

# The Bishop in Canterbury

The Right Reverend Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover  
The Bishop's Office, Old Palace, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2EE  
Telephone: +44 (0) 1227 459382. Fax: 784985  
Email: [trevor.willmott@bishcant.org](mailto:trevor.willmott@bishcant.org)  
Diocesan website: [www.canterburydiocese.org](http://www.canterburydiocese.org)

21 July 2010

Dear Colleagues

## **Pastoral Letter in response to General Synod**

I am writing to give you an account of the recent General Synod meeting in York which looked at the question of ordination of women to the episcopate. Having had a long-standing role in the process, I also offer some personal observations about where we are and the next stages we need to address as a diocese.

If many of the recent newspaper and television reports were to be taken at face value, those inside as well as those outside the immediacy of our church's life might be forgiven for thinking that the whole of the Synod was taken up with a divisive and increasingly acrimonious series of debates. Thankfully such was not the case. While we did indeed struggle hard to find a way through the complexities of this issue, our common life in York, undergirded both by our daily worship and by a shared commitment to keep the Church outward facing to the needs of the world, enabled us to recognise afresh that we were indeed seeking God's will in this particular matter.

That said, the question of the ordination of women to the episcopate taxed us all. At times the intensity of feelings from all sides of the discussion challenged our ability to get behind words such as 'transfer' and 'delegation' which, as they became increasingly totemic, also, in my judgment, became increasingly unhelpful.

### **So where are we now?**

To try and answer that, let me rehearse a little of the journey which brought us to our current debate in York. In 2006 General Synod set forward a process to bring forward legislation to enable women to be ordained as bishops while at the same time seeking to ensure that provision be made within the legislation for those who as loyal Anglicans could not agree with such a development in our common life. I was a member of that legislative drafting group, as I have been also of the steering and revision committees, which have worked through the various drafts over the past two years.

Last week in York, Synod completed the revision stage of the work making some alterations and/or additions to the drafts. The draft Measure and Canon will now be sent to the dioceses for approval and comment. If a majority of the diocesan synods (23) give consent, the drafts will then return to the Synod for the steering committee to shepherd through to final approval. If we reach that stage, approval will require a two-thirds majority in each of the Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity.

As the debates in York showed, there remains much work still to be done if we are to meet the hopes expressed when we set out on the journey. As in the National Church, so in our own diocese, views on this matter are not unanimous.

### **What does the Measure say?**

The Measure as drafted enables women to be ordained as bishops. Alternative provision for those unable to receive the Episcopal ministry of women will be by delegation from each diocesan bishop. The House of Bishops is required to produce a Code of Practice which will offer a framework to enable each diocese to draw up a scheme to provide sacramental and pastoral care for those unable to accept the ministry of a women bishop. If the diocesan bishop will not himself ordain women to the priesthood, provision of women to be ordained and their ministry to be supported, must also be contained in the diocesan scheme.

## So what might we do now?

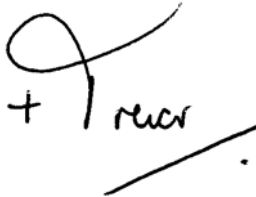
- Listen carefully, especially to those with whom we might disagree, seeking always to get beneath the presenting words to the deeper truths
- Talk, gently, with each other and thus avoid the building of unnecessary walls of separation
- Most important of all, pray together and again most especially, with those who take a different view to our own

In my judgment, the Church of God is no more exempt from disagreement than any other institution. The challenge for all of us is whether we can handle our disagreements differently and thus seek that peace and reconciliation worthy of our calling.

As soon as we receive a draft Measure and Canon from the General Synod I will set out a process to enable us to listen, talk gently and pray together about these matters in order that we may come to a mind at the May meeting of our Synod next year. I hope that each of the deaneries will find an opportunity to do this sometime between October of this year and March 2011. I will, with colleagues, provide a briefing paper with suggestions intended to help this part of the process.

I stand ready to listen, talk and pray with any community or individual who wishes to do so. For now, I ask you all to join with me in praying for the wellbeing of our Church.

With my blessing



+ Trevor