

## Diocese of Manchester

### A briefing note for Deanery Synods on the Women Bishops legislation

#### Background

- In 1994 the first women were ordained as priests in the Church of England, with provisions for those who could not in conscience accept the ministry of women priests.
- The 1998 Lambeth Conference asked all Provinces of the Anglican 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”*.
- In February 2005, General Synod took note of the Rochester Report *“Women Bishops in the Church of England?”*
- In July 2006, General Synod affirmed the majority view of the House of Bishops that admitting women to the episcopate would be a proper development. It also voted to go forward with drafting legislation to enable women to be ordained to the episcopate while making provision for those who are unable to accept the ministry of women bishops.
- In July 2010, General Synod voted in favour of the draft legislation which would be accompanied by a statutory national Code of Practice to be drawn up by the House of Bishops.
- The background is described in more detail in a note circulated by the General Synod Business Committee A8(WE) BACKGROUND, available for downloading from the Church of England website at [http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/article8ref/a8\(we\)background.pdf](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/article8ref/a8(we)background.pdf) or in hard copy on request to your Deanery Officers

#### Process

The draft legislation has now been referred to the dioceses for approval, and votes must be returned by 14 Nov 2011. If a majority of dioceses approve, it will return to General Synod for final approval, followed by Parliamentary approval and Royal assent. The vote (by the three houses of bishops, clergy and laity) in the Manchester Diocesan Synod will take place on September 24<sup>th</sup> 2011. To pass, there needs to be a majority in each house

The Diocesan Synod can also consider further (‘following’) motions proposed by members of the Diocesan Synod, related to the Measure and the Amending Canon. These motions must be debated and voted on separately from the main motion, and the motions and results returned to the General Synod office.

#### The Motion

*“That this Synod approve the proposals embodied in the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure and in draft Amending Canon No.30.”*

#### What does the measure do?

In one sentence the measure provides for the consecration of women bishops as well as priests while providing for those who cannot accept this by means of a code of practice which is not part of the measure.

In more detail the most important clauses are:

Clause 1, in addition to providing for women priests and bishops, repeals the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993. This means the existing arrangements of passing resolutions A and B will lapse after some short term transitional provisions described in Schedule 1. It is expected that the Act of Synod providing for Extended Episcopal ministry will also be rescinded.

Clause 2 imposes a duty on the Diocesan Bishop to make a Diocesan scheme providing for a male bishop to celebrate the sacraments and provide pastoral care when a parish requests this. It allows but does not require him or her to delegate other aspects of Episcopal ministry to the male bishop. If the Diocesan Bishop does not himself ordain women priests then the scheme must provide for ordination of women in the diocese and the pastoral care of female clergy.

Clause 3 describes how a parish requests the ministry of a male bishop or a male priest by means of letters of request in a specified form. One form of letter relates to ongoing Episcopal ministry and pastoral care, the second is used during a vacancy to request the appointment of a male priest.

Clause 5 requires the House of Bishops to draw up a Code of Practice. However the Code of Practice cannot be finalised and approved by General Synod until after the legislation has Royal assent.

Clause 6 imposes a duty on Diocesan Bishops and others to have regard to the Code of Practice.

Amending Canon 30 makes the minimum changes to the Canons of the Church of England necessary to make them consistent with the measure.

## Questions

### **What authority does a Diocesan Bishop have?**

The responsibilities and authority of the Diocesan Bishop are spelled out in Canon C18 of the church which says, inter alia, 'Every bishop is the chief pastor of all that are within his diocese, as well laity as clergy, and their father in God; Every bishop has within his diocese jurisdiction as Ordinary; Every bishop is, within his diocese, the principal minister.' Other ministers assist him and under Canon C14 they promise to obey the Bishop when they take the Oath of Canonical Obedience.

### **What are the arguments in favour of women bishops?**

The arguments in favour are set out in the Rochester report and summarised in Para 18 of A8(WE)BACKGROUND. Essentially, they are as follows:

Scripture challenges us to see women and men equally created in the image of God, equally called through baptism and equally gifted by the Holy Spirit. The Traditions of the Church are continually developing as the Spirit leads us into new understandings and ways of being Church. Ecumenism is not just about our relationships with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches but also our Protestant brothers and sisters in the Methodist, URC and Baptist Churches who are urging us to take this step. 15 of the 38 provinces in the Anglican Communion now welcome the ministry of women as Bishops. The mission of the Church is being hampered because of how the Church is perceived in its attitudes to women. The House of Bishops needs the complementary gifts and experience that women would bring.

### **Should the Church of England now move towards women bishops?**

The majority opinion in General Synod, even among some of those who cannot accept the ministry of women bishops, is that we should move on. A majority want to see adequate provision for those opposed.

