

“After November...”

Comments, stories and experiences from WATCH members and supporters

4th Feb 2013

“...I am beginning to look for a job outside of the church after 16 years of ordination”

“...I have felt very cast down ... I wonder whether to quit and go and work in a bookshop”

“...the vote has been a rude awakening and has knocked me right off course spiritually - I find it hard even to go to church, let alone to exercise my ministry”

“I felt that my authority to preside at the Eucharist was suddenly in question”

“The next day I was surprised at how hurt I felt - really hurt physically. My chest seemed sore with the weight of the pain of it”

“On what basis can I challenge injustice when my Church has institutionalised it?”

I. I write as a laywoman, and licensed lay preacher. As a former member of General Synod I was not very optimistic about the result, before the debate. I was worried when my stepdaughter, ordained deacon only last year, announced that she was going to go to London to queue for the Gallery because she wanted to be there when the legislation passed, just as I had been there when the legislation for women priests passed. I listened to the afternoon speeches on my office computer in the company of a senior woman colleague who is not a Christian but was interested from the point of view of a woman.

When the result came through, I was not surprised, but quite angry. My colleague was furious. When I spoke to my stepdaughter, she said she felt numb. **Both she and I were horrified by the way that speakers opposed to the legislation had not spoken about it specifically, but had rehearsed all the old arguments which had previously been rejected when Synod had concluded that there are no theological objections.** It was a step backwards, rather than a simple no to the legislation.

What surprised me was my reaction the following Sunday at my church. A baby girl was being baptised, and when the words of the service said 'we welcome you' I was suddenly struck by how our church does NOT welcome her - not if she is ordained and then shows the gifts and skills that would make her a fine bishop. I broke down and cried, much to the consternation of the rest of the congregation who don't expect me to show emotion at yet another 'no' from our church.

Since then, I have been heartened and supported by members of the congregation whom I had thought did not care one way or the other, but who turn out to be as appalled as I am at what feels like a slap in the face for women clergy and for women laity. I have seriously questioned how I can stay in this church with any integrity and I suspect that is something on which I will need to go on reflecting.

Lay woman

2. On the day of the vote I met several female colleagues at a meeting. **Quite honestly, the mood was one of depression and no matter how many voted in favour of women bishops, here we feel as if the Church has said that our ministries are not valued and that the Church has to make do with us.** A male colleague wanted to pick my brains and couldn't understand why female clergy should be feeling depressed as so many voted FOR women bishops, but he eventually got the picture. Life goes on in the parish with only a few tuts after the vote. My diocese held an Epiphany

service to celebrate women's ministry which was wonderfully affirming. Several of my parishioners attended in support. The feeling I detect now is that we are expected just to get on with things. As one (male) parishioner said, 'It was a fair vote' and the response from supporters has shown us up as being sour and unable to accept what the majority have wanted. It seems that this vote has been viewed in the same way as a general election. Perhaps that's the nub of it for me: theology and vocation is not the same thing as politics and election.

Female Priest

3. It has been surprisingly draining continuing to minister in the parish post - November. All my ordained life, in fact all my life as an adult Christian, we have been on the journey to women's full inclusion in the church. So although in practical terms nothing has actually changed, it feels very different indeed to have had 'No' said, rather than 'we are working towards it'. **It feels rather like a bereavement, and so is taking an amount of mental energy/ resilience that I hadn't anticipated fully. In addition, I find myself wondering whether I am simply colluding by propping up a fundamentally unjust institution, by continuing to minister within.** This nagging question also inadvertently takes up mental energy. **So I feel drained - the sort of drained that you feel after a night of weeping - which means there is less energy for other things.** I'm carrying on, of course, but I'm snapping more at my children and so on simply, I think, because I feel tired and sad.

Female Priest

4. I heard the news about the vote as I was driving to our diocese's office for a Readers' meeting and I nearly turned the car round and went home. As it was I think I drove rather badly after that and when I got there and met some of the other women Readers, could hardly hold back tears. **The next day I was surprised at how hurt I felt - really hurt physically. My chest seemed sore with the weight of the pain of it.** I felt that I was lucky to be part of an Anglican/Methodist LEP where I know that my ministry is valued and treated as valid.

I think that I have got past the point of making excuses for those who cannot accept women's ministry. I keep repeating to myself that if they substituted 'black' for 'female' no-one would tolerate it, and rightly so and this exposes this prejudice for what it is.

This time, I think, no compromise - a single simple measure. It's all taking energy and time which would be much better spent on the body of Christ.

Lay woman

5. After years of crap from opponents of women priests that I put up with as we appeared to be on an upward curve with first the amendment and then the failure even of that **I am beginning to look for a job outside of the church after 16 years of ordination. I walked out of chapter as my colleagues evangelical and catholic exchanged strategies to 'stop us having a woman'.** I have sort advice from others as to more women friendly Deaneries and looked at 2 posts outside of the C of E plus discussing with another denomination a switch but am dismissing that as an option.

Female Priest

6. It has been very difficult to continue since November. I have felt very cast down. **The worst thing though is that several key members of the congregation which I serve are wavering in their commitment - they are angry and upset and are considering whether their gifts could be better used elsewhere - I think it is only because they want to support me that they have struggled on.** Our numbers on Sunday mornings have dropped noticeably since November. In this tough UPA parish November's decision has made things much harder. **I wonder whether to quit and go and work in a bookshop.**

Female Priest

7. It has been extraordinary the huge wave of support which has developed since November. Our Bishops wrote to us all immediately expressing their sorrow, anger and support and colleagues at the Rural Deans meeting said that the decision had diminished their own ministry. **However the pain remains.**

Lay Woman

8. I'm studying full time in a college that is very supportive of women's ministry and of the consecration of women as bishops. I think it is fair to say that the vast majority of people here were extremely shocked when the vote did not go through. The nature and level of debate also gave cause for general concern. Several of us who are WATCH members were more aware of the potential for the vote to fail but were still extremely disappointed.

As you know, training for ordination is a time of great liminality and uncertainty. The process of priestly formation is a challenging and precarious business. **The question many have been asking is - what does it mean for each of us, as women, if the laity whom we have felt called to serve have rejected the possibility of women as bishops?** This has raised some serious questions for all of us, and I think the experience for younger people in training has probably been far more disturbing - as they have grown up in a church that welcomes the ministry of both women and men and for the first time properly 'heard' all these arguments.

Some people here have had a lot of support from their dioceses, DDO and/or Bishops, but the level of contact has been patchy and some of us, myself included, have had no correspondence at all. Which was both disappointing and unsettling.

If any good has come out of this event for us, it is that the shock brought the whole community together and we have felt very supported by our male colleagues and all the tutors. We were given plenty of time and space to talk, cry and eventually start to laugh about it.

Ordinand

9. I am ordained. Everyone I have met is either despondent or angry or both. **Very deep reserves of emotion are being touched, and together the above two feelings seem to yield a sort of paralysis, an abandoning to our unhappy fate, a distrust of the church and its processes.** It's not that we won't do anything. It just FEELS hopeless.

Male Priest

10. I was devastated (like all of you) when the measure didn't get through Synod. **I feel undervalued - a second class citizen.** I feel supported by my ministry team and congregation, but they can't understand what is going on. It's very hard to carry on when I feel so undervalued. **This is made much worse by the fact that my Rural Dean and Archdeacon both voted against the measure. They've both assured me that they value my ministry - but that's not how it feels.**

So of course I carry on with my ministry - leading worship, preaching, weddings, funerals, baptisms etc etc - because the people I meet don't care whether I'm a woman or a man. They just want me to be a good priest.

Female Priest

11. I'm a Reader-in-training, I'm 29 and work for a large UK charity. I was completely taken aback by the results of the vote in November, more shocked than upset initially as I had really expected the vote to pass. Someone featured on the BBC news - I think perhaps a Forward in Faith spokesperson - was endorsing this decision as being right for "Church unity and mission". I found that statement in particular very hard to swallow.

People at work know I'm a Christian and that I'm training for ministry - it's part of my ministry to be a Christian in the workplace after all! The morning after the vote I walked into an office (literally, in some cases) laughing at the Church of England. I would say the general mood was one of baffled incredulity. As a known Church 'rep' working with a lot of women in the mid- to late- twenties, many of whom are non-Christians but certainly not anti-Church, **I was asked repeatedly for explanations about why the Church had made this decision. It was hard to come up with anything convincing or persuasive and, honestly, this decision has made the Church look outdated, irrelevant, sexist and just plain weird to most of the people with whom I work. Who, in this day and age, is allowed to discriminate against women!? It has made the work of mission in the workplace just so much harder as the CofE has lost a great deal of its respect for a generation of young women, reinforcing the sense that it is completely out of place in society now.**

Lay woman

12. Since the vote on women bishops and during the immediate aftermath I faced many questions from the lay people that I met, and am still meeting, asking for an explanation. Yesterday the female nurse at my doctor's practice came out of her room to speak to me about the vote. The men I have met feel angry and frustrated, understanding the political view more than the women, who feel more hurt and disappointed, not to mention demoralised. 'Whatever were they thinking of?' is a common response. This example of discrimination has been difficult to swallow for those who have working lives and expect to be treated equally with men.

I find myself praying for the women in ministry more often and looking at them with anxiety. I think of children at school facing the challenge of belonging to a church that 'hates gays and women' as one teenager said to me. I pray for those with lost vocations who will not now come forward, particularly the young women and men who value democracy and are stunned at the reaction of the House of Laity. I set up a petition which is still online so that people could express their opinions in the public arena.

