



A Christian presence in every community

[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Document Library](#) | [Site Help](#) | [Text Only](#) | [A A A](#)
[About Us](#)[Our Faith](#)[Weddings, Baptisms & Funerals](#)[Prayer & Worship](#)[Education](#)[Views](#)[Media Centre](#)[Home](#) > [Views](#) > [Women Bishops](#)[Share](#) |[Marriage, Family and Sexuality Issues](#)[International and European Affairs](#)[Home and Community Affairs](#)[Environment and Rural Affairs](#)[Ethical Investment](#)[The Church in Parliament](#)[Medical Ethics & Health & Social Care Policy](#)[Education](#)

Women Bishops

The possibility of women being admitted to the orders of deacon, priest and bishop has been on the Church of England's agenda since at least 1966 when *Women and Holy Orders* was produced for the Church Assembly. Over the succeeding two decades, the General Synod followed up with The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood (1972), The Ordination of Women (1978) and The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood: Further Report (1984).

The women priests debate

In 1975, General Synod passed the motion: 'That this Synod considers that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood'. It did not pass a second motion asking for the legal barriers to women's ordination to be removed and legislation to permit their ordination to be brought forward.

In 1978 the motion: 'That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to prepare and bring forward legislation to remove the barriers to the ordination of women to the priesthood and their consecration to the episcopate' was passed by the House of Bishops and the House of Laity, but was lost in the House of Clergy by 94 votes to 149.

In 1981 the General Synod resolved that the order of deacon should be open to women and passed the requisite legislation in 1985. For the first time, women were permitted to be part of one of the historic threefold orders of ministry in the Church of England and the first women deacons were duly ordained in 1987.

In 1984 the General Synod voted for legislation 'to permit the ordination of women to the priesthood' to be prepared. The motion made no reference to the episcopate.

In July 1988, General Synod gave general approval to the draft legislation.

After further discussion in the dioceses (where 38 out of 44 Diocesan Synods voted in favour), in General Synod and in Convocation, the measure to permit women to be ordained as priests was debated by General Synod on **11 November 1992**, where it received the necessary two-thirds majority in all three Houses. General Synod also approved a measure providing for financial provision for clergy who resigned their offices over the theological issue of women's ordination.

In the light of additional pastoral arrangements for those opposed on theological grounds proposed by the House of Bishops and subsequently approved by the Synod in the Episcopal Ministry [Act of Synod](#) of 1993, the Ecclesiastical Committee of the Houses of Parliament found the [measure](#) expedient and it subsequently received Parliamentary approval in both Houses of Parliament in 1993. The measure received Royal Assent on **5 November 1993**. All the necessary legislation having been passed, the first women priests in the Church of England were ordained at Bristol Cathedral on **12 March 1994**.

The women bishops debate

In July 2000, the General Synod requested a thorough theological study on the question of women in the episcopate after debating a motion put by Archdeacon Judith Rose as follows: "That this Synod ask the House of Bishops to initiate further theological study on the episcopate, focusing on the issues that need to be addressed in preparation for the debate on women in the episcopate in the Church of England, and to make a progress report on this study to Synod within

E-News Sign Up

Sign-up for email news updates

Email Address *

First Name

Last Name

Title

Tell us more about yourself

Clergy

Preferred format

 HTML Text Mobile

More views

- [References to dioceses](#)

the next two years."

An interim progress report was presented to Synod in July 2002 and [Women Bishops in the Church of England?](#), the report of the House of Bishops' Working Party on Women in the Episcopate, chaired by the Rt Revd Dr Michael Nazir-Ali, the Bishop of Rochester, was published in **November, 2004**.

The General Synod discussed the report in **February 2005**.

A [study guide](#) to the Rochester Report was published in **March 2005** and can be [read](#) on the web.

In **January 2006**, the Bishop of Guildford, the Rt Revd Christopher Hill, presented a further report on [Women in the Episcopate](#) known as the [Guildford Report](#).

Further clarificatory work by the Bishops of Guildford and Gloucester resulted in [GS Misc 826](#), published in May 2006.

