

## **JOINT PRESS RELEASE**

### **Groups agree fundamental plans for women bishops in the Church of England**

A campaigning group and a network of Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England have agreed the fundamental principles by which women should be appointed as bishops. For the first time, the leadership and members of the Executive Committees of Affirming Catholicism and WATCH (Women and the Church), which between them represent nearly half the members of the Church of England's General Synod, have jointly drawn up a list of key, non-negotiable principles for moving forward on women bishops.

Affirming Catholicism and WATCH had previously submitted separate proposals to the House of Bishops working party which consulted on proposals set out in the Guildford Report published earlier this year. The joint key principles draw heavily on their separate submissions and challenge the scope of the Guildford proposals which would, if implemented, provide a 'women bishops free zone' for those opposed to the ordination of women.

Christina Rees, Chair of National WATCH said: "The Church is currently discussing proposals which so limit the ministry of women bishops in order to take account of those who won't accept them, that there is a danger of creating a second class of bishops who are women. Our principles – which we regard as non-negotiable – call for the Church to affirm unequivocally its confidence in the ordination of women by not discriminating against them."

The formal consultation process on women bishops began in 2000 with the setting up a House of Bishops' Working Party on Women in the Episcopate, but the journey began over 30 years ago when General Synod agreed that there was 'no fundamental objection to the ordination of women to the priesthood.' There are now over 2,500 clergy women in the Church of England. For the past two years there have been equal numbers of women and men being trained for the ordained ministry in the Church of England.

The Rev'd Richard Jenkins, Director of Affirming Catholicism said: "The Church of England has always made room for different opinions. But the theology and law of the Church must give priority to the fact that we are a Church which has now joyfully accepted and overwhelmingly received the ordination of women. Our principles suggest ways in which those who are opposed can be given security and space, but still remain recognisably within one Church."

The groups now aim to discuss their principles with evangelicals and other groups in the Church in order to reach the widest possible agreement about how to move forward. The House of Bishops will meet again at the beginning of June to discuss the results of their consultation. The bishops will then produce a revised plan to be debated by the General Synod in July.

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## NOTES FOR EDITORS:

**Principles drawn up by a joint Affirming Catholicism/WATCH working party according to which the Church of England can and should proceed to the ordination of women as bishops:**

### **A HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD PROCEED IN CONSECRATING WOMEN BISHOPS.**

1. The Church of England is competent to make the decision to ordain women as bishops. This principle is enshrined in the Canons of the Church of England.<sup>[1]</sup> Further, the Lambeth Conference has recognised that Provinces of the Anglican Communion are competent to move on the question of the ordination of women to all stages of the three-fold ministry when the time seems right to each Province.<sup>[2]</sup>
2. Legislation must express the Church's joyful acceptance of the decision to ordain women as bishops, whilst making suitable pastoral provision for those who continue to have difficulties with the ordained ministry of women.
3. There may therefore be no discrimination in the enabling Measure. The historic and catholic identity of episcopal ministry and office must be retained, and all women and men who are appointed as bishop must have the same authority and responsibilities.
4. Pastoral provision for those who have private reservations about the ordained ministry of women can – and should – be made, but such provision should not create structures which undermine the catholic order of the church or suggest ambivalence about the Church's decision to admit women to the threefold ministry.<sup>[3]</sup>
5. If pastoral provision is to have the force of law, it must be enshrined in secondary legislation or in an enforceable, statutory code of practice. Provision should be made for alleged breaches of such secondary legislation / statutory code of practice to be referred to an independent body (to be defined in law) for mediation (in which the agreement of both parties would be binding) or arbitration (in which a decision would be imposed on both parties).<sup>[4]</sup>
6. The process of reception should be recognised as the means by which the Church enters into the fullness of its joyful acceptance of women's ministry; it is not a continuing process of judging the rightness of the decision. The pastoral provision must be drafted on this basis.
7. There can be no amendment to Canon A4. That is, "those who are made, ordained or consecrated bishops, priests or deacons" according to the ordinal and by a bishop of the Church of England are "to be accounted, both by themselves and others, to be truly bishops, priests or deacons." Consequently, there can be no re-ordination of a priest or deacon ordained by a bishop of the Church of England who subsequently moves to another Diocese; similarly there can be no re-confirmation.

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<sup>[1]</sup> See especially Canon A6.

<sup>[2]</sup> Lambeth Conference 1978; Resolution 21.

<sup>[3]</sup> Cf. Guildford Report, § 130.

<sup>[4]</sup> Putting the detail of the arrangements for the exercise of Episcopal authority in the Code or into secondary legislation keeps these discriminatory provisions out of primary legislation. The Measure can then be short and simple. This approach also gives Synod the necessary power to deal with this matter without reference to Parliament. It would also put these provisions on a firmer legal footing than the existing Act of Synod given that the 1993 Measures on the ordination of women to the priesthood do not mention the Act.

**B. HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD MAKE PASTORAL PROVISION FOR THOSE WITH PRIVATE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN**

1. The pastoral provision may not create a parallel jurisdiction of those who are not prepared to accept the ordained ministry of women, but must seek the highest possible degree of communion together with the highest possible degree of permeability.
2. The pastoral provision must not give rise to a 'theology of taint' whereby opponents of women clergy are able to declare themselves out of communion even with those male clergy who have shared a sacramental ministry with ordained women..
3. Arrangements requiring ordained women to exercise pastoral sensitivity towards those who are opposed must be balanced by reciprocal arrangements requiring pastoral sensitivity from those who are opposed.
4. With respect to Dioceses and Diocesan structures, the pastoral provisions must maintain the integrity of the Diocese as the fundamental unit of the Church.
5. The bishop is and must be recognised to be Ordinary in his / her Diocese.
6. Any bishop who exercises a ministry specifically with respect to those opposed to ordained women's ministry must therefore share in the ministry of the Ordinary.
7. Any such bishop must accordingly work within and according to the policies and practices of the Diocese where he exercises that ministry.
8. In Dioceses where the Ordinary is opposed to the ordination of women and does not ordain women as priest and/or deacon, the interests of women priests and those who are supportive of the ministry of ordained women must have episcopal representation within the Diocese.
9. All bishops and all parishes of a Diocese must continue to be part of the same synodical structures (through which the ministry of oversight or *episcopate* is also exercised).

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