £117,000 will need to be paid into it each year for the next five years.

The Synod approved the proposed budget and authorised the DBF to expend a sum not exceeding £12 million in 2012 and noted the budget position for 2013, with two abstentions.

Korean link



Photo above: The Most Revd Paul K Kim, Bishop of Seoul and Primate of Korea, with Bishop Donald, signing the agreement on 29 June 2011.

Bishop Donald introduced a formal motion to “welcome the agreement between the Diocese of Peterborough and the Diocese of Seoul to develop a formal partnership.” He explained that the Anglican Communion encourages dioceses to have two overseas links, one with a developed country and one with a developing country.

The link with Korea would not work in the same way as our existing link with Bungoma, he said. There would be no financial commitment except to pay for occasional visits to Korea, for which £5,000 was

earmarked per year. It cost about £3000 for the visit made earlier this year.

The link is simply so that we can learn from each other, he said. The Koreans want to learn from us about developing authorised lay ministry, which they do not currently have, and “we can learn ‘Big Society’ stuff. The Anglican Church in Korea has a contract from government for much of the social care in the community, especially for the homeless and the elderly.”

The proposal was carried unanimously.

Synod membership

The question of the number of members of Synod was discussed briefly in the light of the difficulty of filling some vacancies. In 2009 there was only one contested election and 75 of the 160 places were unfilled. A further 26 were filled before the Synod first met.

However, the Synod agreed not to reduce the numbers at this stage, but rather to encourage people to see election to Synod as an important part of their involvement in the church and an opportunity to influence its future development.

Dates of future meetings

Synod will meet twice in 2012 on Saturday 24 March in Kettering, and on Saturday 6 October in Northampton.



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