

Church Appointments

A Summary of the Establishment of Resolutions A and B

In November 1992 the General Synod of the Church of England voted to allow women to be ordained as priests. In 1993 a Measure was introduced not only permitting this innovation but also giving a form of protection to congregations who believed this to have been a mistake, or who, for whatever reason, felt that women should not minister as priests in their local church. This was a recognition not only of differing opinions but that such a dramatic change, which was virtually unknown in the previous two millennia of Church history, needed to be tested and received by the Church.

Two resolutions were provided in the legislation which permit parishes to restrict aspects of their ministry to men. These are in primary legislation in English law and therefore stand alongside other national legislation relating to sexual equality. They are referred to as Resolutions A and B. A third resolution was permitted not through legislation but through what is called an Act of Synod. This concerns the provision of episcopal ministry and is often called Resolution C.

When there is a vacancy in a parish one of the things the Parochial Church Council (PCC) must do is consider whether to debate and vote on Resolutions A and B. There is no need to actually vote on them, but it is required that consideration be given as to whether they should be debated and voted upon.

Resolution A

"That this Parochial Church Council would not accept a woman as the minister who presides at or celebrates the Holy Communion or pronounces the Absolution."

Not passing this Resolution allows various things to happen:

- A woman could be appointed as an assistant minister and made Priest.
- A visiting woman from another parish could preside at Communion.
- During an interregnum, or if the incumbent were ill, the pastoral care of the parish could be passed to a woman priest from another parish.

Resolution B

"That this Parochial Church Council would not accept a woman as the incumbent or priest-in-charge of the benefice or as a team vicar for the benefice"

This concerns the appointment of a Vicar, Rector or Priest-in-Charge for a parish. Some people seem to think that the patronage system itself can safeguard parishes but this is neither true nor does it reckon with the fact that the patrons have no legal safeguards whereas the parish does.

In many places considerable pressure is brought to bear on parishes, particularly through threats of a long interregnum, this has led to unsuitable people being appointed. In many Dioceses almost all vacant benefices are being suspended and in such a situation a parish has no legal rights or safeguards except that if they pass Resolution B this is binding.

If a parish does not pass Resolution B and then turns down a woman candidate simply because she is a woman the PCC could be prosecuted under sex discrimination legislation.

The PCC must decide whether it would wish a woman to be appointed as Rector/Vicar. Such a person would have the pastoral and spiritual charge of the congregation, including; the main preaching ministry, presiding at the Communion, and leading the life of the church.

Resolutions A and B have been provided as a means for Church Councils to signal either their hesitation about the ordination of women or their continuing acceptance of the Biblical teaching on male presbyters (priests).

Team ministries and united benefices present a particular difficulty because some parishes may be actively in favour of the ministry of ordained women whilst others are opposed. If one PCC passes Resolution B this will apply to all others in the benefice or Team. Conversely, a PCC which has passed, or might be considering passing, Resolution B is sometimes put under pressure to revoke the resolution, or not pass it. In such a situation patrons and the Bishop need to be mindful of the issue.

The Code of Practice to the Pastoral Measure in relation to the appointment of Priest-in-Charge alludes to a similar situation: "The bishop should also give careful consideration, in making any appointment, to the views of any particular congregation within a parish that is not disposed to welcome a woman priest in the senses indicated in Resolutions A or B, even if the PCC of that parish has not passed either of those resolutions."

"Resolution C"

Resolution C was not part of the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993, but is rather part of an "Act of Synod". It still has force, but is not in legislation.

The form of words is:

"This Parochial Church Council resolves to petition the Diocesan Bishop, requesting that Episcopal duties in the parish should be carried out in accordance with the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993."

Passing this resolution does not take the church out of the Diocese. Instead it indicates that the church looks to those who retain a biblical and historical view of ministry to exercise the pastoral oversight which is charged to a Bishop. It will ensure safeguards against the Bishops imposing people of different views on the parish.

There are special rules governing this resolution and it is usually passed at a separate meeting. Resolution A or B must have been passed first.

If a parish has passed Resolution C then their "Flying Bishop" should be invited by the Diocesan Bishop to have a role in the appointment of the incumbent or Priest-in-Charge.