

ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD: ANGLICAN DECISIONS AND REPORTS, 1968-1977

(a) Lambeth Conference 1968: Resolutions

34. The Conference affirms its opinion that the theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive.

35. The Conference requests every national and regional Church or province to give careful study to the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood and to report its findings to the Anglican Consultative Council (or Lambeth Consultative Body) which will make them generally available to the Anglican Communion.

36. The Conference requests the Anglican Consultative Council (or Lambeth Consultative Body)

(a) to initiate consultations with other Churches which have women in their ordained ministry and with those which have not.

(b) to distribute the information thus secured throughout the Anglican Communion.

37. The Conference recommends that, before any national or regional Church or province makes a final decision to ordain women to the priesthood, the advice of the Anglican Consultative Council (or Lambeth Consultative Body) be sought and carefully considered.

38. The Conference recommends that, in the meantime, national or regional Churches or provinces should be encouraged to make canonical provision where this does not exist, for duly qualified women to share in the conduct of liturgical worship, to preach, to baptize, to read the epistle and gospel at the Holy Communion, and to help in the distribution of the elements.

(b) Anglican Consultative Council Resolutions

(1) ACC-1 (Limuru) 1971: Resolution 28 (The Time is Now, pages 38-39)

The critical section (b) was carried by 24 votes to 22, with several abstentions. It reads:

"In reply to the request of the Council of the Church of South East Asia, this Council advises the Bishop of Hong Kong, acting with the approval of his Synod, and any other bishop of the Anglican Communion acting with the approval of his Province, that, if he decides to ordain women to the priesthood, his action will be acceptable to this Council; and that this Council will use its good offices to encourage all Provinces of the Anglican Communion to continue in communion with these dioceses."

- (2) ACC-2 (Dublin) 1973: Statement (i) on page 41 of the Report (Partners in Mission) was carried by 50 votes to 2 with three absentions. It reads:

"The Council agrees to recommend once more that, where any autonomous Province of the Anglican Communion decides to ordain women to the priesthood, this should not cause any break in communion in our Anglican family."

(c) Churches which have ordained Women

- (1) Diocese of Hong Kong: The first ordinations took place on Advent Sunday 1971.
- (2) Anglican Church of Canada: General Synod in June 1975 passed the following resolutions:

Act 63 - That this General Synod recommend to diocesan authorities that all types of lay ministries, stipendiary and non-stipendiary, within the Anglican Church of Canada, be open to all qualified persons without regard to sex.

Act 64 - That this General Synod re-affirm the principle of the ordination of women to the priesthood.

	<u>In favour</u>	<u>Against</u>
Laity	88	18
Clergy	75	30
Bishops	<u>26</u>	<u>8</u>
TOTAL	189	56

Act 65 - That this General Synod further affirm that it would be appropriate for women qualified for the priesthood to be ordained at the discretion of the diocesan bishops acting within the normal procedures of their own jurisdictions and in consultation with the House of Bishops.

	<u>In favour</u>	<u>Against</u>
Laity	95	9
Clergy	86	19
Bishops	<u>27</u>	<u>7</u>
TOTAL	208	35

The first ordinations took place on 30th November 1976.

(3) Episcopal Church, USA.

In November 1972 the House of Bishops voted that it was the mind of the House that women should be ordained to the priesthood and episcopate (in favour 74, against 61, abstentions 5). In the House of Deputies of General Convention in October 1973 a resolution in favour of ordaining women to the priesthood was defeated. Voting, by diocese was as follows:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Divided</u>
Clergy	50	43	20
Laity	49	37	26

Where the voting in a diocese is divided, it counts as a vote against the motion. The resolution, having failed in the House of Deputies, was not debated in the House of Bishops. On July 29 1974 there was a service of ordination of eleven women at the Church of the Advocate, Philadelphia. This was not authorized by the Diocese or the Presiding Bishop. Three retired bishops and the Bishop of Costa Rica officiated. A special meeting of the House of Bishops in August declared the Philadelphia ordinations invalid by 129 votes to 9, with 8 absentions. The House of Bishops in July 1974 re-affirmed by a three to one majority the principle of the ordination of women.

