

*The Bishop of Liverpool, The Rt Rev James Jones has issued the following statement.*

"In the Diocese of Liverpool we have been mercifully free from the bitter divisions that have blighted the Church of England over women bishops and homosexuality. We have among clergy and laity the full spectrum of convictions and we have always recognised conscience on all sides of the argument. Over the ordination of women we have Conservative Evangelicals and Traditional Catholics who for different theological reasons cannot accept the authority of a woman bishop and we have outstanding women clergy whose leadership in parishes and in the Diocese is already proven. The decision of the General Synod will test our unity as a Diocese as it will the whole Church of England.

My speech to the General Synod shows that I believe we should recognise the gifts of leadership that God gives to women as well as to men and that they should become bishops. Yet as I have argued that consistently since becoming the Bishop of Liverpool I have also shown respect towards those of a different persuasion. I will continue along this path and I encourage the whole Diocese to follow their conscience without recrimination and without bitterness.

The Church of England prides itself on its breadth, not just because it opts for the easier life that flows from tolerance but because in a richly diverse society with many different personalities and cultures we need as many different doors into the Christian faith. This breadth too is sacramental, a sign that you cannot systemise and categorise God into one definition and box. Our traditions and spiritualities speak to us of different facets of the Divine. Neither is infallible and none has a monopoly of the truth. This acknowledgement works in us a proper humility and in spite of frustrations a proper thankfulness for each other. The different traditions are important to the mission of God to the people of England through the Church of England. I pray that the outcome of the Synod vote will be received in this way.

I continue to thank God for the different traditions even though I am very sad at the result. The reason for that sadness is that in our Diocese we would not be able to support our parish network without the ministry of women in leadership. Indeed, the Church of England cannot now maintain its mission to the nation without the thousands of women priests. The Church of England's mission would collapse without them.

The minority who want exclusively male bishops already have them. The majority who want women as well as male bishops are being denied them in spite of the General Synod agreeing that women should now be consecrated as bishops.

I encourage you to read my Synod speech and also that of the Rev. Canon Christopher Cook and the Rev. Jacqueline Stober. It would be good also to read the speeches of the Ven. Rachel Treweek and the Ven. Christine Hardman.

When a priest stands at the Lord's Table in the place of Christ they become an icon of Christ who is the icon of the invisible God. The priest reflects the image of God which according to the Book of Genesis is both "male and female". For that reason I believe that both a man and a woman are called to stand in priestly ministry at the Lord's Table ministering the Sacrament to God's people.

In the Book of Common Prayer the ministry of a bishop is to feed the Body of Christ. The Scriptures tell us that it was a woman who first physically fed the body of Christ. If a woman can feed the body of Christ in the flesh she surely can then feed the body of Christ in the Spirit.

It was my hope and that of many people that with a 'yes' vote at the General Synod the church could move out from behind the fog that has descended upon us for the last two decades. Sadly the negative vote is a blow both to the outgoing Archbishop of Canterbury and to the incoming Archbishop. I fear the next decade will envelop the Church of England in a mist which will make us more and more hidden from the rest of the world whom God has called us to serve."

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