

Bishop’s Statement about the decision of General Synod on the Ordination of Women to the Episcopate based on what he said to a meeting of the Rural Deans on 22 November 2012.

1. For eighteen years we have had the priestly ministry of women and we rejoice in the ministry of women and men as priests in the Diocese of Salisbury. One third of clergy in this diocese are female, including the Dean, Director of Ministry and the new Archdeacon of Wilts. For twelve years there has been careful discussion in the Church of England, first to agree that women can and should be ordained as bishops and now to agree the means by which this is done.
2. The process to agree the Measure, the legal means, by which women will be ordained has been carefully undertaken. It has been chaired by the Bishop of Manchester who delayed his retirement by one year in order to continue to pilot the Measure to completion. In May he began his a speech to the House of Bishops by saying something like, “I stand before you for the thirteenth time to introduce an item about the Ordination of the Women to the Episcopate . . .”.
3. In February, at the last stage before Final Approval, General Synod asked the House of Bishops to look one more time to see if there was a better way of securing the continuing place of the minority of those who by conscience are opposed to the ordination of women to the episcopate. It was said that these people wanted a Measure that gave them sufficient confidence in their future for them to be able to vote ‘yes’ to women bishops.
4. That was why the House of Bishops amended clauses 8 and 5.1.c of the Draft Measure. At General Synod in July it was clear that the amended clause 5.1.c was felt by those who were strong supporters of the Measure to have gone too far. The Bishops had destabilised the process and it was decided not to put the Measure to the vote for Final Approval.. At the College and House of Bishops’ meeting in September there was a strong convergence on the “Appleby Amendment” which hinges on the word “respect”; a word with strong, moral, theological and legal meaning.
5. On Tuesday the General Synod voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Measure to ordain women to the episcopate.

	Bishops	Clergy	Laity	TOTAL
For	40	148	132	310 72%
Against	3	45	74	122 28%
Abstentions	2	0	0	

In the House of Laity the Measure failed to gain two-thirds support by 6 votes.

6. Forty two out of forty four Diocesan Synods had considered the Draft Measure and voted in favour. Of those voting in Diocesan Synods over 75% were in favour of the Draft Measure. Not only has it been agreed that the Church of England can, and should, ordain bishops but there is a strong consensus that the Measure put before Synod on Tuesday was the best way to proceed.

7. Whichever way this vote had gone there would have been people hurt and angered by the decision. As it is, the House of Laity in General Synod has clearly frustrated the strong desire of the Church of England for women as well as men to be bishops. Oddly enough, the most frequent argument put forward by Conservative Evangelicals was the significance of male headship within the life of Christ. We might therefore want to note that in the male-only House of Bishops the support for this Measure was overwhelming.
8. Many of us will be feeling upset and angry. The Archbishop of Canterbury asked us to take care of one another. All of us need to stop, pray, talk and think about what has happened, where we are and what can be done. What is God saying to us in this crisis?
9. Meetings for clergy who would like to come, have been arranged on Sunday 25 November at Corfe Mullen at 3.00pm with the Bishop of Sherborne, Archdeacons of Dorset and Sherborne and the Chair of the House of Laity and at St Denys, Warminster at 7.00pm with myself, the Archdeacon of Sarum and the Chair of the House of Laity. They are a time for prayer and reflection. They are the first and immediate opportunity for clergy to meet.
10. It is being said that the Measure before Synod on Tuesday cannot come back in the life of this Synod. We now need time to take stock and to decide what actions might be helpful. My understanding is that the Presidents (Archbishops of Canterbury and York), and four other senior members of the General Synod could bring a Measure back but they would have to be convinced that it was both significantly different and stood a good chance of gaining assent. Meanwhile, a number of MPs have said that they are considering asking Parliament to take a view on the Church's continuing exemption to Equalities Legislation. If the matter continues to be unresolved I presume that at the next elections for General Synod will be defined by this issue.
11. A number of women clergy are wondering if they can continue, not because they expected to be bishops but because the decision to continue to deny them the possibility is experienced as a judgement on eighteen years of the priestly ministry of women. We need to take care of them especially. I hope that everyone will want to stay so that the desire of the vast majority of the Church of England is enacted.
12. I note that my successor as vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields has issued an excellent statement giving the reaction of that parish church to what happened at General Synod on Tuesday. Parish churches might want to consider making similar responses.
13. The House of Bishops meets on 10 December and what to do in response to what happened at General Synod will now be the major business of that meeting.

+ Nicholas Sarum

22 November 2012