Church life is affected as we are looking at our mission action plan and are wondering what we can now do that will be effective. In fact we will be starting the mission now with ourselves, so that we can try to keep our members. Our Lent study will be 'Everyone Welcome', a course which meets the needs of our hearts.

Lay Woman

13. I am a male priest who has always been a supporter of WATCH and its predecessor MoW. My coming to faith was very much influenced by time I spent living in the USA where of course women were priests quite a long time before they were in England. When I trained for ministry it was on a course where the majority were women. **I have only realised since the vote quite how much my spirituality is bound up in the view that the gospel imperative is to break down barriers - between different races, nationalities, social groups, and of course genders.** I realised that it was a journey for the Church to accept this as far as women were concerned, but we were travelling in the right direction. **However, the vote has been a rude awakening and has knocked me right off course spiritually - I find it hard even to go to church, let alone to exercise my ministry.** It doesn't help that my day job (I am NSM) is in an organisation led by a woman and one which takes issues of equal treatment seriously. **My experience in the church is that having women priests but not bishops has a toxic effect in the treatment of women throughout the organisation - they are patronised and even bullied by some of their male colleagues and their priestly ministry is seen as in some way flawed or second best, and this hurts all of us.** I hope the group can find a way through this and it must be stressed that this is far larger than just about ordained women themselves.

Male Priest

14. I am an ordained woman in my second year of curacy and a member of the local WATCH committee. Following the vote I was surprisingly calm but those in my congregation and friends of mine were not.

I received many messages via email and Facebook asking me what I was doing remaining in ministry within the Church of England. All of them told me I was an intelligent woman and they could not see why I stayed in an institution that was so irrelevant to the people on the ground - those it purports to serve. Many members of the congregation also received messages from their friends along the same lines and part of my ministry, and that of my incumbent since November, has been helping them to articulate how they feel and enabling them to have a balanced response rooted in the grace of God.

During the week following the vote I was at a couple of local community events as the 'curate' and was staggered by the anger that people felt on my behalf, people who would not call themselves Christians or darken the door of the church except for weddings and funerals. They wanted to know why 'their church' was behaving in this way.

Many people could not understand how the vote had been unrepresentative of their thinking and wanted to know how they could now be part of General Synod. Most people in the congregation were appalled at what had taken place and had just thought that the vote would go through. As a team of churches we had so many people asking for information and further understanding that we arranged a 'conversation' evening for people to come and ask questions about the nature of Synodical Government within the Church and the wider issues pertaining to the Episcopacy of women. People came from four of the five churches and a lively discussion ensued - leaving some people in total

disbelief about the fact that General Synod allows people to have a 'free' vote and a deeper understanding of some of the main issues surrounding the consecration of women to the Episcopacy.

As for me the anger and the sadness came later. It was only when I wrote a parish magazine article on the situation that I realised how angry I was - pointed out to me by the magazine editor who thought he couldn't publish it without a counter view. Suffice to say I changed it for it certainly wasn't 'gracious'. I have to say that the sadness was not on my part - I don't think I have a calling to be a Bishop - but for those young girls in my own congregation who are already saying they want to be a vicar when they grow up and have huge potential in leadership of the church for the future. However, the flip side of that is whatever we end up with it has to be right for them - there is no point in rushing this now.

A very wise woman Bishop in America told me not to let 'them' take away the joy in serving God at this time and she was right to let me know that, as I realised the joy that I should have been feeling in the run up to Christmas was definitely diminished by what had happened. I am in a more settled place with it all now, through prayer and a renewed trust in God, rather than the church but feel very tired about everything. The exhaustion is beginning to hit now just at a time when we need to gather ourselves for more campaigning.

For me personally, I have mainly had support from my colleagues, although I work within a Deanery that has a high level of parishes who are either Conservative Evangelical or Anglo-Catholic and who have passed resolutions. **This leads again to the question of always needing to be 'gracious' that eats away at our energy and therefore our effectiveness in ministry as a whole.**

God is faithful and I do believe that we are to now called to wait at the foot of the cross with Mary and Mary Magdalene. Let's pray that Easter Morning will be utterly glorious and that Easter Saturday doesn't last too long.

Female Priest

15. This decision has made be seriously question whether I want to belong to an organisation which would probably sink without the work of women but will not recognise them in senior roles. If women are deemed fit and able to be parish priests why are they not deemed able to become Bishops.

My frustration is increased by the news that 'Gay Bishops' are acceptable. How can this be fair? Are we not all equal in the eyes of God – or are some more equal than others.

Female Priest

16. I am a priest, in the same benefice since being ordained in 1998. I can't say that the carrying out of my ministry has been affected. However, since the oh-so-disappointing and disheartening November vote, I have had so many expressions of commiseration especially from parishioners (and "how could this have happened?") and colleagues; caring and concerned comments together with puzzlement / mystification / incredulity from people attending baptisms and funerals, and friends and relatives around the UK.

Female Priest

17. It really is quite simple ... **The Ministry of Women Priests is a NORMAL part of life in this Diocese ... it's normal. Women as Bishops is part of this Normality ...** and so it should be throughout the Church of England.

Lay man

18. I am ordained and in my 3rd year of curacy.

My first reaction was to feel better (oddly). I think it was partly just relief that the vote was over. **I became aware of how much time I have spent (perhaps wasted?) since I started training with attempting to fit into a male pattern of ministry which does not fit me or my life. And also of how much emotional energy I have invested in trying to fit into that pattern and failing and then feeling bad about not being able to live well within it.** So there was a certain sense of greater freedom – I've spent all this time being a good girl, doing my best to fit into a mould that doesn't fit me – many other women have worked hard and faithfully for many years - and it still hasn't worked. So maybe it's time to stop apologising for being different from the male norm.

My second reaction was to feel shattered, vulnerable and shaken in my identity as an ordained woman in the church of God. I didn't preside until 2 weeks after the vote but when I did the ground literally felt unsteady beneath my feet. I felt that my authority to preside at the Eucharist was suddenly in question. This might seem extreme but it's just logical. If women aren't fit to be bishops then why are they good enough to be priests?

The whole experience has raised my awareness of misogyny which suddenly seems to be everywhere. For me there are very clear parallels between the failure of the church to affirm women's ministry and the ways in which women in wider society are prevented from being fully the people that God is calling them to be. It has made me determined to be far less tolerant of sexism within the institution.

There have been some interesting conversations since the vote. My neighbour's husband (not a Christian) asked "Why is the church exempt from equalities legislation?" He wasn't being provocative – he genuinely wanted to know. I don't think that there's a mission shaped answer to that question.

Female Priest

19. I am an NSM working in a benefice of five rural churches. I was down to preach on the Sunday following the vote. My male incumbent was adamant that I should not make any mention of the vote as he intended to say something about it before the Service, and "Gender has never been an issue in this benefice and I don't want it to become an issue". Not surprisingly this did nothing to reassure me about his understanding of the legitimacy of my ministry. Like many clergymen, my incumbent believes in equality but is unable to practice it because he doesn't recognise that what he does and says is discriminatory. Although he did recognise that, as emotional women, we might be upset about the vote, his instinct was to sweep the whole matter under the carpet with no understanding of the healing that I, my fellow female NSM and others in our congregation might be needing.

I did challenge him, but got nowhere. Happily on the Sunday, I received some very positive support from members of the congregation, but it didn't stop me from feeling angry and let down again. The cherry on the cake is that since then my incumbent has announced that two funeral parties have specifically requested for a male clergyperson to conduct the funeral. This was raised at an executive meeting with the suggestion that a policy be formulated to accommodate such requests. I pointed out

at that as my incumbent is retiring this Autumn, perhaps it would be appropriate that this be left until his replacement is appointed.

All this has made it more difficult for me to overlook the constant undertone of sexism that colours our incumbent's ministry and has consequently put a strain on what was a reasonably amicable working partnership. We just overlook it don't we? But I think, if I didn't know that he was going, I might well have found it very difficult to carry on working with him without a major set to, which I guess he would have found both mystifying and hurtful.

On the other hand, our Bishop has been outstandingly brilliant in sharing our anger and distress, and in supporting women's ministry both here and nationally.

Female Priest

20. At a really good New Year party at 1.30am I found myself explaining yet again the Synod's decision. I have lost count of similar conversations since November which I have had in this rural area. Absolutely no-one who has interrogated me can understand the mess that the CofE has got itself in and no-one can understand why we are exempt from equality legislation. The Synod and "the church" seems to have lost all credibility and respect – but not locally where there seems to be a rallying behind our 3 wonderful woman priests. There is huge sympathy for the way their ministry has been treated and astonishment that such a small minority has such power in spite of the votes of the dioceses.

Having sat through all the GS debates from 1993 to 2010, I am still unable to adequately explain to anyone in or outside the church why the November legislation would not satisfy the opponents. I feel exhausted by the whole business. My daughters won't talk about the subject with me; their husbands and friends simply laugh at us or dismiss us as irrelevant in this day and age.

Trying to cope with the attacks on the church is really hard for me as one-time lay leader but the pain for my ordained women friends is awful – even in a very supportive diocese.

