

historic role and authority of bishops, and was workable in practice. The final result was legislation that contained provisions by way of local Diocesan Schemes supported by a national statutory Code of Practice. In July 2010 General Synod debated all the possible provisions again, including a last-minute additional suggestion from the Archbishops for 'coordinate jurisdiction'. These possibilities were all turned down by Synod and the draft legislation approved. The legislation now goes for discussion and debate in Diocesan and Deanery Synods. If the majority of Diocesan Synods supports it, General Synod will vote for its final approval, possibly in February 2012. It then goes to Parliament for approval and will become law soon after that.

Still Watching

Many opponents of women bishops believe that the provisions for them in the legislation are not enough. They will be pressing Diocesan Synods to ask for further provision – to look again at

'squaring the circle' in a different way. However, WATCH sees the provisions as a significant compromise from our preferred option of the simplest possible legislation, and that going further would create two tiers of bishops. This would be deeply damaging to the church, as well as discriminatory towards women. Senior clergywomen have indicated that in those circumstances they would not wish to be appointed as bishops.

WATCH believes that part of Jesus' saving, transforming, liberating and reconciling work on the cross was to heal hurtful divisions between women and men and to help us live more fully in the unity to which we are called. WATCH believes that only when women are included at all levels in the ordained ministry will the Church of England be able to bring – and be – the Good News of Christ to a broken and divided world.

July 2010

For further reading:

The Call for Women Bishops Edited by Harriet Harris and Jane Shaw, SPCK 2004, ISBN 0 281-05621-8

Women as Bishops Edited by James Rigney with Mark Chapman, Affirming Catholicism 2008

Women Bishops in the Church of England? The Rochester report of the House of Bishops' Working Party on Women in the Episcopate - GS 1557, Church House Publishing 2004 ISBN 0-7151-4037-X

Voices of This Calling - Experiences of the First

Generation of Women Priests Edited by Christina Rees, published by SCM/Canterbury Press, 2002.

Act of Synod – Act of Folly? Edited by Monica Furlong, published by SCM Press, 1998.

Copies of this book are available from the Administrator at the WATCH Office address (see below) price £2 plus postage and packing £1.50p

If you would like speakers for deanery or diocesan synods, or for any other meeting, please contact Jenny Standage, Secretary, WATCH, telephone: 020 8319 3372 or email: jennystandage@pobox.com

If you would like to talk to someone about any of the issues raised in this leaflet, please contact Hilary Cotton, telephone: 01483 856827 or email: hilary.cotton@ntl.world.com

For further information about National WATCH, write to the Administrator, WATCH, St John's Church, Waterloo Road, London SE1 8TY or visit the WATCH website: <http://www.womenandthechurch.org>



A BRIEF HISTORY of the Journey to Women Bishops in the Church of England

This paper outlines the Church of England's move to ordain women as priests and explains the current situation as the Church prepares for having women as bishops

The Women Priests Measure

On 11th November 1992, the General Synod of the Church of England voted to open the priesthood to women. This historical vote came after 70 years of formal discussion and debate in the Anglican Communion, begun in 1920 when the Lambeth Conference first considered the issue of women's ordination. The subject was placed on the Lambeth agenda largely in response to one of London's most popular preachers of the day, a woman called Maude Royden, being denied permission to preach from a pulpit the year before. In preparation for the vote in 1992, the General Synod had debated the matter for over 25 years. As long ago as 1975, Synod had agreed "that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood". In 1987, women were first ordained as deacons, part of the historic threefold ministry of deacons, priests and bishops. Before then women had ministered as deaconesses and in many forms of lay ministry and also as members of religious communities. Just over a year after the 1992 vote, the Women Priests Measure was ratified by Parliament, with large majorities in both Houses, and in March 1994 the first ordinations took place in Bristol cathedral. By the end of the year, 1,500 women deacons had been ordained to the priesthood. In all, 4,000 women have been ordained as priests, with 3,000 currently serving. Nearly one in four priests in the Church of England is female.

