

We invite you to read this Pastoral Letter, and make it available,
in all our churches on Sunday 20 July 2014.

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A PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

The approval of the Women Bishops legislation brings to an end a decade of debate about what provision should be made for those who are unable, for theological reasons, to receive the ministry of women as priests and bishops.

In the earlier stages of that debate we offered the Church of England a vision of how provision could be made with full ecclesiological integrity not just for us but also for the Church of England as a whole. It is now clear that the reality will be shaped differently, and will fall short of our ideal.

None the less, we believe that we can have confidence in our future as catholics who are called to live out our Christian vocation in the Church of England, maintaining a distinctive witness to the quest for the unity of the Church. The House of Bishops' Declaration embodies a commitment to enabling us to flourish within the Church of England's life and structures. It does so because our theological convictions about ministry and ordination remain within the spectrum of Anglican teaching and tradition. As Resolution III.2 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference stated, 'those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to, the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans'.

The Declaration assures us that bishops will continue to be consecrated within the Church of England who can provide episcopal ministry that accords with our theological convictions. It makes provision for parishes to gain access to that episcopal ministry by passing a new resolution, supported by a Resolution of Disputes Procedure established by regulations made under Canon, with an Independent Reviewer. We will be offering advice and resources to parishes to assist with this.

We note that bishops' authority to exercise episcopal functions comes from their ordination as bishops, and that that authority is distinct from the legal authority that they receive by delegation from the diocesan bishop. The debate over the nature of provision for our future life as catholics within the Church of England has helped us to focus on this important point with greater clarity.

The Society will have a crucial role to play in providing a continuing sacramental life in which parishes, clergy and people are in full and uninterrupted communion with the bishop who ministers to them, and with each other. We will ensure that parishes receive support in articulating the theological convictions that the Society exists to embody and, where necessary, in participating in the Resolution of Disputes Procedure.

As your bishops, we want to thank you for your faithfulness during this long period of uncertainty. Now that the debate about provision is over and the House of Bishops' Declaration is in place, we can look forward to a time of greater stability in which, by the grace of almighty God, we can all focus, with renewed energy, on proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord, and on witnessing to him as we serve our local communities and our nation.

On behalf of the Council of Bishops

✠TONY PONTEFRACT
The Rt Revd Tony Robinson
Bishop of Pontefract
Chairman

The Commemoration of John Keble
Monday 14 July 2014

*Heavenly Father,
Bless the bishops, clergy and people of The Society.
Bind us together in love and faith.
Renew us in service and witness.
And by your Holy Spirit
Guide our future and make plain your purposes.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

*Saint Wilfrid, pray for us.
Saint Hilda, pray for us.*