

The Women Bishops legislation – the next stage

Advice from WATCH National

February 2009

1. The General Synod voted earlier this month to send the draft legislation for women bishops for revision in committee. Revision is the stage when detailed changes to the legislation are considered.
2. Any member of the General Synod can write to the Revision Committee with specific proposals for amendment of the legislation. Any member doing so has the right to attend a Revision Committee meeting and speak to their proposals. WATCH encourages all its members, who are Synod members, to write to the Committee.
3. Non members of the Synod can also write with their proposals for amendments. They do not have the right to attend a Revision Committee meeting and speak to it. WATCH however encourages all its members, whether on Synod or not, to write to the Committee. It is vital that the Committee appreciates the strength of feeling in the church at large about aspects of the draft legislation.
4. The deadline for writing to the Committee is Monday 16 March 2009. Please write to David Williams, Clerk to the General Synod, Church House, Great Smith St, London SW1P 3AZ. You can also email your letter as an attachment to him at david.williams@c-of-e.org.uk Head your letter “Women Bishops Legislation – Submission to Revision Committee”. We would like to keep a check on submissions, so please email a copy to Susan Atkin at susan_atkin@lineone.net if possible.
5. When you write, please remember that the Committee is interested in specific proposals for amendment to the current drafts of the Measure, the Canon and the Code of Practice. You do not have to make your proposals in the language of Acts of Parliament, but you must convey your wishes about what you want to see instead of a particular clause, paragraph or sentence. Please give your reasons in support of your proposal. Your reasons could be theological, pastoral, practical [or whatever]. You will find all the draft legislation at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/papers/womenbishopsdebate/furtherreport>
6. The draft legislation seeks to address the concerns of those opposed to women priests and bishops. There are differing views in WATCH, as in the wider church, about the merits of the proposed arrangements to address those concerns. Accordingly in this advice, we are offering options for proposals for amendment to our members.
7. We offer our options for amendment by reference to particular provisions in the Measure, Canon and Code of Practice in that order. In this advice we are focusing on what we believe are the main areas of concern in the legislation. Do not feel you have to cover all the points; indeed it would be

better if you didn't as we don't want the Revision Committee to receive hundreds (we hope) of identical submissions. So focus on the two or three points about which you feel most strongly and write about those.

8. We hope that our advice will be of help to WATCH members and the church, as we move forward to an ordained ministry, in all three orders, which fully reflects the humanity which God created and which Jesus died to save.

THE MEASURE

Clauses 2 and 3

9. If you feel that the arrangements for those opposed to women bishops and priests make too many concessions and will damage the integrity of the church, **you can propose that clauses 2 and 3 are deleted**. This will mean that bishops will not be able to make declarations of opposition to women bishops and priests (clause 2), and that bishops to provide pastoral care to parishes which are likewise opposed ("complementary bishops") (clause 3) will not be appointed. The argument is that the Code of Practice will be sufficient to lay down guidelines for appropriate procedures and behaviours in the church once women bishops are appointed.

Clause 3

10. You may feel that clause 2 can remain in the Measure but that clause 3 is still unacceptable. WATCH has said that the proposal for the creation of specially nominated suffragan sees would be divisive and would perpetuate the notion that a male bishop who has taken part in the ordination of women is "tainted". Accordingly **you could propose that clause 3 is deleted**.
11. An alternative proposal would be to provide that the archbishops of Canterbury and York do not have to appoint "complementary bishops". This would mean that **you could propose that in subsection (1) first line the word "shall" is replaced by the word "may"**. This would mean that the archbishop will have the option not to make any such appointment if there was no longer any need to do so.
12. In subsection (2) you may think that leaving the decision to PCCs to petition for arrangements because they are opposed to women priests means that too narrow a group will make that decision. Accordingly **you may wish to propose that the decision is made by the APCM with a two thirds majority and that the APCM has to give its theological rationale for doing so, in a memorandum**.

Clause 4

13. WATCH has said that the diocesan bishop should retain most of the functions listed in clause 4(1) as possible areas for delegation to a complementary bishop. If you agree **you could propose the deletion of paragraphs (c), (d), (e), (f)**. This would mean that discipline, appointments of clergy, ministerial review and development, and sponsorship of candidates for ordination training, would remain with the diocesan bishop. If these functions could be delegated to complementary bishops, this would reinforce the creation of ghettos within our church.

New clause

14. WATCH thinks that if there are to be provisions for those opposed to women bishops and priests, those provisions should be temporary or at least subject to review. We believe that the time will come when people will be surprised that there was ever any requirement to make those provisions.
15. Accordingly **you may wish to propose a new clause under which the Measure, other than clause 1, will cease to have effect so many years after commencement. For example, the period in question could be ten or twenty years.**
16. Or **you could propose a new clause under which the House of Bishops will conduct a review of the operation of the Measure every five years from its coming into force and will report their findings to the General Synod.** That could trigger requests for the repeal of the arrangements for those opposed as being no longer needed.

THE CANON

Paragraph 3

17. WATCH has become increasingly concerned about the proposed new Canon A4 (3) which affirms that its members may with a good conscience hold theological convictions against women bishops and priests. We see this as divisive but also potentially an insidious precedent. Could a similar provision about other matters be inserted into the Canon? Accordingly if you agree, **you may wish to submit the deletion of the proposed new Canon A4 (3) in paragraph 3.**

Paragraph 12

18. These paragraphs would replace the existing Oath of Canonical Obedience in Canon C 14(3) with a new Oath which would require an oath to the Bishop and to “any other bishop for the time being set in authority over me ...” You may consider that this would be inimical to episcopacy as practised in the Church of England. If you agree, **you may wish to propose the deletion of paragraph 12 and of the similar provisions in the Canon – see paragraphs 5, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30 and 31.**

THE CODE OF PRACTICE

19. Paragraph 3 of the draft Code states that the reception of women bishops remains an open question. WATCH considers that this statement down plays the significance of several Synodical resolutions, in favour of women bishops, and the strength of feeling in church and country in support of their appointment. **If you agree, you may wish to propose amendments to paragraph 3 so that it states that the Church of England has committed itself to ensuring a place in the Church to those opposed to women priests and that their position is within the spectrum of Anglican tradition** – without further wording.

20. Paragraphs 16 and 17 give rise to concern that they embody a doctrine of taint in that (a) the consecration of male bishops opposed to women bishops and the complementary bishops will be consecrated by male bishops and (b) other bishops present who do not join in a consecration of a male bishop who is opposed to women bishops will participate in other parts of the service. **If you agree, you may wish to propose that paragraphs 16 and 17 should be deleted from the Code.**

21. Paragraph 22 gives rise to concern that complementary bishops may be given too much influence at bishops' senior staff meetings. Whilst it is important that if the Church is to have such bishops, they should be considered as part of the wider Church, their full participation in senior staff meetings may give too much weight to the views of a minority within the diocese, which in many cases is increasingly small. **If you agree, you may wish to propose that the last section of the last sentence of paragraph 22 is replaced by “when appropriate”.**