

## General Synod Report

### Women Bishops

**This time there were three debates about women bishops.**

1) **The first debate was the ecumenical response to the report of 2004.** Three churches had replied; the Methodist, the URC and the Roman Catholic churches, and each of these had sent a written report to Synod last November. This time Prof Frances Young (Methodist) was quite clear that the Methodist Church saw equal access to all ministries as non-negotiable. The Prof David Thompson, (URC), said much the same and Fr Milner (RC) said he had nothing to add to or take from what they said in November, which was basically that our relationship with them would be impaired if we do have women bishops.

2) **The next debate was a whole Synod discussion of a report** put together by the Bishop of Guildford and a working group. In his introductory speech, the bishop said that a third province with male-only bishops would fracture the Church. Also, that a single clause Measure to have women bishops and deal with the problems for dissenters from that in a code of practice would be painful for a significant minority of people, so the way ahead was TEA or 'Transferred Episcopal Arrangements'. (There was much hilarity about this because the only women on the group had been The Ven Joy **Tetley**). These arrangements would allow non-diocesan bishops to be answerable to their Archbishop in order to operate in dioceses where the bishop was a woman. The debate moved between those who thought the CofE could not make such a decision until Rome did, to those who were unhappy about bishops who operated outside traditional diocesan borders and worked with the Archbishops rather than the diocesan bishops, and those who were prepared to wait until they got a single clause Measure and those who wanted women bishops asap.

This debate resulted in the Guildford report being accepted.

3) **Finally Synod debated the next step towards having women bishops.** The Archbishop of Canterbury opened the debate and it seemed clear that he did not want a third province of the CofE nor a single clause Measure with a code of practice. He wanted TEA as the basis for further work - even though parts of the work may be 'untidy'. There were several amendments, some of which got strong support from the Synod. But +Rowan advised Synod to vote against them all. Katie Tupling made a very good speech (for women bishops and based on her own experiences).

Synod voted to go ahead and try to work with TEA. Although the WATCH group and the Catholic group were not happy, the majority of people felt that the TEA proposals offered a way forward which could be made to work.

## **Debate on Reader Ministry**

This was a Private Members' Motion put by Nigel Holmes from Carlisle Diocese on the National Readers' Council and chair of the Reader Magazine Editorial committee. The main thread of the debate was that so many new forms of ministry are arising in the church (eg Non-stipendiary, Ordained Local Ministers, the permanent Diaconate Pioneer Ministers, Lay Pastoral assistants, Youth workers, listeners, administrators etc) that Readers are confused about their role, have felt sidelined, and in some areas, underused. We were all given a briefing paper which gave 'job descriptions' of the various ministries and it is certainly true that there is overlap in many of these ministries. In rural areas especially, Readers are still in high demand (because of the shortage of clergy and multi-parish benefices) and they take many funerals. One idea was that Readers could be lay theologians, especially in the villages, and could be trained for such work so that untrained people should not have to lead services and preach (reading Jane William's lectionary commentary was a favourite for this purpose). This was a good debate and the matter may now get a mention in the forthcoming Faith and Order Advisory Group's paper on ministry due later this year.