Lay woman

21. I did not expect to be so upset by the vote as I was quite prepared to wait to ensure a single clause measure. However I did have a profound emotional response. **I was angry, bewildered despairing and weary. I simply could not believe that after all this time, we would still be discussing this. The tenor of the debate was hurtful. Attitudes which were completely unacceptable were aired without challenge. It seems to me you can say anything about women provided you define it as a "theological".**

I have not doubted for one minute that God has called me to the priesthood because it was a very loud calling with no room for ambiguity. **When people say that women can't be priests/bishops I find it personally hurtful because they are saying that I can't hear from God, that I am fundamentally mistaken, indeed that I am a liar. Most of the time I live with this, suppress it, ignore it, but at the moment it is very raw.**

I am not particularly motivated at the moment. I feel no matter what I do it won't be appreciated. While the public has been very supportive of women priests, there is a sense that my status as a Vicar/leader/public voice has been damaged. I don't like people feeling sorry for me and asking "How do you put up with it?" I also feel unable to provide any kind of moral lead. **On what basis can I**

challenge injustice when my Church has institutionalised it? I hate to admit it but sometimes I haven't cared as much as I should, I haven't bothered, I've gone through the motions. I don't know where my energy has gone.

I have questioned my behaviour at Diocesan meetings as I have been much more vocal than usual and then worried about being that vocal. I contribute to meetings, feel my contributions are welcome but then I berate myself afterwards for putting myself out there too much.

My parish has been supportive by and large, but having to rehash all the arguments again has been draining. When my parishes have discussed matters such as joining WATCH or putting forward a motion to Deanery Synod I have not felt able to be present. I don't want to force them into taking a decision to please me and I don't really want to know if anyone would argue against women bishops.

I feel my Bishops have done the best they can to be supportive, and affirming on a personal level. Although the House of Bishops voted overwhelmingly in favour, I do not have huge confidence in them and their decisions, because they are all male and because of the level of sympathy that there seems to be for the opponents of Women's Ministry. **Why didn't the House of Bishops give a lead on the issue earlier than it did? Why don't they challenge some of the more misogynistic attitudes and say they are beyond the pale? Why were opponents of the measure allowed 50% of the debate when they certainly didn't reflect 50% of the opinion? If Bishops feel this is so important why don't they do something personally costly such as all resign until there is a level playing field or stop appointing new bishops until they women can be considered. Why don't they appoint a woman for a suffragan and give her a different title. Why aren't they behaving prophetically? I think it is because they don't really get it and they don't really care.**

I am not cross with God, and I do not feel myself any less a child of God as a result of the debate or the current climate. I have become aware that some people do consider me less, but that is their problem. However I have been exploring with great joy the idea of God as Mother. I had not wanted to do this. I had resisted it. I hate overtly inclusive liturgy changing hymn words etc, but I wrote a poem called if God were Woman and it felt great. I got rid of a lot of anger that way.

I won't leave, but I'm tired of fighting. It's exhausting being a woman in this Church.

Female Priest

22. I remember picking up my clerical collar the day after the vote and feeling utterly ashamed and very embarrassed. What was I saying to my two young sons by wearing it? What would I be saying about God to those I was due to encounter that day by wearing it? The debate had revealed that far from having 'moved on' as I am continually assured we have, the church hadn't moved an inch. My orders were still viewed as provisional by some who spoke, others didn't believe I am anything other than 'less than' and many revealed the extent to which they will go to ensure my ministry is undermined and thwarted. And since the debate, whilst individual Bishops (including my own) have spoken of their support for the women in their Diocese, the church at large still clings to notion of 'dual integrities', still fails to publically and loudly affirm my ministry as an ordained woman by continuing to build up and nurture those who think I am 'playing' at this. So I continue to ask, what am I saying to my sons by being here and doing this? What am I saying about God by representing this church? **Unless something changes, I suspect there will be a point when the answer prompts me to say 'no more'.**

Female Priest

23. I am coming towards the end of my curacy and beginning to look out for my next post. I was, and am dismayed by the vote in November. **Getting up the day afterwards and presiding at the midweek Eucharist felt somewhat surreal and I still have a strange feeling that the ground has shifted. People within the congregation are angry on my behalf and I feel a little foolish.** It doesn't matter how often I remember that 42 out of the 44 Diocese are in agreement, what everyone 'out there' knows is that the vote for women as bishops failed. What I find hard to understand is how we can do anything but wait until 2015 unless we rewrite the rules which still feels second best. The challenges facing the church and people of faith today are huge this whole situations is a ridiculous distraction; yes we need to fight for equality and justice but we seem to be spending our time and energy trying to put our own house in order.

Female Priest

24. As a lay woman very much in favour of the legislation, I experienced negative feelings of numbness, bewilderment, shame that lay people could do such a thing, tearfulness, sadness and a heaviness of what will be next.

I experienced the anger of some lay people in my Diocese who demanded to know how the Diocesan lay people had voted and why. A realisation that lay people do not understand the election and voting system in General Synod. The sadness of so many clergy, female and male who are affected by the decision. **The strong feelings that are still around and surface every now and then at gatherings. A worry that we are polarising more and that the gap between us is widening.**

On a more positive note I have been aware of more interest in General Synod from Lay people, a greater dawning that lay people need to be more aware and tuned in at election time to what is being said or not said. A drawing closer of lay and clergy who now seem like 'Comrades in adversity'.

My belief in God has not altered but my belief in people, the systems and processes we have wavers and every now and then I want to scream that things must change if we are to survive.

Lay Woman

25. I became a Christian aged 16 in an evangelical, vibrant C of E church. Over the 10 years that followed, I was discipled as a follower of Jesus and empowered as a gifted leader, all 10 years in that one church. I was given tons of advice, constructive criticism and feedback in all my leadership roles and outcomes, but not one of them had anything to do with my gender. Finally I responded to a call to ordained ministry. Being a young candidate I am now in my 3rd year at college. In those three years since joining an Anglican training institute, I have been the subject of debates over whether I can lead or not, or whether I need a male in authority above me in order to lead, just because I'm female. I've met women older than me (and younger actually) who have shared stories of discouragement, ridicule and bullying during their journey following their call, simply because they were a woman. I've had to fill in forms for my curacy where there is an option to tick if I want to go to a parish that doesn't want women(!). Finally, I listened intently to the result of the women bishop debate live online and the result was devastating; I quietly hoped the 'voice' of the Church of England would in this way at least acknowledge my gender and my gifts both as positively as each other, but instead it went the opposite way.

Since I've begun training as a Church of England minister, I've realised just how difficult it is to be a woman in the church, something I naively didn't realise before I came to college. I just thought, if you're a good leader, you'll eventually be in leadership. I still think this is the case and being a strong evangelical I believe this Biblically too. The women bishops vote broke my heart and my confidence and it's been a struggle ever since.

Ordinand

26. My reflections relate more to the reactions to the vote in General synod from others than my own. As far as my own feelings were concerned as I listened to the debate for most of the day I came to the conclusion by 4 p.m. that the motion would fall and I grieved that the Church of England would have to wait longer to benefit from the spiritual leadership of a gifted woman. Immediately following the announcement of the vote I found myself having to deal with the responses of others. I emailed a woman priest who had just left her curacy and moved to another diocese, and I wanted to check how she was. She answered that she had wept alone and had not felt supported by her colleagues although that fortunately changed within a couple of days, perhaps because people had been taken by surprise and were not expecting to provide such support. I received an email from a former student, now a Methodist Minister, who expressed shock and dismay pointing out that the result did not only affect the Church of England but all women in ministry. **Downright anger has been a common response amongst those with whom I worship and serve as a Reader.** There was a surge of interest in synodical government which is no bad thing – ‘How is the House of Laity elected?’ ‘Are they on another planet?’ The most common reaction of all especially from those outside the Church or on the edge is utter bemusement. At a family gathering over the Christmas period I was virtually interrogated over the issue especially by younger members of the family in their early 20's who do not attend church. A former Principal of a Sixth Form College with whom I worked many years ago on his Christmas card asked if I would write back to explain why it was that the House of Laity voted in a way that did not seem to correspond to the views of the Church of England as a whole. People have been genuinely puzzled and confused by the way the Church of England has dealt with the legislation on women bishops.

Lay Woman

27. Three things which have really impacted me since the vote on women bishops in November are as follows:

1. Spiritually and emotionally I was surprised at my reaction - the next day I took a communion service and just wanted to cry. **I started to question if I should be there as president - what if I'd got my calling wrong? Of course I have recovered but I was shocked at how I felt. I've encountered opposition in different forms over the 11 years I've been ordained but this was different** - perhaps because it became a national event and I was hearing all sorts of opinions around me. I've had to dig back into the sense of calling that I know was real and still is, and which others have affirmed over the years.
2. Members of my congregation, ecumenical colleagues and non-Christian friends and acquaintances all have commented on their disbelief in the church and its stance on women bishops - and also on the synodical process. How can 42 out of 44 diocesan synods vote yes and then get overturned - and by the laity? I find it hard to explain or justify! **As a vicar am I expected to keep justifying the theological stance of those opposed?** I'm afraid I get a bit fed up with that at times.
3. After a packed crib service at Christmas which was the usual organised chaos an elderly man came up to me and said 'you've really made me think'. I was puzzled and then he said - 'when I came here today I was against women's ordination but you've made me think differently.'

Someone sitting next to him said he'd had tears in his eyes and had commented about how impressed he was with the way I'd kept the children engaged during the service. This tells me that there are still many who are opposed to women's ordination because of nothing more than ignorance or old-fashioned views (well it just doesn't seem right to have a woman vicar....).

Underlying all of this is my frustration that we cannot just get this sorted - I just want to get on with being a vicar and doing what God has called me to do. This is distracting us from the real work of mission and ministry.

Female Priest

26. I am a lay person. I stood for the House of Laity in the last General Synod election but it did not matter that I was not elected because all our elected members are fervently inclusive.

