



DIOCESE OF OXFORD

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire

FROM THE BISHOP OF OXFORD
The Rt Reverend John Pritchard

25 February 2014

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Dear Colleague

Members will know that the legislation allowing women to be consecrated in the Church of England is coming to General Synod in July. This is a great source of encouragement to nearly all the Church. It combines a simple Measure, a strong set of guiding principles and an independent review system to keep recalcitrant bishops up to the mark.

It's 'Article 8' business and therefore has to be referred to the dioceses before it returns to General Synod. This would normally imply that it be sent to Deanery Synods for discussion before a debate in Diocesan Synod. However, our Bishop's Council decided on 7 February that we will not take that step on this occasion and will simply have the final diocesan debate at Diocesan Synod on 22 March. Why did they decide to miss out the deanery stage?

Firstly, because it is widely agreed that this is much better legislation. The near unanimous votes in General Synod bear witness to this, especially when you remember the substantial opposition to the previous legislation defeated in November 2012. (In November 2013 the vote was 378 to 8 with 25 abstentions.) Nearly all our deanery synods voted for the legislation last time so it hardly seems necessary to go through it all again with better legislation this time round.

Secondly, time is short. At the February group of sessions of General Synod it was decided to suspend a standing order in order to shorten the usual six month period for Article 8 business because of the widespread desire in the Church to make rapid progress on this issue. The consequence is that each diocese must tell the Clerk to the Synod the result of its vote by 22 May. It would be hard to reorganise deanery synod schedules to fit in with having a Diocesan Synod debate on 22 March which is what would be necessary to fit in to this General Synod timetable.

I hope this seems reasonable to you. There is of course nothing to stop deaneries having discussions on the new legislation, which can be downloaded from the Church of England website. However, it seemed to Bishop's Council unnecessary to take these proposals down to deaneries formally and I trust you agree with that thinking.

Yours