



WATCH PRESS STATEMENT

Friday, 30th October 2009 – for immediate release

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: STOP THIS CHARADE!

WATCH has a message for the Revision Committee as it meets on Tuesday to continue its task of preparing draft legislation to bring to General Synod in February: **ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!**

WATCH has received an unprecedented number of emails from normally quiet and patient members of the Church of England. They have expressed their disbelief at the Revision Committee's announcement earlier this month that it has decided to prepare legislation *for an option the General Synod has already rejected!*

Instead of doing what General Synod asked of them, namely drafting simple legislation for women to be allowed to be bishops, with arrangements for those who remain opposed to women's ordinations to be contained in a statutory Code of Practice, the Revision Committee decided to "*provide for certain functions to be vested in Bishops by statute rather than by delegation from the diocesan bishop under a statutory code of practice*".

This would result in a two-tier Episcopate, with every female bishop, and potentially all male bishops who ordain or consecrate women, having their authority diverted on request to another male bishop acceptable to those opposed to women bishops. A senior clergywoman and General Synod member has written of her dismay at the proposals, making the point that for those who want to stay in the Church of England, in spite of their difficulty with women's ordination, it is precisely this Church they love, not the damaged and divided one that would result from the proposed arrangements. She says, "**We can and will make it possible for them to stay...not through rules but through Christian care.**"

The Revision Committee's decision has produced widespread shock among Church members, not to mention disbelief and derision from wider society. People are confused about the role of the Established Church, which exists to serve all in the land and which is supposed to give Christian leadership on matters of ethics and justice. For the Church to be equivocating on the ability or desirability of women to hold positions of leadership is to send out a damaging message about all women, and one which is at odds with the Church's understanding of humanity.

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Timeline on women's ordination in the Church of England

- 1975 General Synod (GS) agrees there are 'no fundamental objections' to ordaining women to the priesthood
- 1978 GS debates ordaining women as deacons, priests and bishops and wins overall majority but vote is taken by Houses and it falls in House of Clergy
- 1986 GS votes for women to be allowed to be deacons – the first of the three historic orders
- 1987 First female deacons ordained
- 1992 GS votes for women to be allowed to be priests
- 1994 1,500 female deacons ordained as priests
- 2000 GS asks House of Bishops to "initiate further theological study on the episcopate, focussing on the issues that need to be addressed in preparation for the debate on women in the episcopate in the Church of England" (Rochester Commission – House of Bishops' Working Party on Women in the Episcopate established.)
- 2004 Publication of Rochester Commission Report
- 2005 GS (Feb) debates Rochester Commission Report
- 2005 GS (July) votes to start process of removing legal obstacles to having women as bishops (The Bishops of Guildford and Gloucester are asked to start the process)
- 2006 (Jan) Guildford and Gloucester Report published
- 2006 GS (July) agrees that having women as bishops is 'consonant with the faith of the Church'. Legislative drafting group set up to prepare the draft measure and amending canon necessary to remove the legal obstacles to the consecration of women as bishops
- 2007 (no consideration in GS)
- 2008 GS (July) Report of Legislative Group debated and sent back to be completed. GS votes to "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" and "affirm that these should be contained in a national code of practice to which all concerned would be required to have regard." GS asks the Revision Committee to prepare the draft measure and code of practice.
- 2009 GS (Feb) Legislative Drafting Group final report considered and the legal provisions sent for revision in committee
- 2009 Revision Committee (8th October) decides to reject arrangements in a Code of Practice and to prepare legislation with statutory provision.