I attended as an observer at both the July Synod meeting and the disastrous meeting in November at Church House. I am a lawyer, very level headed, a strong person but was devastated by the vote in General Synod rejecting women bishops. **I spent the next day crying and my colleagues struggled to know what to do as I am the one who usually holds everything together in difficult times.**

I decided to abandon the Church of England but our Bishop sent a brilliant pastoral letter to us pleading with us not to leave. So I carried on attending services. I had led a course in church on Christian Ethics in October and the group of 10 who attended are very concerned about the clearly unethical way in which the church is proceeding. I have spent a great deal of time trying to comfort people of both sexes although, of course, it has been impossible to reconcile the church's behaviour with Christ's moral teachings.

I have reassured everyone that God's goodness will prevail and that the church will find a way through this unholy mess. But, if no solution can be found quickly, I know for certain that there will be a number of very devout members of All Saints who will leave the Church of England.

It is ironic that when I spoke at the hustings for General Synod, I had to listen to the desperate pleas of fundamentalists threatening to leave the church if women were admitted to the episcopacy and now I find myself making the same threat despite the fact that I hold views in common with the vast majority of Church of England members and the country as a whole.

Lay Woman

27. I have found the biggest impact on my relationship with my priest colleagues. They all voted no in our Deanery Synod and our reps voted no in Diocesan Synod. **I sense that they feel the vote in General Synod has vindicated their prejudices against women being Bishops. I also feel that it has affirmed the unspoken notion that is around in our local Chapter that women priests are second class and that women are unequal to men whatever they do.** As a result I feel a lack of trust towards my colleagues because I feel this agenda is true elephant in the room at our meetings.

Lay Woman

28. It came at a very difficult time for me as I had retired at the end of October after twenty years in ordained parochial ministry (sixteen as a parish priest) and was struggling to come to terms with the loss of job, home, church and community. I was one of the first women to be ordained priest after many years of working towards it and had spoken out in diocesan synod in favour of women bishops, and I felt sure General Synod members must take into account the overwhelming support for the measure in both the CofE and the country as a whole. **So the November '12 vote was crushing and undermining.** I felt like one of those cartoon characters who run off the edge of a cliff and for a moment hang in the air desperately trying to run on, until gravity wins and they crash to the ground and are flattened into two dimensions before staggering to their feet and tottering unsteadily off. **It was and is a very lonely place to be in.**

Female Priest

29. I really feel tempted to mark the time by BTV (Before the Vote) ATV (after the Vote) - it's been such a watershed. What a time of turmoil.

Locally, the following stand out:

- E-mails from friends and colleagues expressing support & sympathy immediately ATV
- A normally very reserved 8 o'clock-er. throwing her arms round me on the Sunday morning ATV, bursting into tears and saying, 'I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry.'
- Friends, parishioners and retired (male) priests furious
- A Reader candidate considering whether she wanted to stay in the CofE, and if she did, how she could justify it to her work colleagues
- **A friend and former parishioner (a vicar's daughter) announcing that she has now left the CofE altogether, for the Quakers**
- Non-churchgoing parishioners coming up to me in the street to express their dismay, bewilderment and anger

Further afield, friends and colleagues everywhere despairing and exhausted

I seem to be the only one who feels quite hopeful! **Because I sense a turning of the tide at last, a beginning of the Narnian thaw. All the same, it has brought back so much pain and anger from my 25 years as an ordained woman in the CofE, so many hurtful and unjust experiences.** I can see how far we've come - so many are angry at what once they wouldn't even have noticed - but we've got so far still to go. So, for me ATV, a huge mixture of emotions, all of them intense. It's been distracting and psychologically draining, and at times it's been very hard indeed to give my full attention to the demanding job at hand here.

Female Priest

30. I've been two years retired from my large and completely rural benefice. A feature of the general response to the negative vote of the laity has been how many of my old parishioners have emailed or rung up to say how shocked and saddened they are. This has not only been church people, but people who rarely if ever came to church except for hatches, matches and dispatches. **The general feeling seems to be one of revulsion from the church in general and from General Synod lay people in particular.** (It's not fair; I'm simply reporting.) Messages of sympathy came from people of widely different background and ages. When the way that people get voted for (by Deanery Synods) is explained, people are shocked. "How can so few people have such a hold over the majority?" I have been asked.

The most touching responses were the really heartbroken emails I had immediately from my three grandchildren at university and in their first jobs. Idealistic and intelligent, they are the best of young people, though not believers. They found the result hard to believe in their generation. **It has convinced them that the church has nothing to do with the justice and human dignity to which they hold most dearly**, and they all feel bitterly sad for me their grandmother. I think they stand for their generation. It's a long time we've been "Waiting" !

Female Priest

31. Yesterday I attended Arthur Miller's excellent production for the ENO of *The Mikado* at the Coliseum.

When Ko Ko, the Lord High Executioner was making his *little list of those society offenders who might well be underground*, the biggest, almost show stopping cheer, from the audience came to the reworking of Gilbert's words;

Ko Ko...*the Christian misogynists, I've got them on my list
They'd none of them be missed—they'd none of them be missed!*

Chorus; *He's got 'em on the list—he's got 'em on the list;
And they'll none of 'em be missed—they'll none of 'em be missed!*

That audience's reaction brought home to me the nation's view that our Church is being held to ransom by a small number of misogynists.

Lay Man

32. Since the vote in November, I have struggled to see the Church of England as an affirming and inclusive church for women. While my parish church is a safe haven for me, I find myself caught trying to explain to friends how the CofE can be allowed to be institutionally sexist - and I'm caught because I just can't explain it by reference to Reason, to decent exegesis of Scripture, or to any Tradition that isn't oppressive. Friends both inside and outside the church have been expressing their sadness or even disgust; and in many cases their intention never to belong to a Church which cannot accept ALL people as equal in God's sight.

Lay Woman

33. I am an OLM, a school Chaplain and teach. As a result I meet a huge number of folk from diverse backgrounds, and continue to do so. Since the vote there has been bewilderment that a minority can dictate to the majority and amazement that the Church of England is permitted to discriminate against women when other institutions are not (few understand the legal position). 'Out of step with society' and 'increasingly irrelevant' are phrases often heard during discussions. Strangely, the effect on my ministry has been affirming. The support from the Dioceses, colleagues, congregations and those I meet has been humbling. I had no idea so many people cared so much. **However , there is a huge feeling of anger, frustration and sadness. The latter on behalf of the many talented women have been so gracious and patient.** They are considered a hugely wasted resource. There is a perception that God cannot be clearly heard while women are barred from the episcopate – do not have full voice.

Female Priest

34. I am a member of General Synod and also a priest-in-charge of two parishes and a Rural Dean

Following the vote last November my main emotion was anger as I felt that the best chance of having Women Bishops in a generation had been lost, that the mission of the church had been damaged and that the church had been made to look ridiculous as one third of the clergy could not be considered as bishops. I was also concerned that the church would have to spend so much more time on this issue, which would be a distraction from mission, and that the authority of the new Archbishop was damaged before he had even started. I felt that the provision made for those opposed was good and would have worked. I got fed up of being asked if I was hurting as I felt more inclined to hurt someone else, however unchristian that might be!

When I returned to my parish and Deanery people there were angry and disappointed at what had happened. Anger and incomprehension was expressed about those who voted against. I spent some time explaining the processes of Synod to people and also the way that the House of Laity are elected so that there would be a better understanding for next time. I have been to speak to a Deanery Synod in a neighbouring Deanery and have also been invited to speak at a Lent group in a church in my own Deanery on this subject.

My own church and Deanery are very supportive of my ministry, so I have been enabled to get on with concentrating on doing what I and they are convinced that God has called me to do, whatever people in the wider church may think. It has, however, been difficult to hear the arguments against the ordination of women gone over yet again when we have been doing this for nearly twenty years! The anger has been succeeded by depression as it is so difficult to see the way forward.

Our Bishop has been very supportive and is leading a service to affirm the ministry of women on Sunday. So far as the way ahead is concerned I find it difficult to imagine what that might be at the moment. I think it must be a single clause Measure but there will have to be some parallel provision for those opposed and I hope and pray that something will be found which makes fair provision but does not damage the authority of women bishops.

Female Priest

35. Two images will stay with me for some time: that of the Archbishop with his head in his hand, and the face of the Archbishop Elect – white as the blood seemed to drain away. They knew, as we did, that we had just witnessed or participated something historic. That afternoon was a real turning point for the Church of England. Never had we seen such a response of anger, bewilderment, outrage, despair – at least that's how it was for the vast majority. Since then, in my capacity as member of Bishop's Staff Meeting and Director of Discipleship, Vocation and Ministry but also as a woman, a person and a priest experienced this:

- **a sense of betrayal**
- a sense of shame that I was part of Guildford diocese (where 2/5 clergy and 3/4 lay voted against) which had played such an important part in the 1994 debates
- a rush of emails and calls from outraged women and men, lay and ordained
- **a trip to A&E following a shutdown of my memory as a result of stress**
- a resignation from the national Common Awards Steering Group in protest that the new Chair had voted and spoken against the Measure.

So, it's been an interesting time. Our two bishops have been exemplary in their support and response and we hope for a better experience in July. But it's not a sure and certain hope – that's for sure.

Female Priest

36. I feel as if I'm in an abusive relationship; offered something, to have it taken away, and told it's my own fault that I'm being punished.

Lay Man

37. When I got back from GS in November I was numb and speechless with shock. When I went to church the following Sunday I was greeted by a sea of people who could not understand what had happened. 'But we voted for it at the Deanery and Diocesan Synods', they said. 'What is the church on about? It looks very silly now....' A former assistant minister was very good.

