

# THE BISHOP OF CHICHESTER

The Right Reverend Dr John Hind

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To the Diocese

14 July 2010

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am writing to offer some information and advice following the meeting of the General Synod of the Church of England in York from 9th to 13th July 2010.

The last time I wrote to you in this way was following the General Synod of July 2008 and I am attaching/enclosing a copy of what I wrote then.

## **A      *What happened?***

First I need to explain what has happened this weekend. As you may imagine, media reports have been selective!

Most people will know the General Synod had already agreed in principle that the episcopate should be open to women as well as men. The main focus of this General Synod was therefore whether any special provision should be made for those who cannot accept this and, if so, what such provision might be.

The proposal before us made some provisions which most people considered discriminatory and which most opponents found insufficient. This disagreement had already led to some members of the commission writing effectively a minority report.

In the General Synod, every attempt to amend the proposals to strengthen the provision was defeated. A couple of smaller amendments were passed.

My own preference had been for the creation of new dioceses in the closest possible association with the other dioceses of the Church of England. This would have enabled people of both sides to pursue the mission and ministry of the Church, including its ecumenical relations, with integrity, notwithstanding their impaired fellowship with each other. It would also have meant that no bishop, male or female, would have any restriction to their ministry or any obligation to receive an episcopal ministry that for good reason they found unacceptable.

This proposal was defeated, although it did command the support of more than a third of the Synod.

To my mind, the most serious moment was the defeat of the amendment proposed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. This was in fact supported by a majority of members of the Synod but, in accordance with the rules of the Synod, it was possible for a "procedural motion" requiring each of the three "houses" of Bishops, Clergy and Laity to vote in favour. While the bishops and laity supported the archbishops' amendment, the clergy narrowly failed to do so (85:90 with 5 abstentions).

Although I was very unhappy about this amendment for a number of reasons, especially theological, I did vote for it because it seemed to me to be the last opportunity this Synod had to try to preserve the Church of England as the generous and comprehensive church it has tried to be.

Despite my misgivings, I also supported this amendment out of my sense of loyalty to our Archbishop whose efforts, with those of the Archbishop of York, need our affirmation at a critical moment in the life of the Church of England.

**B      *What was decided?***

It was agreed to refer to dioceses a proposal that women should be admitted to the episcopate and that every diocesan bishop would be required to make provision for parishes and clergy who so requested to receive the ministry of male priests or a male bishop appointed by the diocesan bishop. The Measure can be found on the Church of England website.

**C      *What happens next?***

Sometime over the next two years every diocese in the Church of England will be asked to consider this matter. It will be for each diocese to decide whether to consult parishes and deaneries. A decision will be taken by the Bishop's Council as to whether to refer the draft Measure to deaneries, but my hope is that every parish will discuss it carefully.

As you will know, for the past three years I have been encouraging the careful study by local groups of our study programme (*"Women in the episcopate. A study of the Rochester Report"*). It is easier to study and discuss things objectively when there are no immediate decisions to be taken and so I hope that most members of the diocese have already thought this through in the light of the Rochester Report and the study guide. It is important that when our diocesan synod comes to vote it might have the benefit of the widest possible and best-informed consultation within the diocese.

If more than half the diocesan synods approve, it will return to the General Synod for "final approval", which will require a two-thirds majority in each of the three houses.

**D      *In the meantime?***

In my letter of July 2008, I wrote *"Reactions in the diocese will be as varied as in any other diocese. Some will be rejoicing and others weeping. I hope that everyone will do their best to maintain as high a degree of fellowship as possible with each other and above all to act charitably and graciously especially towards those who take sharply different views from their own."* My first message is to repeat those words.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that things have moved on in the past two years.

Perhaps the most important thing to say is that almost everyone, including those opposed, now accepts that the Church of England will admit women to its episcopate within the next few years. This is a matter of great rejoicing for many people. Of course this is entirely subject to the

diocesan consultations about to begin and ultimately the general Synod, but no-one seriously thinks the direction of travel will be reversed.