MOW and WATCH

From 1979 the campaign to include women in the priesthood was led by the Movement for the

Ordination of Women (MOW). A single issue group, MOW worked with other organisations and many individuals to have the priesthood opened to women. In 1994, its mission accomplished, MOW closed down. Two years later a national broad-based group was formed, including both women and men, lay and ordained, called Women and the Church (WATCH). WATCH has been promoting women in ministry and, as a priority, working for the appointment of women as bishops. WATCH is also working for more openness in appointments and for an end to all discrimination against women in the Church of England.

Financial Provisions and Resolutions A and B

Various qualifying clauses were included in the Women Priests Measure, including financial provisions for those priests who felt unable to minister in a Church that ordained women. In total, the Church of England paid out £27.1 million to 441 priests who made claims under the financial provisions. Of those priests who resigned during the ten year period, over 60 have since returned, with 31 going back into stipendiary ministry and 20 into non-stipendiary ministry. Fifteen retired priests have also returned to the Church. Of all those who have returned, only one is known to have offered to repay the money given to them when they resigned their positions.

In addition to the Financial Provisions clauses, there are two clauses in the Women Priests Measure known as Resolutions A and B. Resolution A states that a Parochial Church Council (PCC) may vote not to accept a woman priest to take services. Resolution B states that a



PCC may vote not to accept a woman as their incumbent, priest-in-charge or team vicar.

The Act of Synod

In November 1993, almost one year to the day after the vote for women priests, General Synod voted for an Act of Synod that would provide an additional set of arrangements for those who opposed ordaining women. At the time there were great misgivings about the proposed Act, but Synod was urged to pass it as a practical way forward and as a gesture of generosity. Even then, it was widely acknowledged to be a theological nonsense. Unlike the Women Priests Measure, the Act, known as the Episcopal Ministries Act 1993, was not part of canon law, and carries only the moral weight of the Synod that passed it.

The Act created a separate class of bishops called Provincial Episcopal Visitors (PEVs), which quickly became known as ‘flying bishops’. There are currently three PEVs: one in the Province of York and two in the Province of Canterbury. Originally, it was intended that the PEVs offer the extended Episcopal oversight of the diocesan bishops to those priests and people who requested it, but what developed in fact was virtually an alternative Episcopal ministry, where in places, there was scant or no regard for the diocesan bishop.

The Act of Synod has been the cause of a great deal of pain, confusion and negative treatment for many women priests, some supportive male priests and bishops, and lay members of the Church. Dr Helen Thorne, in her doctoral study of the first women priests, concluded that the Act was “deeply harmful to women on a practical, emotional and spiritual level. The Act of Synod, and the provision of alternative Episcopal oversight, are offensive to women because they legitimise women’s exclusion and create a form of sexual apartheid by creating areas in the Church where women’s ministry is unacceptable... Spiritually, the Act fosters a theology of ‘taint’ whereby a man’s ministry is made void through his association with a woman priest.” (*Dr Helen Thorne, Journey to Priesthood, CCSRG Monograph Series 3, Department of Theology*

and Religious Studies, University of Bristol, 2000)

In 2000, the House of Bishops’ Review of the Act of Synod was debated in Synod, with a number of speakers questioning the ongoing and long-term effects of the Act. Speakers also objected to the tone of the Review, and the fact that the views and opinions of several hundred submissions, including those from bishops, male and female clergy and lay members, were virtually absent from the Review. It has been pointed out by many in the Church, most notably the Church historian, the Revd Dr Judith Maltby, that in its entire history, the Church of England has never reacted to diversity by creating an alternative structure. A few years after the Act was passed, she wrote that “at no point in our history has the endorsement of comprehensiveness ever resulted in the creation of an extended or alternative Episcopal system.” (*Maltby, J. in Act of Synod – Act of Folly? edited by Monica Furlong, SCM Press 1998, p51*)

Maltby also observed that the “Act is saying that if a bishop lays hands on a woman in ordination, others have the right to seek the ministry of a bishop whose hands have not been so exposed”, (*ibid*, p55) and she went on to question the theological rationale of such an arrangement.