The following week, we had a PCC and someone – not me because I was chairing it- - suggested that we told our Bishop of our views. The PCC agreed and the following Sunday we wrote a short statement about our shock and displeasure at the vote and everyone in church – except one retired cleric and his wife who belong to FinF and 2 very little children in the crèche. There were over 70 signatures and the age range was 9-82

Female Priest

38. How does it feel? Really rubbish! I was part of the diocesan deanery roadshow presenting the case, responding to questions, listening to all sides. I'm on Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council and have pondered, considered, discussed and prayed. I have thoroughly engaged with the whole process and now I feel detached and disconnected. **At our parish prayer meeting this evening we were praying for our Bishop, who is retiring soon, and for his successor - then it got me, again - it has to be a 'he', it could have been a 'she'.**

Lay Woman

39. A member of one of my congregations - a young, visionary, creative, brilliant woman - is struggling to remain in the CofE after what she perceived to be 'Institutionalised Sexism': "a woman can be a Bishop but only so far, and even then she needs to be contained so that others are 'protected' from her improper ministry..." For every anecdote told by Reform/FinF about how 'the world' thinks we're right to pause and protect, **there are as many from 'the world' who believes we have very effectively discredited ourselves as a body with integrity and a right to have an opinion...**

Female Priest

“This just feels like the 1980s again”

“I feel that the introduction of women clergy has been a battle with unreason and prejudice, with my own soul made a battleground of...”

“It has been such a long, hard journey...”

“...I had suffered enough with the women priests legislation and all it has meant to bring that to birth”

40. I had put on hold thinking about when I should retire until after the November General Synod. The result of the vote was the final decider that I should retire. I wrote to my Bishop informing him and reproduce below part of that letter:

*“I have always intended to continue as archdeacon after the age of 65 and for as long as I found the role fulfilling. I could continue in post for another four years. **However, I have found it increasingly difficult to live with the tensions between voicing my own views on controversial matters and speaking as a senior representative of the Church of England and of this Diocese in particular.** I take loyalty to my archbishop and my bishop seriously.*

*These tensions have come to a head with the recent vote against the Women Bishops' Measure. **I have been working for the full inclusion of women in the ordained ministry of the Church of England for over twenty eight years and it has taken its toll.** The cost of serving as a priest (in my case for nearly nineteen years) in a Church that continues to allow some male clergy, even those newly ordained, to state publicly and contrary to Canon A4 that women lawfully ordained are not, indeed cannot be priests, is not something I would guess most women priests think about very often. That is, unless they have listened to the hours of debate that have taken place over the last few years in General Synod. Nevertheless it is inevitably undermining and it is hardly surprising that bishops find it difficult to encourage women to apply for senior posts.*

I received a Christmas card this year from my niece and goddaughter. She wrote inside it to tell me that her daughter, age 17, had decided to leave the Church of England because of the ‘no’ vote. I immediately wrote to her and I have persuaded her to stay for now. Unfortunately, not every teenage girl has an ordained great aunt.

After considerable reflection I have decided to retire at the end of September 2013. I think that it is important for my spiritual health that I do so.....”

I hope that the meeting with the Working Group is fruitful but I do not expect much progress in the lifetime of this General Synod. Lay people in this Diocese are only just waking up to the fact that their GS representatives are not representative of the strength of support for women priests and bishops here.

Female Priest

41. I have struggled for 30 years (21 of them as an ordained woman in the C of E) to work out how best to respond to a call from a loving, inclusive, redemptive God to serve in the name of Jesus Christ (in whom there is neither male nor female) through an institution which is so deeply and unapologetically sexist. Since the attempt by the House of Bishops to ‘improve’ the legislation re women bishops in May 2012 I have been seriously wondering how much longer I can continue...

I think this is all as much about what happened 20 years ago with the introduction of the Act of Synod (and all its unintended consequences over these last two decades) as it is about what happened last November.

I am also concerned/cross that there is a rhetoric around that says that the legislation would have been approved (with the Bishops' amendments) last July but that 'the women' spoiled that by asking for the adjournment. AAaagghh! There are people who would have voted against whatever was on the table who are now saying that of course they would have voted for the amended legislation last July had they been given the chance - I am not sure I believe them.

Female Priest

42. How do I feel? What was the impact of the vote in General Synod in November on me? In fact, the rejection of the legislation in November had less of an impact on the depths of who I am than the introduction of the "Archbishops' amendment" in May 2010, after the Revision committee had published its report, and then the very similar action of the House of Bishops in May 2012 when they added the infamous clause 5.1.c (and clause 8). On both those occasions **I felt deeply betrayed by those who trusted me with the cure of souls to share, who had allowed me to be ordained. How could they then bring into law something that legitimised the denial of my existence as an ordained woman? I felt torn apart by the collusion with those opposed to women that these amendments represented.**

So after the debacle of November 2012, and **after spending all day listening to the speeches of those who did not want me to exist (this is what it felt like – as though I had been sitting there being mugged for 5 hours)** I was not surprised or shocked. I felt a mixture of relief that we would not still be trying to make the legislation work when so many people seemed to think it was still all right to discuss whether women could be ordained as priests; sadness for those in the parishes who wanted to feel that their church valued women and who did not want to have to justify discrimination to their friends, and **a deep anger that so many people were still colluding with the narrative of victimisation spun by those who have remained in the church for 20 years still demanding the right to argue that women are not and never can be, ordained. Most of the time I don't notice this anger and get on with those I meet in day to day ministry – but when I allow, myself to feel I am deeply, deeply hurt and angry at the depth of collusion with the mendacious arguments of those who will never, never accept that women can be ordained, who want to ignore the decision of General Synod 20 years ago but still call themselves "loyal" Anglicans.** They are entitled to their views- but to insist on the right to publicly undermine the ministry of a third of ordained clergy because they are female, and also the ministry of most of the other men because they accept ordained women, is not loyal, is not generous, is not gracious. To continue to find a way of including a group who clearly don't want to be included but want separation (the original demand was for their own separate third province) is not inclusion - it is appeasement.

One promise I made to myself after November was that I was going to stop being careful and start telling the truth, as I saw it. And the truth as I see it is that the House of Bishops has, as a body, been caught up in a process of appeasement, and lost their role as those who protect the doctrine of the C or E by allowing the orders of the church to be so undermined. I came across a wonderful phrase today, nothing to do with the Church of England, or women: "The standard complaint from groups for whom taking offence is a tactical weapon" This seems one of the best descriptions of what has been going on in the C of E for years – and the bishops fall for it every time. Why they do, I don't know – it feel like systemic gender discrimination, so that men who genuinely don't discriminate in their "normal" life so when they become part of the collective group that is the House of Bishops.

That's my response to the politics of it all and the "messages" that political actions give, far more strongly than words.

What about my own ministry and spirituality? I am very thankful to be vicar of a very open, welcoming, inclusive congregation with integrity. So it is possible to say it how it is and they are not shocked – or if they are, they are grown-up enough to deal with this themselves. The challenge was how to allow the sadness, feelings of betrayal, shock, concern for me and other women colleagues, be expressed and acknowledged without taking over. Luckily we had a church committee meeting two days after the vote- we took time to share how we felt, and as a result decided to put up a poster saying exactly this by Sunday morning – for much of our concern was how the decision would impact on how the church was perceived by others, not how it would affect us – but how it would affect those who might need the church but would be turned away by their perceptions of injustice and exclusion. Having made this "statement" I think we have then been able to get on with the rest of what we should be doing.

However, there was no real support from anyone with roles of authority in the diocese other than the adviser for women's ministry. Lots of support from other clergy and some lay people I knew – but no awareness, it seems on the part of the bishops, or archdeacons, that this was an issue that affected women (and others) as a group, not as individuals who could be dealt with by a phone call but not face to face. The first meeting with women clergy will take place next week ... and so any meetings amongst the bishops, have happened without our bishops knowing how we feel. All our bishops support women in ministry – but do not seem to realise that we would have valued them making time as a matter of urgency to listen to what we had to say.

But as for me – I wake many mornings wondering how I can continue to be a priest in a church which by its actions denies what it preaches. I can't be happy in my work and role, though there are plenty of individual moments that are joyful. Every action of the official church in this whole affair seems to be antithetical to the gospel.

Why do we put some ideal of institutional unity before following Christ?

Why do we allow those who refuse to share communion to hold positions of influence in the church, when sharing communion is, I thought the defining act of being one church?

Why do we still preach about bringing in the outcasts and then shut the door on women?

Why do we preach sermons about Jesus challenging those who gave precedence to purity laws over God's love – and then write our own purity laws?

I still preach these sermons – and try to avoid talking about the irony and tragedy of the actions of the C of E every week - but do sometimes, otherwise it becomes dangerously unmentionable which doesn't help anyone.

At the moment I shall stay with this as it is part of my own calling – but if young, faith-filled women ask me about ordination I tell them to think very, very hard before offering themselves for ordained ministry in the current CofE. It is toxic for women's spirituality (and others??) and risks undermining any woman's sense of self-worth. I advise young women to get a job in the secular world where they will learn what it feels like to be valued in a job, before they offer to be an ordained priest in the CofE where they will risk being undermined as a person by the actions and words of the institution.

Female Priest

43. I am Rector of a market town and three villages and an Area Dean as well. I was ordained deacon in 1990 and have had to battle with the church for many, many years, as a woman and then as an ordained mother (the church didn't know what to do with me.) I had spoken in some of the deaneries here about the legislation and the overwhelming feeling was that it should be supported.