At the General Convention in September 1976 approval was given to the ordination of women to the priesthood. The House of Bishops voted 95 to 61 in favour of the canonical change which makes ordination canons equally applicable to men and women. By a narrow margin the House of Deputies concurred with the Bishops' decision. The voting was as follows:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Divided</u>
Clergy	60	39	15
Laity	64	36	13

Since 58 clerical votes and 57 lay votes (the Haiti lay deputation did not vote) were needed for the canonical change to be made, the margin of affirmative votes was 2 clergy and 7 lay votes.

The House of Bishops after a long debate agreed to advise two optional procedures for regularizing the orders of 15 women irregularly ordained in 1974-5:

- (1) A public event conducted by the bishop involved and an affirmation that the ordinations were now regular, or
- (2) A conditional ordination.

The first ordinations took place on 1 January 1977.

- (4) Province of New Zealand: The Bill allowing the ordination of women was passed by General Synod in March 1974. The procedure required that it should be submitted again to the dioceses and brought to the next General Synod for final decision. General Synod in May 1976 passed the Bill, but a year had to elapse before it could be implemented.

During this period appeals might be made to a Tribunal set up under a Parliamentary Act of 1928. For the appeal to be dismissed it was necessary for at least two-thirds of those present to concur in such dismissal. An appeal was made to the Tribunal, and was heard in November 1977, and dismissed.

The first ordinations took place in Auckland and Waiapu during Advent 1977 and further ordinations are due to take place at Christ Church at the beginning of Lent 1978.

(d) Present Position in other Churches

- (1) Church of England in Australia: A report prepared by the Commission on Doctrine was referred by General Synod in May 1973 to the dioceses for study. The Commission published a further Report entitled "The Ministry of Women", recommending the ordination of women as deacons and priests. This Report was debated by the General Synod in August 1977, and the following resolution was passed:

"That this General Synod having taken note of the report of its commission on doctrine entitled 'The Ministry of Women' believes that the theological objections raised do not constitute a barrier to the ordination of women to the priesthood and the consecration of women to the episcopate in this Church."

	<u>In favour</u>	<u>Against</u>
Bishops	13	6
Clergy	50	33
Laity	<u>44</u>	<u>33</u>
TOTAL	107	72

The legislation necessary to implement this decision is likely to take some years to complete.

- (2) Province of Burma: The Provincial Council in January 1972 passed the following motion:

"This Council accepts on principle the ordination of women to the priesthood and agrees to its introduction when circumstances so require it."

- (3) Province of Central Africa: The following actions were taken at the Provincial Synod 1976:

- (i) Episcopal Synod put before Synod the Question: "Should the CPCA permit the taking of steps to provide training for women for ordination to the priesthood?" An informal vote was taken by houses, resulting in the following:

	<u>In favour</u>	<u>Against</u>
Laity	7	16
Clergy	5	18
Bishops	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
TOTAL	14	40

- (ii) This Synod affirms the request of Episcopal Synod to the Church of the Province of Canada not to act in the matter of the ordination of women to the priesthood, at least until the Lambeth Conference has given some clear lead to the Churches.
- (iii) Synod agreed overwhelmingly that it should remain in full communion with any other Province which canonically ordains women to the priesthood.
- (iv) In reply to the question: "Should a Diocesan bishop in the CPCA, at his discretion, in consultation with his synodical authorities, be permitted to allow women canonically ordained elsewhere to the priesthood to exercise their ministry in his diocese?", the Synod answered overwhelmingly in the negative.

- (4) Church of Ceylon: A majority of the clergy in the Diocese of Colombo and Kurunagala have voted to take no action at present because this matter is not an issue of importance or urgency in Sri Lanka.
- (5) Council of the Church of East Asia: Diocese of Singapore  
The Synod in December 1974 voted against the ordination of women to the priesthood.
- (6) Church of England: The General Synod on 10 July 1975 passed the following resolutions:

"That this Synod considers that there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood"

	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>	<u>Abstentions</u>
Bishops	28	10	0
Clergy	110	96	2
Laity	117	74	3

"That this Synod invites the House of Bishops, when, in the light of developments in the Anglican Communion generally as well as in this country, they judge the time for action to be right, to bring before the Synod a proposal to admit women to the priesthood"

"That this Synod, not wishing to prejudice improving relationships with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches by removing without consultation with them the legal and other barriers to the ordination of women in the Church of England, requests the Presidents to

(i) Inform the appropriate authorities in those Churches of its belief that there are no fundamental objections to such ordination; and

(ii) Invite those authorities to share in an urgent re-examination of the theological grounds for including women in the Order of Priesthood with particular attention to the doctrine of Man and the doctrine of creation."

