



MOVING FORWARD ON WOMEN BISHOPS CALL TO ACTION!

**WATCH supports the draft legislation proposed by the Revision Committee as a framework for moving forward without further delay.
But this represents a *significant compromise*.**

The ideal

WATCH has always campaigned for the simplest possible legislation for women bishops, that is, a **Single Clause Measure**. This is the only way of having women bishops without discrimination. A Single Clause Measure would have brought women in the Church of England under the protection of the Equality Act. It would also have put us in step with all other Anglican Provinces that have consecrated women as bishops. Most importantly it would have signaled that the Church now values women as much as men. What is being proposed falls short of this ideal.

The current proposals

The draft legislation provides for the consecration of women as bishops with special arrangements for those with conscientious difficulties by way of **delegation** from the diocesan bishop under a **statutory Code of Practice**. This is the approach that Synod approved after lengthy debate in July 2008.

Under the proposals, each diocesan bishop would be required to draw up a **Scheme** in her or his diocese that takes account of a **national Code of Practice** and provides **local arrangements for the performance of certain Episcopal functions** in relation to parishes with conscientious difficulties.

In addition such parishes would be able to request, when there is a vacancy, that **only a male incumbent or priest-in-charge** be appointed.

A compromise for WATCH

It is a **significant compromise** for WATCH to consider supporting anything short of a Single Clause Measure. However, the Revision Committee has listened to all viewpoints and investigated the practical possibilities with great care. Their lengthy report is a testament to the enormous patience and generosity of their process.

The Revision Committee's proposals

- Allow for the consecration of women as bishops
- Maintain the integrity of the church and the episcopate
- Make provision for those who are opposed to women becoming bishops

There seems to be a **consensus** emerging across the moderate mainstream that this is a good basis for moving forward.

All these factors lead us to believe that WATCH should support the proposals at Synod. However, this is a compromise so that we can move ahead with women bishops **NOW** and be as inclusive as we can **without compromising the integrity of the episcopate or of women**.

Our Concerns

Although we support the legislative framework proposed, **WATCH has concerns** over certain details of the draft legislation. Our Synod Task Force is considering possible amendments. Our principle concerns are as follows:

1. The Code of Practice.

The Code of Practice has not yet been drafted and yet will be key to the content of Schemes that are drawn up at local level. Para 448 of the Revision Committee's report accepts that '*much ... turns on what the Code of Practice says and the extent to which the bishops ... are prepared to commit themselves to a broadly consistent approach across the country*'.

We have an incomplete picture at present and we are concerned that there is room for many discriminatory practices to return at a later stage in the process. WATCH is prepared to support the draft Measure but we reserve our position on the details of the Code of Practice.

The Revision Committee has recommended that a draft Code of Practice be ready before Final Approval of the legislation. We would urge the preparation and publication of the draft Code at the earliest possible opportunity and endorse the Committee's proposal that both men and women should be involved in the drafting process.

2. Diocesan Schemes

The Measure does not provide for a 'national standard' for Diocesan Schemes and there is no obligation to consult with a local or national advisory group in drawing up a Scheme. This leaves open the possibility that practice will polarise across dioceses with some dioceses continuing to provide a very difficult environment for women in ordained ministry. There is no simple mechanism for challenge or redress if a Scheme is unsatisfactory.

Where the Diocesan Bishop will not ordain women, the Scheme makes no provision for the care of parishes who support the ministry of women or for women discerning a vocation to the priesthood.

3. Letters of Request

Provision for those opposed is triggered by the PCC sending a Letter of Request to the Diocesan Bishop. WATCH would like to see the grounds and process for such Letters to be tightened.

We are concerned that the PCC need only pass a resolution 'on grounds of theological conviction' and that these grounds need not be further specified in the Letter of Request. We are also concerned that the Diocesan Bishop is given no opportunity to challenge the reasonableness of any such 'theological' grounds.

These theological grounds need not be of the PCC themselves – the theological convictions of others (also unspecified) is enough. Given the seriousness of the request – alternative Episcopal oversight or the appointment of a male priest – there is need for more rigorous scrutiny of the grounds of a Letter of Request.

WATCH would also like to a requirement for wider consultation in the parish before the PCC considers whether to send a Letter of Request.

4. Exemptions from the Equality Act.

WATCH deeply regrets the need to seek exemptions from the Equality Act and will seek to minimise the effect of such exemptions wherever possible.

What next ?

The draft legislation returns to Synod in July for its Revision Stage. But, as the House of Bishops recently made clear, this is **likely to be a very difficult Session**.

Opponents, though a **small minority**, remain very vocal and, despite the careful listening of the Revision Committee, still **claim they have not been heard**. There will be attempts at Synod to bring back structural separation, declarations by bishops and other discriminatory measures.

WATCH will oppose any attempts to institutionalise division within the Church. The Revision Committee has already explored the options thoroughly and has found that none of the approaches suggested to them by those opposed would work in practice.

There must be no further concessions to accommodate theologies that demean and diminish women.

WATCH needs you to ACT NOW!

Get involved!

This is a crucial time for the future of our Church. We need your help to ensure that the best possible legislation is passed by Synod and that there are no further delays in the process. Synod has been debating this for more than thirty years. Now is the time for action! Please help us campaign in the weeks leading up to Synod.

Get writing!

- to your **Diocesan Bishop**,
- to your **General Synod representatives**
- to the **Church and national press**

key points to remember

- this legislation is a **compromise**
- structural solutions **will not work**
- the **integrity of the church** is at stake
- we need to **move forward NOW!**

Get blogging!

Engage positively with online discussions

Get together!

Meet locally to co-ordinate action and share ideas. Contact WATCH www.womenandthechurch.org to find friends in your area.

As well as preparing for this Synod we need to make sure that good people stand for the forthcoming General Synod elections. Have you considered standing yourself? We can help you through the process.

Keep praying!