

Women bishops coming soon in the Church of England?

With almost all the English Diocesan Synod voting tallies now in there has apparently been a sea change in the figures supporting the ordination of women as bishops in the Church of England. This is a consultative process but even conservative dioceses such as London and Chichester have produced majorities in favour. The matter will therefore return to the General Synod in July for a second attempt, the Synod having failed to secure the required majority in the House of Laity in November 2012.

Notwithstanding the General Synod's capacity to surprise, and it could yet fail to approve the proposed legislation, the way does look clear to allow women to serve in the Church of England as bishops in the near future. If this is to be the case the Church of England will have caught up with the three other local provinces of Scotland, Wales and Ireland in accepting that women may be bishops and in the case of Ireland actually having one.

The Church of England is often considered the mother church of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Thus in agreeing to ordain women as bishops it will not only join the nineteen other provinces which have already passed legislation for women bishops*, it will endorse the general tone and mood of the Communion, which has over the past thirty years gradually and sometimes painfully accepted women's priestly ministry which in turn logically extends to the episcopate. Only nine provinces currently remain without women priests and four of these have opened the diaconate to women.

In short although there is still a way to go the direction is clear, the ordained ministry of women is conducive to Anglicanism. This is a statement that would have been inconceivable only a generation ago and for such *Deo gratias*.

Nicholas Henderson
May 2014

* To date six provinces have actually ordained women to the episcopate.