



WATCH Press Statement

WOMEN BISHOPS: THE CHURCH SHOULD MOVE AHEAD IN FAITH, NOT FEAR

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WATCH would like to express support for the motion on women bishops from the House of Bishops. Overwhelmingly, bishops, clergy and lay members in the Church of England would like women to be bishops. Substantial numbers of these want to proceed with legislation that is free from discrimination against women and that does not include 'safeguards' against the ministry of ordained women.

When women are able to be bishops, it will show that the Church accepts the ordained ministry of women on the same basis as it accepts the ordained ministry of men. This move will help to bring to an end years of legal discrimination against women in the Church, and will implicitly repudiate beliefs and behaviours which have diminished and demeaned women's lives for many centuries.

We believe that the legislation to enable women to be consecrated as bishop should provide for the simplest possible statutory approach. Arrangements for those unable in conscience to receive the ministry of women bishops should take the form of a Code of Practice, which would provide pastoral and sacramental care to those concerned and establish mutual support and co-operation between bishops throughout the Church of England. The Measure should not enshrine in legislation any form of discrimination against women or against men who ordain women.

We are committed to ensuring care for those who in conscience cannot accept women bishops, and we commend the experience of 20 years of women bishops in the Anglican Communion, who make arrangements within their dioceses or areas for the care for their clergy, without any of these arrangements being contained in law. 15 Provinces in the worldwide Anglican Communion have legislation which allows both men and women to become bishops. All of these make provision for those opposed to women's ordained ministry, but none has enshrined this provision in law.

We believe that the Church should now move ahead in faith, and cease to use the language and tactics of fear. This is not about winners and losers, 'them' and 'us', but rather about where God is leading, and has been leading, our Church. Over the past 14 years women have enriched the priestly ministries of the Church. Their presence has spoken in new ways of the Good News of Jesus Christ and we believe that having women as bishops will further expand and deepen our understanding of the nature of both humanity and the Divine.

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