



WATCH Submission to the Legislative Drafting Group on Women Bishops

1. We are pleased that the Legislative Drafting Group has been constituted and has begun its work. Over the past decade WATCH has been working for the consecration of women as bishops in the Church of England, and we have sought to make constructive contributions at every stage of the process. We offer this submission in the conviction that, as God is calling our Church to open the episcopate to women, so God will also guide us as we seek to respond to His will.
2. Over 30 years ago, in 1975, General Synod passed a motion stating that there was 'no fundamental objection to the ordination of women to the priesthood.' A few years later, in 1978, a motion calling for women to be ordained both to the priesthood and to the episcopate was debated in General Synod. The motion received an overall majority, but, as it was Article 8 business, a two-thirds majority in each of the houses was required, and it failed to achieve this. With the long history of debates on this subject and with the clarity brought by the recent votes in General Synod, as well as with strong and clear evidence from the wider Church, WATCH is confident that the Church is desirous that the episcopal ministry now be open to both women and men.
3. We recognise that, having accepted the principle of women as bishops, our Church has entered a period of new potential for the way we proclaim the Gospel to God's people, to our country and to the world. The view of General Synod on having women as bishops was tested most recently in July 2005 and again in July 2006. In July 2005, General Synod passed a motion to remove the legal obstacles to women in the episcopate. As demonstrated by the speeches made in that debate, most Synod members understood the purpose of the motion as being the means by which we move forward to opening the episcopate to women. The view of most Synod members, many other Church members and the wider public, was that General Synod had agreed to have women as bishops.
4. However, because of the precise wording of the motion, there was some ambiguity about the exact meaning of the vote. It was eventually decided that there would need to be a vote specifically on the principle of having women as bishops in our Church. On 8th July 2006, General Synod passed a motion stating that having women as bishops is 'consonant' with the faith of the Church and that it would be 'a proper development in proclaiming afresh in this generation the grace and truth of Christ.'
5. In the light of the recent votes in General Synod, and in the larger context of the positive acceptance of women's priestly ministry in parishes and sector ministries, WATCH affirms that women's priestly ministry has been received by the Church of England. This reception has come about over 20 years of women's ordained ministry in the Church. We recognise that there will continue to be an ongoing process of reception as the Church begins to experience the ministry of women as bishops. However, we do not see this as a continuing process of judging the rightness of the decisions to ordain women, but rather as one of continuing to incorporate the full acceptance of women in the ordained ministries of our Church. We further recognise, as all orders are to be considered as being provisional, that the Church now affirms that women's orders are no more provisional than those of men. We would want to emphasise that, at heart, reception is about receiving from God: in receiving the ordained ministry of women, we recognise the Giver as well as the gift. Indeed, the nature of the Giver should determine the manner of our receiving.

6. In this process, we recognise that the Anglican understanding of reception is different to the Roman Catholic understanding of reception. In common with many Anglicans and Roman Catholics, we long for the day when there is greater unity between our two Churches, but we maintain that the burden for the delays in our joint ecumenical journey towards unity must not be placed on the issue of women's ordination. There are many other and more substantial issues of doctrine and order which have stood in the way of unity up to now, and these issues existed well before women were ordained in the Church of England. We are also aware that there are many in the Roman Catholic Church, lay and ordained, who long for women's ordination in their own Church, as well as, of course, the ordination of both married men and women.
7. We are also aware that the Methodist Church, with whom we are in the process of forging closer relations in the shape of a Covenant, has made it abundantly clear that, until and unless women are admitted to all orders, it will not move to full unity with the Church of England. We are also mindful that in most of the other Churches with which the Church of England is in communion, women are fully recognised in all ministerial offices. (see 'Women Bishops in the Church of England?', 2004, pp 238 - 239)
8. We would want to stress as a point of principle that the legislation for women as bishops must be free from discrimination. We are confident that the Church wants to have bishops who are women on the same basis as we now have bishops who are men. Any discrimination written into the legislation would inevitably create a two-tiered episcopate, with women exercising an episcopal ministry limited and defined by qualifications based solely on their sex. This would be unjust. This means for us that in preparing the draft measure and amending canon necessary to remove the legal obstacles to the consecration of women to the office of bishop, the measure and canon should be simple and straightforward, and should not in any way make a distinction between the episcopal or priestly orders of men and women. It further means that any possible additional legal provision consistent with Canon A4 should be distinct from and subordinate to the draft measure.
9. It is apparent that Parliament, on both sides of the House, is strongly averse to discrimination of any kind. There is every reason to believe that MPs and Peers will decline to pass any legislation which introduces new forms of discrimination against women within the Established Church of the nation, when such discrimination is rigorously outlawed in society as a whole.
10. To have any such discrimination written into the legislation would be to subscribe to a theology our Church does not own, with devastating implications for ordained women and men, for lay members of our Church and for our witness in the world. It would be to imply that there is a different relationship between God and male human beings as males, and between God and female human beings as females, an understanding our Church does not accept. Rather, we recognise the position of all those who are in Christ Jesus as being of equal worth and value to God and of being made equally in the image of God.
11. We acknowledge the shared creation and blessing of men and women in Genesis chapter one. We accept that in our baptism into Christ there is no distinction based on sex. We believe that the new creation Paul writes of in 2 Corinthians chapter five includes both women and men, and that both men and women have been entrusted with the message and ministry of reconciliation, and, together, are ambassadors for Christ. We believe that the gifts given by the Spirit are given to both men and women. When we look at the Gospels we do not find a gendered teaching, with one Gospel for men and another Gospel for women.