The General Synod passed a succession of motions in **July 2005, February 2006 and July 2006**. In July 2005, it said that 'the process for removing the legal obstacles to the ordination of women to the episcopate should now be set in train.' In February 2006, it commissioned the further work in the light of the Guildford Report. It then, in **July 2006**, passed motions as follows:

'That this Synod welcome and affirm the view of the majority of the House of Bishops that admitting women to the episcopate in the Church of England is consonant with the faith of the Church as the Church of England has received it and would be a proper development in proclaiming afresh in this generation the grace and truth of Christ.'

'That this Synod, endorsing Resolution 111.2 of the Lambeth Conference 1998 "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" and believing that the implications of admitting women to the episcopate will best be discerned by continuing to explore in detail the practical and legislative arrangements:

- (a) invite dioceses, deaneries and parishes to continue serious debate and reflection on the theological, practical, ecumenical and missiological aspects of the issue;
- (b) invite the Archbishops' Council, in consultation with the Standing Committee of the House of Bishops and the Appointments Committee, to secure the early appointment of a legislative drafting group, which will aim to include a significant representation of women in the spirit of Resolution 13/31 of the Anglican Consultative Council passed in July 2005, charged with:
 - (i) preparing the draft measure and amending canon necessary to remove the legal obstacles to the consecration of women to the office of bishop;
 - (ii) preparing a draft of possible additional legal provision consistent with [Canon A4](#) to establish arrangements that would seek to maintain the highest possible degree of communion with those conscientiously unable to receive the ministry of women bishops;
 - (iii) submitting the results of its work to the House of Bishops for consideration and submission to Synod; and
- (c) instruct the Business Committee to make time available, before first consideration of the draft legislation, for the Synod to consider, in the light of any views expressed by the House of Bishops, the arrangements proposed in the drafting group's report.'

In September 2006, The Rt Revd Nigel McCulloch, Bishop of Manchester, was [appointed](#) by the Archbishops' Council to chair the legislative drafting group to consider proposals for allowing women to be consecrated as bishops as called for in those motions. Once the whole group had been appointed, it started its work in January 2007.

The legislative drafting group published its [report](#) in **April 2008** on the issues surrounding the drafting.

In July 2008, General Synod called for legislation to be drafted in line with the motion: '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

Women Bishops - the debate so far

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.'

A further report from the Manchester Group ([GS 1707](#)) and the [draft legislation](#), together with an illustrative code of practice, were published in December 2008.

General Synod debated the [draft legislation](#) in **February 2009**, sending it to a [Revision Committee](#) that was set up in March of that year.

The Revision Committee issued two interim statements on its progress in [October](#) and [November](#) 2009.

The legislation, in the form of a [draft Measure](#), was published **May 2010**.

Later that month, the [House of Bishops](#) issued a statement on the draft Measure.

In **July 2010**, the [Synod](#) left the draft legislation largely unamended. In **September 2010**, the draft legislation was referred to the dioceses for debate and vote ('[Reference to dioceses](#)' explains this process in more detail and contains links to the relevant documentation under discussion).

If a majority of Diocesan Synods approve the draft legislation, it will return to the General Synod (probably in February 2012) for Final Drafting. The Final Approval stage, at which two-thirds majorities are required in each House, could be reached in July 2012. If approved, the legislation would then go to Parliament for consideration by the Ecclesiastical Committee and each House of Parliament.

The draft Measure requires the House of Bishops to draw up **a code of practice** (which is not subject to the diocesan reference procedure). This cannot be formally drawn up or laid before the Synod for approval until after the legislation has received Royal Assent. But an initial illustrative draft code was prepared by the legislative drafting group in 2009 and in the light of changes subsequently made to the draft legislation the House of Bishops has accepted the recommendation of the Revision Committee that further work on a draft code should proceed, rather than waiting for the various legislative stages to be completed. A House of Bishops working party on the Code of Practice (chaired by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich) started work in November 2010 with a view to enabling the House of Bishops and the General Synod to engage further with the shape of a draft code before the draft legislation reaches the Final Approval stage.

