

Church of England general synod votes against women bishops



The general synod of the Church of England has voted against the appointment of women as bishops.

The decision came at the end of a day of debate by supporters and opponents - and a 12-year legislative process.

The measure was passed by the synod's houses of bishops and clergy but was rejected by the house of laity.

Controversy had centred on the provisions for parishes opposed to women bishops to request supervision by a stand-in male bishop.

The measure needed two-thirds majorities in each of the synod's three houses.

The votes were 44 for and three against with two abstentions in the House of Bishops, 148 for and 45 against in the House of Clergy, and 132 for and 74 against in the House of Laity.

The vote in the House of Laity, at 64%, was just short of the required majority.

Just six more "yes" votes would have tipped it over the two-thirds mark.

Twenty years after the introduction of women priests, the issue has continued to divide traditionalists - among those on the Church's evangelical and Anglo-catholic wings - from reformers.

Had the move been backed by the synod, the proposed legislation would have made its way through Parliament before receiving royal assent.

The Bishop of Norwich, the Rt Rev Graham James, said: "It is very disappointing that the vote was lost so narrowly."

Campaign group Women and the Church (Watch) said the outcome was a "devastating blow for the Church of England and the country".

The Rev Rachel Weir, chairwoman of Watch, said "This is a tragic day for the Church of England after so many years of debate and after all our attempts at compromise.

"Despite this disappointing setback, Watch will continue to campaign for the full acceptance of women's gifts of leadership in the Church's life."

Watch said bishops would need to act promptly to offer pastoral support in the coming weeks to women clergy and others who felt devastated by decision.

Both the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and his successor, the Rt Rev Justin Welby, were in favour of a "yes" vote.

The Catholic Group in General Synod said "mediation and conciliation are needed so that new legislation can be framed to provide fairly for all members of the Church of England".

The group said in a statement: "We regret the synod was put in the position whereby draft legislation failed at final approval because it was unclear and unfair in its provision for those who, in conscience, are unable to accept the ministry of women as bishops or priests.

"The Catholic Group calls on the House of Bishops to reconvene the talks started in the summer between representatives of different groups, chaired by Bishop Justin Welby.

"The Catholic Group is committed to playing a full part in the process of achieving good legislation to enable us all to move forward together in mission and service to the nation."

The vote at the Church House in central London came after several speakers opposed the legislation.

The result means it will be at least five years before the synod gets to vote on final approval of such legislation.

The House of Bishops will hold an emergency meeting on Wednesday morning following the decision, a Church spokesman said.

BBC News