At the November 1976 General Synod it was stated that:

"The House of Bishops has been advised that as the law stands, a woman ordained abroad cannot lawfully be invited to officiate as a Bishop or priest."

The House of Bishops will bring the <sup>matter of the admission of</sup> ~~proposal to admit~~ women to the priesthood to General Synod in November 1978.

- (7) Province of the Indian Ocean: "That the Provincial Synod of the Church of the Province of the Indian Ocean approves in principle of the ordination of women to the priesthood and leaves it to each diocese to put this into practice, which decision shall be communicated to the other dioceses of the Province."  
(November 1974)
- (8) Church of Ireland: "That this House approves in principle the ordination of women subject to the enactment of any necessary legislation." (General Synod, May 1976)

- (9) Japan Holy Catholic Church (Nippon Sei Ko Kai): The Bishops meeting in 1976 agreed that there is no fundamental objection to the ordination of women to the priesthood from the aspect of biblical theology. But the Bishops said that the necessary steps for ordaining women could not be taken until there was sufficient understanding of the issue at the parochial, diocesan and provincial level. "While acknowledging the need for a free exchange of opinion, we must guard against the danger of division and schism within the Anglican Communion arising from disagreement". "Further, in view of our relationship with other Churches, the discussion should also proceed on the ecumenical plane".
- (10) Province of Kenya: The House of Bishops in November 1976 "accepted in principle the ordination of women to the priesthood but felt the need for further discussion on Diocesan and Provincial levels". The Standing Committee of Provincial Synod, meeting shortly after, decided in favour of the ordination of women and said, "If and when any woman is called by God to this office, the Bishop will be open to put her through the normal process as all other candidates for training and ordination". But the Province "would not rush women into ordination simply because other churches are doing the same".
- (11) Province of South Africa: The Provincial Synod in November 1976 carried a motion that the debate and vote on the ordination of women to the priesthood should be deferred until the relevant Report, Patterns of Ministry, which recommends the ordination of women, had been translated into some of the other languages used by the Anglican Church in South Africa. The matter would be proceeded with at the next Provincial Synod due in 1979.
- (12) South Pacific Anglican Council (SPAC): The bishops deeply regretted the division in the Church caused by the ordination of women priests and resolved "that we believe we cannot find in the Bible arguments for or against the admission of women to Holy Orders. Nevertheless we cannot recommend such a step to the Church in our region at this time"; and "that if any women priests visit the SPAC region, they will not be permitted to exercise priestly functions in our SPAC dioceses." (Feb.1977)
- (13) Province of Tanzania: "This Synod of the Church of Tanzania is not ready to ordain women to be priests." The voting was 32 in favour and 7 against. (Provincial Synod 1976)
- (14) Church in Wales: Debate took place in the six dioceses before the Governing Body voted in April 1975. The Governing Body decided that "there are no fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood", but that it would be inexpedient for the Church in Wales to take unilateral action in this matter at the present time."
- (15) Province of West Africa: The Bishops of West Africa have discussed the issue since 1972, but as it "affects theological, cultural and sociological matters, we feel that it requires further careful study of the Office and Work of the Priesthood so as to educate our people against the background of their own locality. Until this is done, we do not consider the subject urgent."

- (16) Province of the West Indies: The Provincial Synod in February 1975 requested all dioceses "to address and educate themselves to the importance and implications of the Ordination of Women". This is to include "the encouragement of informal discussion among the laity" and "the building up of the role of women in the Church and the creation of opportunities of leadership roles in the Church for women, and the encouragement of such roles". Further action will be taken at the next Provincial Synod.

8th December 1977