

# **Statement to the House of Bishops regarding the Single Clause Measure as outlined in the Manchester Report**

## **From: Women Clergy**

We welcome the work done by the Legislative Drafting Group outlining ways forward for the Church with regard to the consecration of women as bishops. As ordained women, from amongst whom some of the first generation of women bishops may come, we wish to make our own contribution to the current debate.

We believe that it should be possible for women to be consecrated as bishops, but not at any price. The price of legal “safeguards” for those opposed is simply too high, diminishing not just the women concerned, but the catholicity, integrity and mission of the episcopate and of the Church as a whole. We cannot countenance any proposal that would, once again, enshrine and formalise discrimination against women in legislation. With great regret, we would be prepared to wait longer, rather than see further damage done to the Church of England by passing discriminatory laws. In this, we support the recent principled stand taken by the Archbishop and Bishops of the Church in Wales.

After 21 years of ordained ministry and 14 years of priesthood, many of us have much experience of building trustful relationships with those unable to accept the priestly ministry of women. In the Anglican Communion overseas, women take this experience into the episcopate, which leads them to invite other bishops into their Dioceses or Episcopal areas to ordain, confirm and take other services when required. Bishops should be trusted to act wisely and behave with dignity, and all bishops should work within clear expectations and codes of practice. The language of “protection” and “safeguard” is offensive to women, and we believe the existing disciplinary procedures are enough for women or men to be brought to account if they behave inappropriately. We would commend the good practice over the past 20 years of the 15 Anglican Provinces which have already opened the episcopate to women: none of these has passed discriminatory legislation.

Discussion of a single clause measure without including the possible arrangements for those opposed, characterises those who argue for it as somehow “not caring” about those who oppose the ordination/consecration of women. This is far from the truth. Strong relationships have been forged on the anvil of profound disagreement and there is ample testimony to the richness of these encounters, to set alongside those situations which have proved painful. As the broken body of Christ on earth, the Church’s internal relationships should rest on trust, forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation, rather than on protection and an over-anxious reliance on the letter of the law. Work has already been done on a draft proposal of robust and clear arrangements that make the passing of a single clause measure realistic in today’s Church, as well as theologically and ecclesologically cohesive.

We long to see the consecration of women bishops in the Church of England, and believe it is right both in principle and in timing. But because we love the Church, we are not willing to assent to a further fracture in our communion and threat to our unity. If it is to be episcopacy for women qualified by legal arrangements to “protect” others from our oversight, then our answer, respectfully, is thank you, but no.

**May 2008**