

16/97 Conference on Women's Ministry

(A report from the Standing Committee)

Introduction

1. On 23 October 1997 the Archbishop circulated to members of the Synod a memorandum in which the Archbishop proposed a conference to assist members of the Synod in determining what they believe to be the will of God on the subject of the ministry of women in the Diocese and, in particular, the question of women exercising ordained ministry.
2. On 23 October 1997 the Synod resolved as follows (resolution 16/97) -
 "Synod notes that in 1996 a substantial majority of Synod affirmed the Diocesan policy of not ordaining women as priests and after a second detailed debate on this issue rejected the bill for the General Synod - Law of the Church of England Clarification Canon 1992 Adopting Ordinance 1996. Synod warmly supports the Archbishop's proposal for a conference on the future of women's ministry in the Diocese and respectfully encourages the Archbishop-in-Council to plan a conference that will encourage and strengthen the ministries of women in our churches."

The Conference

3. The Conference referred to in resolution 16/97 was held on Saturday, 16 May 1998 at Trinity Grammar School. About 330 Synod members attended.

Morning Session

4. After a welcome from the Archbishop and Bible exposition and prayer from Archdeacon Trevor Edwards the morning session of the Conference focussed on the ordination of women to the priesthood.
5. Bishop Paul Barnett reflected and commented upon 2 papers which had been circulated in advance to Synod members. The first paper, entitled "Not Compromise; Not Uniformity; but Liberty - a Case for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood" was prepared by a group convened by Dr Stuart Piggin. The second paper "Ordaining Women to the Priesthood - A Case Against" was prepared by a group convened by Canon Peter Jensen.
6. A copy of Bishop Barnett's reflections and comments was subsequently circulated to Synod members.
7. Representatives of the groups which prepared each of the 2 papers answered questions from Synod members.
8. The Rev Narelle Jarrett and Dr Ann Young then presented a paper prepared with Bishop Paul Barnett on options for addressing the issue of the ordination of women to the priesthood and the ramifications of each of those options. The options considered included the following -
 - (a) maintaining the present policy by which women cannot be ordained as priests;
 - (b) extending the role and ministry of women deacons;
 - (c) allowing for women priests but limiting the ministries to which a women priest can be licensed;
 - (d) allowing for women priests without limiting the ministries to which a woman priest can be licensed;
 - (e) allowing for women priests and providing for oversight of them by a bishop from outside the Diocese;
 - (f) allowing parishes which want women rectors to withdraw from the Diocese and join another diocese.
9. Synod members then divided into 35 small groups to discuss the following question -
 "We are faced in our Diocese and Synod, with a serious division of opinion over whether or not there should be included among the many ministries exercised in the church by women, the opportunity to fulfill the ministry of presbyter. Can you conceive of any generally acceptable approach to this question that would satisfy the convictions of both groups, and relieve the Synod of the prospect of regularly debating bills calculated to make such ministry possible or to rescind such bills?".
10. Each group was invited to write down any ideas or conclusions for the Archbishop-in-Council to consider.

Afternoon Session

11. The afternoon session commenced with a panel discussion on women's ministry. Short presentations were made by Archdeacon Dianne Nicolios who gave an overview of part time and voluntary work conducted by women, and by Deaconess Margaret Rodgers, Mrs Lesley Ramsay, the Rev Jill Williams and Miss Evonne Paddison who spoke about their own ministry, how they have been encouraged in ministry and how women's ministry might be strengthened.

12. Thereafter these speakers were joined by Miss Sheila Spencer, the Rev Denise Nicholls, Mrs Colette Read and the Rev Narelle Jarrett and Synod members were able to ask questions. The question time allowed issues not covered in the presentations to be raised. Many appreciated the frankness of some of the answers given.

From Here

13. To date some 51 responses have been received by the Archbishop-in-Council in response to the group discussion question. Some of the responses have been made on behalf of groups while others have been made by individual Synod members.

14. The Standing Committee has considered the responses and thinks that a 5 year period of experimentation with lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper is a principled means by which the tensions and divisions over the ordination of women to the priesthood may be addressed.

15. The Archbishop has advised the Standing Committee that he thinks the Conference was a useful exercise but that we tried to do too much in one day. The Archbishop considers that the process of discussion in small groups was not allowed sufficient time to be of greatest benefit and that the process of talking has not proceeded sufficiently for any real synthesis or greater corporate mind to develop.

16. The Archbishop has further advised the Standing Committee that he does not consider that the proposal to experiment with lay and diaconal administration of the Lord's Supper will help reduce the tensions and Synod difficulties over the ordination of women to the priesthood. The Archbishop considers-

- (a) Sydney would lessen its capacity to be an influence in the Anglican Communion if it were to move in the direction of immediately practising lay and diaconal administration;
- (b) if the Synod is convinced that lay and diaconal administration is of such an order that it wishes to commend it to the whole Church, it should first have the matter tested at General Synod;
- (c) permitting lay and diaconal administration of Holy Communion without the matter being approved by the General Synod would be inconsistent with the Archbishop's support of the idea that the Anglican Communion should have an enhanced capacity to hold provinces accountable for deviations from Anglican traditions.

Finally

17. The Standing Committee thanks the sub-committee appointed to plan the Conference for its time and energy. Thanks are also extended to the Headmaster and staff of Trinity Grammar School for making their facilities available on 16 May.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

MARK PAYNE
Diocesan Secretary

14 August 1998