12. We also recognise that our tradition has always been dynamic, and that, as the Reverend Dr Charlotte Methuen writes in a WATCH paper, 'Women with Oversight', *"patterns of ministry, and patterns of involvement of men and women in leadership and oversight, were not fixed throughout the history of the Church, but have developed and changed as centuries passed. Many of the decisions of the early church about its leadership structures were mission-driven, and some were intended to prevent the institution of the Church from becoming a stumbling block or an embarrassment to those to whom the folly of the Gospel was to be preached...The tradition of the Church shows us that the exclusion of women from those offices (of leadership) came about largely for reasons of evangelism, for fear that the pagans would "mock and scoff" to hear women teach."* In our present context, we would say that the situation has been reversed, and that not having women sharing leadership and oversight with men in our Church now causes people to 'mock and scoff' and inhibits our evangelism.
13. Therefore, bearing in mind our present context, and for reasons of theology and mission, we request as a matter of high importance that the drafting and voting process be completed within the lifetime of the current quinquennium. Not to do so would be to break faith with the clear expectations that this Synod would be the one to prepare and vote on legislation to allow women to be bishops. The General Synod has already shown that it is ready and desirous to proceed with removing the legal barriers to women in the episcopate. It has also shown that it agrees with the principle of having women as bishops. We believe that it would be detrimental to the life and mission of the Church, draining of the Church's energies and resources, and dishonouring to God's Spirit if the vote were to be delayed beyond this current quinquennium.
14. In the Church of England, over 2,000 women have been ordained to the priesthood. Women have had more than 12 years of experience as priests, and 20 years' experience as deacons. For the past three years as many women as men have been selected and trained for the ordained ministries in our Church. There are a number of senior female clerics in the Church of England, including residential canons, archdeacons, and deans. Many more women holding senior positions in the Church have also held senior positions in professions other than the ordained ministries. There are also Church of England clergywomen working in senior positions in academia, the public and voluntary sectors and elsewhere. Within about a year one quarter of Church of England clergy will be female. If the gender ratios of recruitment and retirement continue as they are now, within a decade half of all licensed clergy will be female.
15. In the submission WATCH made to the TEA proposals, we stated that the concepts contained in the proposals were unacceptable. Although the later SEO proposals attempted to produce more workable arrangements, they, too, were unacceptable to WATCH. We found both sets of proposals to be overly complicated, unworkable and flawed in their design which allowed structural arrangements for clergy who wished to bypass the ministry of their bishop if female, or male, but supportive of women's priestly and episcopal ministry. However, we agreed with some of the comments contained in the TEA proposals, such as the conclusions on the lack of viability of a Third Province (see the Note in Appendix 4 by the Bishop of Guildford on the Juridical Implications of a Third Province, GS 1605, pp 47 - 48). WATCH included in its submission to the TEA proposals a paper by the Cathedral Women and Archdeacons, in which that group made it clear that should the conditions of the TEA proposals be implemented, then the most senior ordained women in the Church would seriously question whether they would be able to accept appointment to the episcopate.

16. WATCH believes that as the Church of England moves forward to opening the episcopate to women, there are good examples to be seen elsewhere in the Anglican Communion. The majority of provinces, 25 out of 38, have accepted women's ordination to the priesthood. There are currently over 8,000 priests who are women across the Anglican Communion. Four other provinces have women as deacons. So far, 14 provinces have also opened their episcopates to women. In none of these 14 provinces have any legal arrangements been made for those who remain opposed to women's ordination as bishops. All arrangements for those who remain opposed have been handled informally, locally and pastorally, and there is ample evidence that these arrangements work well.
17. Any additional arrangements consistent with Canon A4 should in our view be confined to creating a framework within which appropriate informal and pastoral arrangements can be made. There is a significant danger that other approaches would, as the Act of Synod appears to us to have done, crystallise and exacerbate differences into an increasing absence of communion, rather than allowing for the highest possible degree of communion sought by General Synod. Consistency with Canon A4 means that the Church of England officially recognises a single episcopate and a single priesthood. There may be members of the Church who will be conscientiously unable to receive the ministry of women bishops, but this will not change the teaching of the Church, the orders of its priests or the authority of its bishops. Any additional arrangements, if required, be kept local and pastoral, to be decided by the diocesan bishop, as an expression of the bishop's own responsibility to be a chief pastor to the diocese. Should a member of the clergy wish to seek the episcopal ministry of a bishop other than his or her own Diocesan, it will be the cleric's responsibility to ask the Diocesan to make arrangements for another bishop to provide ministry. We commend the model of 'conscientious objection', put forward by the Reverend Canon Peggy Jackson of Southwark, about which we believe the Legislative Drafting Group has already been made aware. Justice would require that this model is followed in all cases of clergy claiming conscientious objection, and not only in cases where the Diocesan is female. Any cleric requesting the episcopal ministry of a bishop other than their Diocesan must nevertheless recognise the authority and jurisdiction of their diocesan bishop.
18. In order to ensure parity across the dioceses and to give assurance to those opposed that a legal framework exists within which they can express their concerns and seek provision, we accept that it may be beneficial to have any additional arrangements set out in a Code of Practice. This Code would be rigorous and would need to be agreed by General Synod. The Code would not, however, be Article 8 business, and would therefore not be part of Canon Law and would not have to be voted on by the Houses of Parliament.
19. In the light of the fact that our Church has made it clear that it accepts the principle of women in the episcopate, we ask that the Act of Synod be repealed. We would draw to the Group's attention that never before in the history of our Church has a diversity of views on any subject been responded to by the creation of an alternative episcopal structure. We commend the assessment of the Act of Synod by the Reverend Canon Dr Judith Maltby, who shows that the Act is an example of modern Donatism, and has created a destructive and harmful model to catholicity increasingly applied to other cases of genuine difference between faithful Anglicans. (see 'Act of Synod, Act of Folly?', edited by Monica Furlong, SCM, 1998)