When I first got news of the GS result my immediate reaction that I felt was one of shock and disbelief. Then after a short while I thought, **“This just feels like the 1980s again.”** Then later I thought, “It’s such a nonsense: I know in my heart of hearts that women will be ordained bishop. It is so blindingly obvious. I have to hand this over to God, confident in that belief.” I have to admit that I wasn’t happy with the legislation after the Bishops had tampered with it, so there was a part of me that was glad it had fallen because I think that there should be a single clause measure really. But I was prepared to go along with the legislation to try to keep the C of E together. People in the churches were puzzled. People in the street just write off the church – to them it’s a joke the way the church is behaving nationally. In the aftermath, I have to say I have just got on with things as I usually do and not let it get to me – largely because there’s a huge job to be done here and I am fighting about getting a gay chap ordained who won’t lie about being celibate. But the thing that really got to me and has made me most anxious was the reaction of a group of 20s and 30s doing the Exploring Christianity course I am running. These are fringe people – I was amazed that they turn up week after week as they have been doing since last September. **When they heard about the vote (and the gay marriage issue as well), they said, “Why would we want to join a church that has these attitudes?” I tried to explain that not everyone in the church thinks like that but the damage has been done. I have lost them to some extent. And that is what I really mind about.**

Female Priest

44. I was on retreat when I heard that the legislation for women to be bishops had failed so I missed all the media interviews and reactions and put it to one side. **However when Sunday came and I was staying with family I found, for the very first time, that I felt spiritually unable to go to church. We did an at home service instead. This was the first indication to me that I felt about this very deeply indeed. I had avoided a lot of the struggle for women to be bishops as I had suffered enough with the women priests legislation and all it has meant to bring that to birth.** Now I am very angry at the attitude to women that still prevails, the appalling theologies that the CofE still endorses about women, and I am thinking about how to creatively use that anger. In the first weeks I had a number of conversations with people which coalesced around the feeling, that what was the point of the institutional church if it could be like this about women and so demonstrably ignore the dioceses votes. What was the point of all the PCC, deanery and diocese votes anyway given what happened in General Synod. Two people had been Christians all their lives, were churchwardens and worked very hard for their local church, now they questioned all that and wondered what the point was. I was shocked to learn that the House of Bishops knew this failure was likely from the known views of those elected in 2010, and to learn that there was block voting and individual decisions to ignore the diocesan vote. **It was wrong in 1993 to make it part of our legislation that women priests could be excluded, but in the spirit of the time it seemed the generous thing to do. The consequence now shows how wrong that was. Either women are acceptable or not in any role in the church.**

Female Priest

45. The first woman student at a certain theological college in 1984, I was one of the last deaconesses in 1986, one of the first women deacons in 1987 and one of the first women priests in 1994. **I feel that the introduction of women clergy has been a battle with unreason and prejudice, with my own soul made a battleground of. Just imagine – 29 years of that!** Recently, my feelings about the pain and injustice of all this have been assuaged by the steady progress towards the first women becoming bishops in the Church of England. When 42 out of 44 English Diocesan Synods voted in favour of the legislation, I thought “The people have spoken! How can the progress be halted now?” When the legislation was voted down in an unrepresentative House of Laity in General Synod,

at first I could not believe what I was hearing. **I felt stunned, numb, disillusioned, crushed. I still do. I go about in a pained silence on the subject. No-one has said anything about it to me – I expect they can see it is too sore a point to mention. This is the first time I have expressed my feelings about it since the November vote.**

Female Priest

46. Briefly, I'm a retired Vicar but am still very active in ministry. I was in the first tranche of those ordained priest in 1994. The reaction after November has been twofold: to quote Victor Meldrew they '**just don't believe it!**' - that after many years of experiencing the joy of women's ministry plus the affirmation of 42 out of 44 dioceses, the measure didn't go through - and secondly, in recent intercessions in churches, charitable and loving prayers have been voiced for wisdom, discernment and action for the future.

Female Priest

47. I am a retired Priest who helps out in various country parishes around. I personally was bitterly disappointed by the vote. **I made my first speech on these issues in the former Church Assembly in 1967 and hoped that at last we might come to a positive decision.** The debate at the last General Synod and the vote left me feeling physically ill.

I have been inundated by messages - e mails, cards, letters from people who are greatly angered by the decision and want to express their support. One person with whom I taught forty years ago had taken the trouble to obtain my address and write to express his sympathy and anger. When I returned to the Abbey I found the same feelings among the congregation. I have felt encouraged and supported by all this but still sad and angry at the result.

I do not know how we get out of this mess as the opposition now feels confident and determined to press for concessions which we could never accept. In a strange way though I feel that this is no longer the fight of WATCH. It is the fight of the whole Church and of the Bishops.

We should congratulate ourselves on the fact that we have brought about a sea change in the Church and hope and pray that we shall move forward to a satisfactory result.

I have also been encouraged by the attitude of Parliament and the people there who will not let the matter rest. Several times they have pressed the Second Church Estates Commissioner with questions and are determined not to let this issue go. They have made it clear that they will not accept anything that makes women bishops second class.

Female Priest

48. I am a retired priest with PTO living in a Diocese where Forward in Faith and Reform have been fairly vocal.

Since the vote in Synod I have been surprised and reassured by the number of people, members of the local congregation, other churches and non-church members who have been so outspoken in voicing their disappointment and disgust at the outcome of the vote at Synod. **There have, unfortunately,**

also been those who have stated that they do not wish to be associated with a church which they perceive as having such a negative view of women and their Ministry.

Female Priest

49. I have to confess that at first I deleted the request to send our comments to you. **It has been such a long , hard journey and since sitting in the public gallery in November to see and hear what I believed would be its climax , I have lost all my enthusiasm for engaging in any more dialogue in a debate in which I believe it's all been said.... and to no avail.** However it was a lay friend, who is a member of WATCH and just sent me an email to tell me I must write, who has made me put fingers to key board.

Ordained deacon in 1992 and priested with the first batch of women in 1994, I was made an honorary Canon in 2008. Now retired from parochial ministry, I am a spiritual director and a mentor to clergy and lay people in our diocese. I have three children, taught science for some 25 years before ordination and, with a gay son, have many LGBT friends. I share the incomprehension of many of my non church going friends and family who find our church's stance on women's ministry and homosexuality quite at odds with the Gospel we preach. I have trained 5 male curates and know the joy of experiencing a whole ministry - men and women , gay and straight, ordained and lay, young and old etc etc..

So I found it difficult to find words (through my tears), after the November vote, to explain what on earth was going on to those many people contacting me in shock...

including the stranger outside church house who got on the bus and sat down next to me that evening and asked me "How did the vote go?" Those who are interested knew the diocesan votes so thought Synod's vote was a done deal. I was on General Synod from 2005 to 2010 and was amazed then at how unrepresentative the house of laity seemed. I felt it did not speak for the lay people I came across as Area Dean in my parishes, deanery and diocese. It seems the present group of laity are even more unrepresentative and I suspect there was some lobbying in the last election to make sure that the conservatives were in the ascendancy.

So what now? I have believed all through the last few years that we should make as much provision as possible for those, both Trad Catholics and Conservative Evangelicals, who could not accept women in the episcopate. I booked a stay York last summer, naively believing that the vote would go through then, but felt it right the debate should be adjourned and even agreed with the Appleby amendment in the belief that we had to make this compromise. Now I no longer think that makes sense. Such compromises, it would seem, will obviously not placate those who are against the idea of women Bishops. We have tried and tried. I believe the time has come for a Single Clause Measure. **We have lost a great deal of credibility in the eyes of those many , many people who did feel the church could be a force for good in our world even if they would not call themselves Christian. We need to show them the good news of a church that involves all in its ministry in every sphere and then we need to get on with others in addressing the real issues that concern our broken world.**

Female Priest

“...we must stand up against the discrimination and bigotry that masquerades as “theological conviction” at each end of the Anglican spectrum”

“I have been disheartened by this vote; I struggle that there’s still so much non-inclusive language, gender bias and a significant voice given to the theology of taint”

“...they exercise headship in order to deny that to other women”

50. I’m writing in response to the request for stories about how things have been since the November Synod that was such a disaster for women in the church. The first few days were terrible – I was constantly apologizing for being a member of the House of Laity when people asked me what on earth had happened. When I tried to explain that the vast majority of church members at every level did in fact want women to have the chance to be bishops some people found that hard to believe. All they saw was the Church of England appearing to condone and support discrimination.

Having had the Christmas and New Year period to reflect and read other people’s responses on websites (thanks mostly to Thinking Anglicans!) **I’ve come to the conclusion that however long it takes we must stand up against the discrimination and bigotry that masquerades as “theological conviction” at each end of the Anglican spectrum.** I voted for the measure in November as I believed it was as generous as it could be to these people without compromising the role of a woman bishop. The talk from Dr Giddings and others that there was “a better way” just around the corner was ridiculous. Now that this generosity has been spurned I believe we need our bishops to take a lead in tackling the theology. If women can be priests then they can be bishops. 20 years ago perhaps we needed to be kind to those men who were already ordained and never thought there would be women priests. But any man accepted for ordination training now needs to realise that we do have women priests, and if he can’t accept that, then he will have to be ordained into some other denomination. **The “headship” argument needs to be demolished – picking and choosing verses out of context and taking no account of the culture of the time and place cannot continue – if it did, we would still have slavery and apartheid.** And as for waiting for the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches to move with us – I believe that many of their members are waiting for us to take a lead that no doubt they will follow one day. The Roman Catholic Church does not recognize Anglican orders any way – men or women, - so why wait? I truly don’t believe we can give any more concessions, but must stand fast now for proper equality in the Church of England.

