



**From the Bishop of London**

13<sup>th</sup> July 2010

**General Synod – What actually happened?**

Dear Friends,

Most of us get information about what is happening in the rest of the church beyond our own patch from the mass media. Understandably in a fierce ratings war and in the struggle to get religious news of any kind reported there is tendency to hype and dramatise and to give undue prominence to extreme voices.

Almost every week we are told that that the Church of England faces “the greatest crisis since the reformation” and “that a split is imminent”.

Actually the weather at the 2010 General Synod in York was much more temperate than in July 2009. I was very proud of the way in which your representatives from the London Diocese, speaking from different viewpoints, made a constructive contribution to many of the debates. The Bishop of Willesden in particular with his characteristic candour shone a bright light on the complex business before us. The outcome is that the measure to permit women to be consecrated to the episcopate has been remitted for consideration in the Dioceses. This process will take about eighteen months before the matter returns to the General Synod.

There is no doubt that a substantial majority in the Synod and in the Church is strongly in favour of this change and for many, the Synod’s decision will be a cause for heartfelt rejoicing. It was also significant that only a very few of those opposed to this measure sought to delay the process. There is a general feeling that it is urgent to conclude a debate which can appear somewhat introverted when our real focus must be on our unity in mission and in service to a country facing turbulent times.

In consequence much of the discussion was about how to secure an honoured place for those who cannot accept such a decision as one authorised by scripture and tradition and who believe that it will erect new obstacles in our relations with other parts of the “one, holy catholic and apostolic church” to which we claim to belong.

It is emphatically not true to say that the measure as it stands contains no provisions for those who hold such a view. Attempts during the two days of debate to amend the draft measure to remove any arrangements to assist those who adhere to the present practice of the Church were decisively rebuffed.

The draft as it stands offers a “statutory code of practice” to protect the position of those opposed to this development. The question which occupied much of our time was – “Is it enough?”

There was clearly an anxiety in some parts of the Synod that given the sense among a number of supporters of the proposal to ordain women as bishops that this was a gospel and justice matter, “a code of practice” would not be strong enough to ensure respect for the minority who on theological and biblical grounds continued to resist the change.

It is a complex question particularly given the fact that the contents of such a code have not been worked out. At the same time a number of words which have been used in the debate thus far, such as “delegation” and “transfer” have become freighted with negative connotations.

The Archbishops attempted to clear a way through the impasse by introducing the concept of “co-ordinate jurisdiction”. The contents of such a “co-ordinariate” would also have to be settled by reference to the, as yet undrafted, code of practice. Although I voted for the amendment, it is unsurprising that there was a good deal of confusion about what such a concept might mean in practice. The Archbishops’ proposal failed to secure a majority in the House of Clergy although it passed the Bishops and the Laity.

The important point is that valiant attempts are being made to open the way for women to be consecrated bishops without excluding from the church those who adhere to the present position and who share the faith which inspires our mission. We now have an opportunity to consider the draft legislation in the Diocese and I shall be setting out the process for doing this in due course. At the same time the House of Bishops is charged with working on the vital question of the Code of Practice. The Bishop of Willesden and I will be fully involved in these discussions. There will be a special meeting of the Diocesan Synod to ponder and vote on the advice which London will be sending back to the General Synod.

I do hope that anyone questioning their place in the Church of England on the basis of media reports or premature judgements about the final shape of the legislation will get in touch with me or with their respective Area Bishop before making any personal decisions or public statements.

I returned from York clear both that the majority will is to ordain women bishops while at the same time preserving, as far as possible, the unity of the church in her mission and service to our country.

With thanks for our partnership in the Gospel.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Richard Chartres". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

The Rt Revd and Rt Hon Richard Chartres KCVO DD FSA