20. We also ask that, as part of the women bishops legislation, Resolutions A and B of the Women Priests Measure, 1992, be rescinded. We have already put forward a model that any additional arrangements are to be kept local and pastoral. We believe that, when women are bishops, it will be time for Resolutions A and B to be removed, and any new arrangements put in place in accordance with the present reality of our Church as one which accepts the ministry of women in all three orders.
21. We also ask in the interests of fairness and to reflect the importance of the decision for the whole parish, that in the case of a congregation requesting the Episcopal ministry by a bishop other than their Diocesan, that it must be decided by a poll of all members on the electoral roll, and not just of the members of the PCC. Bell's life of Randall Davidson (2nd Ed OUP 1938) records, in a section on the passage of the Enabling Act in debate at the then 'Representative Church Council' to allow the Church to make its own legislation, the outcome of a vote on an amendment to change the franchise for internal church elections from Baptism to Confirmation (p 969) - Bishops, 7 for 17 against; clergy, 37 for and 62 against; laity, 65 for and 80 against. There was a vigorous debate with strong views on either side. The wider franchise has been maintained ever since (as in the Electoral Roll) and a franchise based on Baptism is theologically grounded, and not merely arbitrary. The wide franchise is part of who we are as the Church of England.
22. In keeping with the recent decisions taken by General Synod, WATCH requests that when the Women Bishops Measure is passed, all future candidates for ordination should be willing to affirm their commitment to Canon A4 and recognise the orders of their clergy colleagues. We would also ask that, when the Women Bishops Measure is passed, all candidates for the Episcopacy should be willing to affirm their commitment to Canon A4 and recognise the orders of their ordained colleagues.
23. We further suggest that, when the Women Bishops Measure is passed, the Provincial Episcopal Visitors still in post should be invited to become assistant or suffragan bishops in dioceses in the Church.
24. WATCH makes this submission in the belief that it is wholly faithful to the Gospel of Christ and with an understanding of God and humanity which proclaims to the world that women as well as men are gifted and called to the ordained and lay ministries in our Church. We would, of course, be happy, to discuss or clarify any points we have raised in this paper and in the suggested legislation which we include in the Appendix.

Summary of Points in WATCH Submission

1. The Women Bishops Measure must not contain any discrimination against bishops who are women on the grounds of their sex.
2. Any additional arrangements for those who will not accept women as bishops should be local and pastoral, to be negotiated with the diocesan bishop. These arrangements should be dealt with as internal matters for the Church of England, and, if necessary, put into a Code of Practice. They should not form part of the primary legislation.
3. Any such arrangements for those who remain opposed to the episcopal ministry of a woman might follow a model along the lines of 'conscientious objection'.
4. As the Church of England has now accepted the principle that women should be bishops, women's priestly orders are no longer in doubt. There is therefore no reason to continue to allow discrimination against women who are priests, and the Act of Synod should be rescinded.
5. Similarly, Resolutions A and B should be rescinded.
6. When the Women Bishops Measure is passed, the Provincial Episcopal Visitors who are still in post should be invited to become area or suffragan bishops in dioceses in the Church of England.
7. All future ordinands should be willing to affirm their commitment to Canon A4 and recognise the orders of their female colleagues.
8. All future candidates being considered for episcopal ministry should be willing to affirm their commitment to Canon A4 and recognise the orders of their female colleagues.
9. The Women Bishops Measure should come to General Synod for final approval in the lifetime of this current quinquennium.

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Note about WATCH

WATCH has both lay and ordained members, including bishops, and our supporters hold a wide range of views on other issues, but all share an understanding of God and humanity in which both women and men fully bear God's image and are equally called to the ordained ministries in our Church. We also have members from other mainstream Christian Churches, including Methodists and Roman Catholics.