That must not, however, influence members of the diocese as and when they are asked to vote. Everyone should vote according to their conscience, having of course made sure they have done the best they can to understand, in the light of the Gospel, the issues at stake.

During what is bound to be a difficult period in our common life, I want to assure you of the principles that have guided our diocesan policy for a number of years.

1. except where law requires/permits and conscience dictates, the Diocese of Chichester makes no distinction of gender in respect of the discernment and training of ordinands or the ordination and deployment of clergy. I expect all members of the diocese to behave with courtesy and mutual respect, regardless of their views on this matter.
2. I ordain deacons regardless of gender and I commission assistant bishops to ordain female priests. I license, collate and institute clergy regardless of gender, and expect the archdeacons to induct on the same basis.
3. Special arrangements have been made to ensure that appropriate pastoral support is available for those who need particular encouragement.

***E Some other issues***

I recognise that many members of the diocese will feel unsettled at the moment and I assure you all, regardless of your position on these matters, of the support of your bishops. Special meetings have been arranged in the autumn for laity and clergy who are wondering about their own future, but I want to assure everyone that Bp Mark, Bp Wallace and I are available for anyone who, individually or in groups, wishes to consult us.

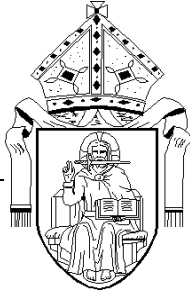
As your diocesan bishop, I also want to add that I consider it my responsibility to encourage and support all members of the diocese, whatever view they take on these matters and whatever challenges such developments pose to their own future participation in the life of the Church of England.

May God bless and preserve us all.

With all good wishes

Yours sincerely

+John



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## **Copy of a pastoral letter to the Diocese 08 July 2008**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

You will have heard the result of the latest vote in General Synod on the Manchester report. Contrary to media reports the debate was not about the principle of ordaining women to the episcopate in the Church of England, but about the next stage in the process.

The motion eventually passed was:

‘That this Synod:

- (a) affirm that the wish of its majority is for women to be admitted to the episcopate;
- (b) affirm its view that special arrangements be available, within the existing structures of the Church of England, for those who as a matter of theological conviction will not be able to receive the ministry of women as bishops or priests;
- (c) affirm that these should be contained in a statutory national code of practice to which all concerned would be required to have regard; and
- (d) instruct the legislative drafting group, in consultation with the House of Bishops, to complete its work accordingly, including preparing the first draft of a code of practice, so that the Business Committee can include first consideration of the draft legislation in the agenda for the February 2009 group of sessions.’

The main question Synod was asked was “the extent to which it wishes to continue to accommodate the breadth of theological views on this issue that [the Church of England] currently encompasses” and, in order to do so, whether special arrangements should be made for those whose convictions would make them unable to receive the ministry of women bishops. The answer to this question was “yes”.

From the range of options suggested in the Manchester Report, the Synod decided it wanted to proceed by way of a “statutory national code of practice”. This decision was carried by the vast majority of members of the Synod, although it was opposed by all those with theological objections to the ordination of women bishops. It will be difficult for a code of practice to be drawn up that will satisfy those for whom it is apparently designed, but these are still early days. In due course, if the Legislative Committee is able to produce a draft that satisfies General Synod, it will then be referred to the dioceses before General Synod gives final approval. Until then it will not be possible to be clear about the long term future for the Church of England, although the direction now seems pretty clear.

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Reactions in the Diocese will be as varied as in any other diocese. Some will be rejoicing and others weeping. I hope that everyone will do their best to maintain as high a degree of fellowship as possible with each other and above all to act charitably and graciously especially towards those who take sharply different views from their own. Charity and graciousness were not, I fear, the most obvious characteristics of the Synod debate.

I am grateful to those who have shared with me their reflections on the dilemmas facing the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, including the members of various societies and other groups who have met with me over the past few months. I was particularly appreciative of the generosity that most people in the Diocese seem to want to show towards each other and pray earnestly that that may continue.

Yours – in prayer and some confusion,

*+ John*

8<sup>th</sup> July 2008