

There were 3 sessions – a total of nearly 7 hours – that addressed the issue of women bishops. Except, well, they didn't really address the issue of women bishops. We kind of skirted around the issue. It seems not to be about what would deliver justice, integrity, credibility... but how do we hold the church together? I come to this argument rather late, I admit – my teenage and adult years have all been spent in a church that ordains women, and it's never really occurred to me to think about if or why it shouldn't. I have, since being on synod, been sent a lot of information that explains why it shouldn't, and I've worked through those things with a lot of anger and pain, and even incredulity – and in response I have sought out theologies that can accommodate and describe my convictions and my experience of God on this issue. The Church of England ordains women to the priesthood – that is a fact. But clearly not the whole of the church accepts that. Yet it seems that because the church does ordain women, people feel it's rather discourteous to defend that position.

The ordination of women did not herald a great rejoicing in, and welcoming of the ordained ministry of women in our church. Women priests have had a struggle on their hands from the very beginning. I spoke to a woman priest, and synod member, this week whose bishop refused to install her in her new parish, as he does not believe women should be priests, but got one of the other suffragan bishops, from a different area of the diocese, to do it instead. Yet he does her reviews etc with her as if there is no reason either of them might find that difficult. I spoke to another woman priest, also a synod member, whose husband is also a priest, he found a new parish in a diocese whose bishop does not support the ordination of women – and, oh how strange, he didn't manage to find a suitable job for her in the diocese and she had to find a job in a different diocese. But these stories did not come out in the debate. It all went on as if the only people who are suffering in our church are people opposed to the ordination of women. I must admit I expected a fight. But the debates that took place seemed strangely flat. The majority of the passion came from those opposed to women priests and bishops, describing the effects on them of the actions and potential actions of the church.

There were a number of amazing peacemakers in the debating chamber who were a real blessing. There was great gentleness, compassion, generosity and graciousness. As I reflect it seems that the majority of that came from people who want to see women bishops in our church. I was planning to make a speech yesterday, about how my conscience, and my sense of justice, tell me that women and men bishops need to be fully equal in law. Yet in the debate I felt that it was far too ungracious and critical for the terms on which this debate was apparently being conducted, and only stood up to be called to speak 2 or 3 times when the previous speaker had really pushed my buttons. In private, yes we can speak with passion and pain – but in the debate, we have to be calm and gracious.

I tried to examine my feelings about it this morning, and felt ungrateful, grudging even, for what was expressed in the debate and the decision yesterday that seems, incredibly, to be a consensus. Disappointed that I didn't get my fight? Talking to my colleague and friend this morning, he said he sensed sadness. And I think that's it – I'm sad that the church seems somehow to feel embarrassed about

fighting publicly for equality between men and women bishops – that we've got women priests now, and we're going to get women bishops, so we should be grateful for what we've got and be happy and willing to make sacrifices to keep the church together. Of course we should do what we can to care and provide for people who feel they're being pushed out of the church – that's an awful position to be in – but I'm scared about sacrificing too much.

Thank you for your prayers – the church needs many more prayers on this issue. If you feel anything of the passion I do about this, maybe we can think together about what we as a community can do – the cause of full equality for men and women in our church needs passion and as has become clear, needs voices.