

St Mary-le-Tower Church Ipswich

Interim Statement on Women Bishops

**A personal statement from the vicar,
Revd Canon Charles Jenkin**

This week's decision by the General Synod of the Church of England not to give final approval for women bishops is a hugely embarrassing setback for the whole Church. It has happened because the House of Laity has turned out to be seriously unrepresentative of the laity in general.

The disparity between the voting by bishops and clergy on one hand and the laity on the other brutally reveals this (bishops 44-3, clergy 148-45, laity 132-74). Moreover this decision flies in the face of voting in the dioceses where over 75% of those voting have consistently been in favour of this measure in all but two out of forty four dioceses. However, you may like to know that all the representatives on General Synod for this diocese unanimously voted in favour of this measure, so the problem doesn't lie in Suffolk.

This decision does not reflect the real Church of England. The voting on this occasion in the House of Laity simply does not represent the vast majority, as those opposing the full equality of women in the Church are vigorous but small minorities. They are (or have been) a valued part of the Church of England, but they are not the mainstream and this decision significantly overrates their importance.

Sadly, it will now take some time to put this right, as constitutional arrangements designed to achieve wide consensus do not allow such errors to be rectified quickly. However I wish to assure members of St Mary-le-Tower Church and our supporters more widely in the community, that this decision will not stand. It will be reversed, and the only question is how soon this can be done. This is temporary setback which is temporary, albeit one that is deeply offensive.

Much has been made in the debate about respect for different viewpoints in the Church, but it has to be said that the theological arguments of those opposed to women priests and bishops have consistently been found to be weak and inadequate in the context of modern knowledge and social justice.

In particular I wish to single out the assertion, recently much repeated by those opposing women bishops, that they nevertheless affirm women as equal to men, but different. This is intellectually ridiculous and morally offensive. Nobody is ever equal when they are denied the opportunity of equal power and influence. This is the whole point of equality, and that kind of obfuscation has so often been the stance of those defending rank prejudice.

At root, the real objection to this decision lies in the way that it offends against the inclusive loving justice of God that Jesus taught. Jesus was radically inclusive of women but it was the early Church that then reasserted traditional patriarchy. As with racism and slavery, it is a matter of shame that the Church took so long to recognise these as sins, and it is a matter of continuing shame that the Church of England has not yet been able to put this right in respect of discrimination against one half of the human race. I pray that this will be done soon and commit myself to doing all I can to help ensure this.

CJ