### **Was the simplest form of legislation, a 'single clause' measure, considered?**

Yes but General Synod voted against it and expressed a strong desire to make some sort of provision for those who cannot accept the ministry of women bishops

### **Was more robust provision in legislation for those who cannot accept the ministry of women bishops considered?**

Yes in various forms, but nothing that was proposed obtained a majority in all three houses of General Synod. In particular, none of the attempts to give a male bishop independent authority, not delegated from the Diocesan Bishop, including the Archbishops' amendment in July 2010, received sufficient support. The Archbishops' amendment gained an overall majority but was narrowly defeated by the clergy in a vote by houses.

### **Why can some not accept the ministry of women bishops?**

The theological objections to women bishops are set out in the Rochester report and summarised in Para 17 of A8(WE)BACKGROUND. Essentially, they are as follows:

Conservative Catholics are unable to accept the sacramental authority of women bishops, because bishops both in the New Testament and in the universal practice of the Church have always been men. Bishops are the successors of the Twelve Apostles, and represent Jesus in a particular sacramental way. Today, the majority of Churches which have the order of bishops do not accept women as bishops; this includes the majority of other Anglican Provinces, as well as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

Conservative Evangelicals, submitting to the authority of Scripture, seek to follow a Biblical pattern of complementarity between men and women and the New Testament teaching and practice of male headship in the church.

### **What difficulties do they have with the proposed provision?**

Under the present proposals ministers would be required to submit to the authority of the Diocesan Bishop even if day to day Episcopal functions were delegated to a male bishop.

This is a major problem for Conservative Evangelicals who could not in conscience submit to a female chief pastor.

Conservative Catholics could neither receive the sacramental ministry of male bishops or priests acting under the authority of a female Diocesan Bishop, nor the sacramental ministry of male priests ordained by a female Bishop, because to do so would mean accepting the authority of female bishops. The draft Measure makes no provision for parishes to receive sacramental ministry in accordance with these convictions; it does not even allow a parish to decline the sacramental ministry of woman priests.

The proposed abolition of the existing arrangements under the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure - Resolutions A and B - and the Act of Synod would be seen as an abandonment of the solemn promises given in 1993 to both Church and Parliament, that the arrangements would remain in force for as long as they were needed.

### **How many parishes in the Diocese of Manchester does this affect?**

In January 2010, of the 269 parishes in the Diocese, Resolution A applied in 32 parishes, Resolution B in 33 and Extended Episcopal ministry by the Bishop of Beverley in 22 parishes.

**Conservative Catholics have got the Roman Catholic Ordinariate. Why does the Church of England need to provide anything for them?**

Some will go, yes, but many wish to remain loyal Anglicans and the proposed measure, as presently framed, is insufficient to allow them to do so.

**Why is delegation of authority preferred in this legislation?**

Those who support the draft legislation are concerned that giving another bishop independent authority would undermine the authority of the Diocesan Bishop and particularly of a female Diocesan Bishop. However, those opposed to the draft legislation would point out that Armed Forces bases, Royal Peculiars such as Westminster Abbey, and some university colleges, do not come under the jurisdiction of Diocesan Bishops.

**Can the present legislation be amended?**

The revision process in synod is complete. Only the House of Bishops can make changes before the Final Approval stage.

**What if the legislation fails?**

The earliest any new legislation could be introduced into General Synod would be in 2015 after a new Synod is elected.

**What is the purpose of any following motion?**

As the main motion cannot be amended, it is a way of communicating concerns formally to General Synod.

**What happens next?**

The voting in Deanery Synods, which is advisory and informative only, will be reported to Diocesan Synod for the debate on Sept 24<sup>th</sup> 2011. The result of that debate will be formally communicated to General Synod.

**Other questions to consider**

- Is the proposed legislation the best possible?
- Is this the only possible way forward?
- If we do not all agree, must we wait until we do?
- Can we move forward and yet stay united (and in what sense)?

The Lambeth Conference 1998 affirmed that *“although some of the means by which communion is expressed may be strained or broken, there is a need for courtesy, tolerance, mutual respect, and prayer for one another, and we confirm that our desire to know or be with one another remains binding on us as Christians”*.

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24<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Appendix: Key documents**

- The Rochester Report “Women Bishops in the Church of England?” (available at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/womenbishops.pdf> ) is a theological study of the issues. In addition the Business committee of General Synod has provided for Dioceses:
- An explanatory note of the mechanics of the current process (GS Misc 964)
- The background note mentioned above (A8(WE)BACKGROUND)
- The draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure (A8(WE)M)
- The draft amending Canon 30 (A8(WE)AC)
- An explanatory memorandum relating to the draft measure and amending Canon (A8(WE)X).

These can be downloaded from the Church of England website at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/article8ref/>