Over the years, bishops, clergy and laity have increasingly spoken out about the damaging effects of the Act of Synod, noting how it has legitimised and normalised prejudice against women priests and against women in general, and how it has built barriers between people and created ghettos which have remained closed to the priestly ministry of women. The Act has also been detrimental to the Church’s ecumenical conversations, most especially with the Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches. The Methodist Church has made it plain that it will not agree to formal unity until and unless women are allowed to minister on the same basis as men and there are some in the Roman Catholic Church who are even more disturbed by the implications of the Act than they are by the prospect of women priests and bishops. In October 2000, a few months after the Review of

the Act was published, concern about the Act prompted the launch of GRAS, the Group for Rescinding the Act of Synod. For nearly a decade GRAS has spoken out about the abuses committed under the protection of the Act and has campaigned vigorously for the Act to be rescinded.

The House of Bishops’ Working Party on the Theology of Women in the Episcopate

In July 2000, the then Archdeacon of Tonbridge, the Venerable Judith Rose, presented a Private Member’s Motion to General Synod, which was debated and passed by large majorities. The Motion asked the 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, and to make a progress report on this study to Synod within the next two years.”

Accordingly, a House of Bishops’ Working Party was set up under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Rochester, and in July 2002 it brought its interim report to Synod. To many in the Church, it seemed as if the Working Party had gone over ground already covered by the much earlier debates and discussions about women and the priesthood. However, the Working Party continued to meet for another two years, and then, in November 2004, it published its final report entitled, ‘Women Bishops in the Church of England?’ which was debated at the February Synod 2005. Synod voted overwhelmingly to take note of the Report, and also voted to have time made available at the 2005 July Synod to decide whether to embark on the legislative process that would “remove the barriers to women in the episcopacy”.

Guildford Diocesan Synod Motion and others

Frustrated by the slow progress of the Working Party, and recognising that legislation for women bishops would have to be prepared sooner or later, in June 2002 Guildford Diocesan Synod passed a motion asking that “General Synod bring forward legislation to permit the consecration of women to the Episcopate in the provinces of Canterbury and York without delay”. Soon, a

number of other dioceses had passed similar motions, urging General Synod to begin preparing legislation for women bishops. All these motions were ‘parked’ until the Working Party’s report had been debated. Most have lapsed, but a motion from Southwark Diocese calling for the rescinding of the Act of Synod is still waiting to be debated.

‘Yes’ – preparing legislation

In July 2005, General Synod passed a motion calling for the legal barriers to women bishops to be removed and in July 2006 a motion from the House of Bishops stated that having women as bishops was “consonant with the faith of the Church” was passed. A Legislative Drafting Group was set up to look at the scope of possible legislation: they soon discovered that the ‘circle to be squared’ was how to have women bishops with full authority (ie on the same basis as men) AND adequate provision for those who would not be able to accept them. Possibilities included separate dioceses for those opposed, the automatic transfer of parishes to another bishop, the creation of a Society of those opposed to the ordination of women who would minister in parishes who so requested, and the offer of local arrangements to be made by discussion between the bishop and parishes involved. General Synod debated these possibilities in July 2008 and voted that their preferred way forward was for provisions to be made ‘within the current structures’ supported by a ‘national statutory code of practice’. The issue of whether women *should* be bishops was by now settled: Synod had agreed three times that it was right to do this. The Legislative Drafting Group now put together legislation containing the provision Synod had asked for, which General Synod agreed as a basis for going forward in February 2009. The legislation was then open for scrutiny and revision (similar to the Committee stage of a Bill in Parliament). The Revision Committee decided to look again at provision for those opposed, to try again to square the circle in a way that would satisfy as many people as possible. They made a thorough and exhaustive examination of all the possibilities, looking at what made sense theologically, maintained the