Lay Woman

51. I cannot remember a time when members of the church were so angered by the C of E's apparent failure to respond what is seen as the clear desire of the great majority of church members.

Personally, I felt ashamed and found it very hard to have to keep trying to explain how this could happen. My 42 year old daughter, a church goer who is a 'high flyer' working in the City said "Don't they understand that this is why the Church is not creditable to my friends?" My non-believing friends are simply astonished - one atheist friend just gave me a big hug. I have also had to spend some time explaining about 'Evangelicals'...not least pointing out that very few of them would identify with the extraordinary views they heard expressed about the submission of women. **The general view, which I share, is that nothing will satisfy those opposed to women bishops.** They will simply attempt to block legislation in any way possible.

Therefore, after much thought and prayer I have this to say. I have been active locally and nationally in the cause of women's ordination since the mid 70s. **I was one of the very few who did not vote in support of the Act of Synod in 1992. I was right. Many of those who did vote for it would not have done so had they known how things would work out.** I now find that I can - just - recognise some validity in the traditionalist Catholic viewpoint even though it is predicated on a

fantasy about re-union with Rome. **I do however think the Church should now refuse to recognise complementarianism as a valid Church of England doctrine. In my opinion it is a doctrine which is contrary to the clear thrust of the Gospel and hence a false teaching. I would call it heretical. There should be no more talk of giving an 'honoured place' in the Church for those who hold this view.**

Female Priest

52. Sadness shock anger dismay and bewilderment. Tears rolled down over the leeks I was slicing for dinner when I heard the outcome of the vote. The irony of being in the kitchen doing 'women's work' as some would want to see it!! My 20 year old son had set up the laptop in the kitchen for me - he was completely mystified by the vote. To him, women Bishops was a no-brainer!! Of course it should happen. **I took the loss of those 6 votes needed personally and deeply and I felt rejected and devalued as a woman and a priest.** The next day I was, like countless clergy throughout this country, carrying on in ordained ministry, sharing morning prayer, worshipping God at the altar in the Eucharist, encountering and embodying the holy in human experience. Still a woman, still a priest. Delighted that day by the company of faithful women, lay and ordained, by the very supportive comments of male colleagues and truly heartened by the chap who came to a service to 'support God' after what he said was 'such a disastrous decision'. He was sure and certain that it couldn't stand.

I have been disheartened by this vote; I struggle that there's still so much non-inclusive language, gender bias and a significant voice given to the theology of taint. I sometimes think we don't name misogyny and gynophobia when we find it. I was angered by the disingenuous descriptions of conservative evangelical synod candidates who said they valued women's ministry – really meaning their ministry in the kitchen or with children - but never their orders as priests. I get very depressed by the high-jacking of the Catholic voice in the Church of England – a voice this country desperately needs to connect with - I too want to go forward in faith – but that phrase is unusable! I too value the living traditions of the church – but I can't use the word traditional. But I go on and live in hope as Christ has called us to do. There are so many gifted women – I know that they will eventually become bishops, those who've not retired by the time it goes through! **We will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living – this change is of God and it won't go away.**

Female Priest

53. As an active laywoman I am shocked to discover that a move widely desired in the Church of England can be blocked on the basis of embarrassingly weak arguments, as demonstrated in some of the contributions to the recent CT Guide to the women bishops debate. **It is hard to respect the idea that the Church of England must keep in step with the Church of Rome, which does not recognise Anglican orders. It is equally hard to respect an argument, based on no convincing evidence at all, that women in general are not fitted to be in positions of leadership.** These arguments were not properly confronted in the General Synod debate, and I can feel little confidence in the Church since its decision-making process has been revealed to be so flawed.

Lay Woman

54. I am a lay member of GS - I had predicted to my Deanery Synod that the opponents would use their blocking minority in the house of Laity to vote the measure down; I was therefore not surprised but i was and still am angry at this behaviour

I still think that the conservative evangelical women are being less than honest in their reading of Paul to Timothy; they exercise headship in order to deny that to other women. But I am even more convinced that much of the opposition comes from some deep sexism; Paul lived in a sexist milieu and so has the church for centuries. There were many "Christians" opposed to the abolition of slavery because they could find biblical fragments to seemingly comfort their views. This same fragment seeking as a comfort for sexism is still with us.

The opponents had a mantra; this is not about women bishops it is about the measure, there must be a better way. But not one of them gave any indication about what a better way might be. I take this to mean that their opposition is to women and not to the provision in the measure; because they will not even accept the institutional authority of a woman even though the measure distinguishes between that and the derivation of orders.

Lay Man

55. Several events through December helped me unpack the reasons for the deep distress I have felt as a woman priest after November's vote. These included the shooting of the school girl Malala and the rape and murder of a female Student in India. **I have come to see that this relatively local issue in our domestic church, reflects a much bigger issue about what we are saying about God's relationship to human beings. If the Church of England is, through whatever measure for women bishops is adopted, to publicly affirm as a position of theological integrity the belief that God has ordained and conveyed through Scripture that women are to be in submission to the headship of men, then we are on the same, terrible spectrum as those who believe girls should not be educated and are prepared to shoot girls who disagree, or that women are of less value than men and may be raped, sold, married off at (men's) will.** We may believe we are different, because we do not act in these extreme ways, but as a church we would provide an apologetic for the view that it is divinely ordained that women be subject to the "superior" will of men (however that is interpreted by different groups), and the consequences of that view throughout the world are devastating. Is this the gospel we have to proclaim?

Lay Woman

“...some of the people who made up the laity ‘NOs’, was that they really felt they had a mandate, valued at pretty high levels”

“Our laity took the lead in signing a statement ‘You Didn't Speak for me’”

“I still do not give money to the Church - we have a rule in our house that in our charitable giving we do not support organisations which are not equal opportunities employers”

“The real problem is that the church remains patriarchal and this needs to change”

56. I am a lay person worshipping at my local parish church on a housing estate and I work as an editor in an ecumenical religious publishing project. Although I was a General Synod member for ten years, I no longer have much to do with the diocese in which I live, and most of my experience of the Church is in my local parish and in the Churches, generally, at a national level

As a woman working in education for various church organisations for almost thirty years, my experience has very frequently been of being marginalised and patronised. Playing the sycophantic game mitigates this, but it is not one I have been prepared to participate in.

Oddly, since the November vote, I think things have shifted and improved a bit in this respect. **Although I felt it was really very likely the vote would be lost, because the way opponents had been manipulating the process for a long time, I think people generally were so deeply shocked and ashamed that they have felt compelled to behave differently towards women. It is tragic that the vote was lost in the way that it was, but I wonder if it hasn't been a wake-up call.** And I do wonder if the opposition as it was expressed in the House of Laity might not have crumbled if it had been confronted in a more robust and direct way by men in leadership positions. **My personal experience, in Synod study groups, of some of the people who made up the laity ‘Nos’, was that they really felt they had a mandate, valued at pretty high levels. This made it very difficult to address the matter with them, without being made to feel disloyal and diffident.** This has gone on for long enough and it needs to be addressed. We know only too well that in poor communities wracked by hunger and conflict, it is the empowerment of women that makes so much difference, delivering educational opportunities that enables change to happen and working at resolutions to conflict. The Church of England really has to set a good example for the world to see, by ensuring that women can assume top leadership roles, where their contributions will be properly acknowledged and acted upon. The walk must be walked – it is no good just talking.

Lay Woman

57. I am happy to share a few anecdotes for your gathering of experience. I am a team curate serving in a team of 3 parishes. I have been uplifted since the vote. It has been largely as a result of an outpouring of support from laypeople in our churches, but also by the general support from people I encounter in our community.

There was a general sense that the vote was incomprehensible to normal people, and some felt it quite unjust, among those:

The day after the vote a man who we have never seen before - or since - came into church very angry about the vote and made his feelings very clear and very vocally to our churchwarden, who is female. It was quite disconcerting for her but she took it in good spirits and explained our supportive position.

The owner of the local pet shop, not a churchgoer, also voiced his anger and then wanted a detailed explanation of what the laity was, including how you pronounce it, and how the decision the vote could have possibly gone that way.

I was encouraged that people who never venture into church felt a desire to engage and understand what had happened, even if they disagreed.

Our laity took the lead in signing a statement 'You Didn't Speak for me' and about 75 signed it and sent it in to synod. Several conversations revolved around the importance of engaging with synod, possibly standing for synod next time, and discussing how it works e.g: are synod representatives, representatives (in which case who do they represent?) or delegates (in which case, what are we delegating them to do?) Again this engagement has been encouraging.

Some people, including a gentleman in his 90s who supported and campaigned vigorously for the movement to ordain women in its early years, have been deeply grieved by the vote. But they have been heartened by the Bishop's decision to bring it back to synod so swiftly.

I have had conversations with a few of those who are against and the conversation has been kind and honest. On our recent day of prayer, I gave thanks for those people who chose to remain with us, quietly accepting the ministry of women gracefully, though they disagree with it theologically.

Throughout this I have felt nothing less than wholehearted support for the ministry I have been called to.

Female Priest

58. I am a male lay minister. It's actually surprised me how positive things have been. I was devastated on the day of the vote of course, but then the amount of solidarity from others has been really overwhelming. In both parishes where I am involved there was anger, but also a resolve to move forward to a better solution. It has been heartening to see WATCH members so engaged in now pushing for simpler and fairer legislation. MPs, the national press, and I think a majority of English people are ready for women bishops on an equal basis to men - **this disastrous vote has woken a lot of people up who previously thought it would happen without their input.** We may well have to wait until after 2015 for legislation to be passed owing to the blocking group in the present lay house, but I think the signs for the future are encouraging.

