

A statement from male clergy to the House of Bishops

We welcome the letter sent in early May by our women clergy colleagues to the House of Bishops of the Church of England. In common with them, we support the Simplest Statutory Approach outlined in the Report of the Women Bishops Legislative Drafting Group (GS 1685).

The letter, signed by over 500 clergy women within two days, has accumulated even more support since it was published and is now approaching a thousand signatures. We wish the House of Bishops to be aware how strongly our women colleagues are supported by us, their male counterparts in the ministry of the Church.

We emphasise our agreement that the price of having arrangements spelt out in law for those opposed to women bishops is too high and we would add that the language of 'safeguards' is offensive. Any such legislation would enshrine discrimination against women within the ordained ministries of the Church, which we would find unacceptable. Twenty years' experience in the provinces of the Anglican Communion where there are women bishops has shown tried and tested ways to meet graciously and generously the concerns of those who remain opposed to women's ordination. In none of the 15 provinces that have voted to have women as bishops has discriminatory legislation been included. We are confident that acceptable non-statutory arrangements can be devised.

We point out that many ordained men supported the ordination of women to the priesthood from the outset; significantly, many others have changed their minds over the past fourteen years. We value the ministry and collegiality of female clergy as much as that of our male colleagues; parishes and congregations have been enriched and assisted, cathedrals have benefited from the addition of women to their Chapters, and most congregations are bemused that any further hesitation and prevarication is even being considered. They know the good fruits of a priesthood inclusive of both women and men.

We urge the House of Bishops to give a clear and positive lead in the General Synod that the simplest statutory approach is all that is required to enable the ordination of women to the episcopate, something for which the Synod has already shown its support. We believe this will have widespread approval within our congregations and in both Houses of Parliament. We also believe that having women as well as men serving as bishops will be beneficial to all our work and that it will result in greater unity and integrity within our Church and greater credibility in our mission and ministry.

We consider that any further delay or any compromise in legislation would be deleterious to our mission and evangelism. We are also aware that some men themselves may well refuse ordination to the episcopate if the Church chooses to be discriminatory in its acceptance of women as bishops.

We appreciate the patience and generosity expressed by our sisters in Orders and we urge that the time is right for a formal and simple extension of their ministries to include episcopacy as soon as possible.

We sign this letter in a spirit of solidarity in faith and work with our female colleagues and we pray for wisdom, clarity and courage for our (all male) House of Bishops.

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