Lay Man

59. Deeply disappointed that there is a glass ceiling in the one place that should reflect that God sees us all as equal, loves us all equally and we bring our individual gifts. **Firmly believe the legislation should reflect acceptance of Women to be Bishops and all Bishops should be equal.**

Lay Woman

60. At the knowledge that the vote had not gone through with the expected result I was beside myself with disbelief. I was embarrassed to talk about it for about a week. My grown up daughter was the same and my husband likewise. It was then easier to treat it as a mistake and in fact that is how I view it still. It was a mistake to assume that the majority of Synod members were really up to speed with the social climate. **It was a mistake to think that the Synod members were representing the minds of the congregations and the general public in their remit.**

Now it is a little easier with the knowledge that there will be an opportunity to do it again, to do it properly. To assess the situation. **I will learn as many others have not to rely on others to make a difference. I am now on the Diocesan Synod representing my Deanery. Doing as best I can to be a true voice of the people.**

Lay Woman

61. I was taken aback as were so many others by the result of the vote, but I was heartened by the number of supportive emails, texts and calls I got from members of our parish. They wanted me to know that they understood how hurt I must be. I think many of them just did not realise that there was an issue and they were shocked by the result. The overwhelming impression I have received is that most ordinary people simply cannot understand why there can be an objection to women as bishops. This seems to me to reinforce the fact that those opposed are a very small minority of the laity of our church.

The positive thing is that people are now asking what they can do to help. How can they show their support. This has come particularly from other women in our parish. They have been amazed and disbelieving when I have told them that in our diocese 3 of the 4 laity who voted against the measure were women. It just seems to them that this is not representative of their wish in this matter. They want our bishops to know that most people and certainly most women want to see the full inclusion of women in all areas of service, vocation and ministry. At the same time I have also had a huge amount of support from the male members of our clergy team. They have been wholeheartedly behind the campaign and have felt just as devastated as I have at the result. **Their support and prayers have done so much to keep me going at this difficult time and I cannot express how grateful I am for their loving care.**

Female Priest

62. I'm a lay woman. To my surprise I feel really positive. Immediately after the vote I was surprised and very heartened to hear the rush of solidarity for women bishops expressed by senior church figures. There's a shared public sense that this is what we all want to happen, and we are an organisation with shared values and a common purpose. This was helped by Bishop Justin being clear about his disappointment over the vote. I know that ++Rowan thought his support for women bishops was well-known, but the traditional practice of 'on the one hand, on the other hand' from church leaders, plus some of his actions (e.g. his choice of staff) meant this wasn't the message that came across. **A lesson for the future - progressive Anglicans should be clearer and more confident about expressing their views. I was moved to hear so many people talk about their children's reactions - we care about the future. I still do not give money to the Church - we have a rule in our house that in our charitable giving we do not support organisations which are not equal opportunities employers.**

I have become increasingly aware that we do not yet have good mechanisms by which bishops communicate with (listen to) intelligent lay people, and I think those bishops who do not have these in place should make this a priority.

I feel positive that the arguments against women's ministry have come under public scrutiny - the 'Biblical' argument has been roundly refuted, and the need to take the opponents seriously seems to have reduced (too flippant to say it's a bit like the Wizard of Oz behind his screen?) It feels as if the high water mark for the opponents has now passed, **and I see no reason in the current climate for compromise.** The reaction of the wider world was bracing, despite the embarrassment it

brought. The requirement to be polite about the church and its foibles has dropped away, and this is a relief - we can perhaps be more honest all round. I no longer fear that I will find myself a member of an organisation taking a ridiculous retrograde stance. With so many supporters to encourage one another either we will end up with women bishops without compromises, or the Church will become an organisation which has chosen to make a priority of something that isn't a Gospel value, and is no longer recognisable as a prophetic and credible force for the future.

Lay Woman

63. When the news broke about the failure to achieve the necessary majority in the Synod vote last November my immediate reaction was one of disappointment and disgust. So much so that I wrote to my diocesan bishop, admitting to him that it made me feel like resigning. However, like many others, after that initial shock, I began to feel that it strengthened my resolve to stay and struggle. It was talked of a fair amount in our ecumenical parish where we join with Methodists, Baptists and the URC in formal and structured collaborative ministry. **At Ecumenical Council the lay members felt strongly enough to enter into correspondence with the House of Laity reps to express their dismay and disappointment at the result of November's vote.** Though the average member in our parish may not know a great deal of the complexities of the situation, their basic response, I think, is one of incredulity. They just cannot understand in this day and age why the CofE continues to be so retrograde in its policies. They cannot understand where opponents are coming from and even if the more informed among us try to explain, the incredulity remains quite strong. Both the "Catholic" and the "Evangelical" extreme positions remain somewhat opaque to the majority of our ordinary members. **I think that for most members of our six congregations it offends common sense that women cannot be counted fully as equals in the episcopal order of ministry and makes them feel that they belong to an organisation which outsiders see as bigoted or prejudiced. If the Synod manages to find a way through to women becoming bishops I think our members will issue a huge and collective sigh of relief.**

Male Priest

64. I am a Reader. The effect of the NO vote has been for the church to look stupid in the eyes of the general public and make it look more out of touch with everyday life, and irrelevant. All this at a time when we are looking for growth. On the positive side, most people I have spoken to feel it is only a setback, and no real damage done. **Some feel it is a positive because it has made people realise how stupid the church has been. The real problem is that the church remains patriarchal and this needs to change. From my point of view the church remains too priestly and should look to working more (and equally) with lay people. The problem of gender would then disappear because outside the church, and especially with the younger generation, gender simply is not an issue.** Other professions - Law - Medicine - still have an element of male domination, but it is changing fast. We will have women bishops: that is not in doubt.

Lay Man

65. Just a line to let you know how losing the vote has affected my life: personally, not a great deal, other than a profound sense of disappointment, there is an acceptance, because we can't change what has happened but a fear that I may die before I see a woman consecrated, although I'm a young 71!! However, those I meet are appalled that the church could be so out of touch with what real people want. The churches where I minister have been extra kind to me, as though they could, in some way.

compensate, because some of them wrote supporting the measure, but members of the general public with whom I have contact suggest that it is time the church got real and engaged with the world in which we live, "shot yourselves in the foot" has been used several times.

Most people feel that we should do something, over-ride the decision, go ahead without Synod and I have to explain that that's not the way things work. For non-churchgoers the issue is simple, Why don't we just say to those who don't agree, well push off, they don't understand that we are trying to hold a difficult balance. **However, that does highlight for me the fact that we have leant over backwards to compromise and it wasn't enough, proving that those against have not been willing to compromise, not willing to listen to any will but their own.** The vast majority of churches, in this country, have been very happy with our Ministry and want to see women bishops, to make the family of God whole. If there's any way we can do this, it should be got investigated.

Female Priest

66. I am a lay worship leader, working in a church where both are Vicar and Curate are female. We are now a United Benefice, one of the two parishes concerned having previously had Resolutions A, B & C in place.

Having spent a career in very senior policy roles in the NHS and healthcare, **I remain totally and utterly frustrated at the Church's inability to offer the equality to women which is required by law in every other aspect of our country. I feel increasingly ashamed and embarrassed to admit my allegiance to such a body and have seriously considered returning to my non-conformist Methodist roots.**

But a short story: I am currently studying for an MA in Pastoral Theology. My tutor group has a wonderful eclectic mix of people from all over the world - religious and lay. On the day after the vote on Women Bishop's was announced we were all talking about it, when we were joined by a Nigerian Pastor (here on study leave). He had one simple question 'Is this really the most important thing in the church in the UK today?' He's right, of course. It's not. This is a distraction to ministry and mission – something which is taking up the time and effort of numerous intelligent people who would be better off working on other things. **Of course it needs resolution – but what a tragedy that we are required to give it time and space ... apparently in pursuit of making ourselves look biased, old-fashioned, inward looking, un-Christian, uncaring and just plain silly. It can only serve to emphasise the church's increasing irrelevance in today's society. If we wish to maintain any sort of place at the national and international policy table, we must show that we have something to offer: this debacle has significantly - possibly irretrievably - damaged that hope.**

Lay Woman

67. I left the last General Synod debate on the Measure for Women Bishops disheartened, angry and feeling ashamed to be a member of the House of Laity. I was deeply saddened and I want to apologise to those who elected me.

That there has been confusion in the dioceses and the country as a whole goes without saying. And this is mainly due to the fact that, contrary to what many think, we are, like Members of Parliament, not representatives but delegates. We are not required to vote as our dioceses might expect us to but as we believe is right at the time.

However, on the late-defeated measure, defeated by the House of Laity, there is, I believe, a moral issue. Diocesan synods debate many matters but few subjects are sent out from The Church of England as an Article 8 with a requirement for diocesan debate and vote. And we knew the outcome of these votes on the proposed Measure for Women Bishops before General Synod. 42 out of 44 dioceses voted in favour, some - our Diocese for example – voted for the Measure overwhelmingly. This, surely, places additional responsibility upon us to vote as our Diocesan synods, which elected us would, in the main, wish, indeed expect us to vote.

It is clear that the composition of the House of Laity is not representative of the concerns and wishes of the laity in Diocesan and Deanery Synods. For this situation to have arisen raises questions about governance in the Church of England and whether it is now time for a radical overhaul. Is General Synod too big? What responsibilities should rest upon those elected? How can those standing for Synod be effectively questioned as to their position on crucial matters of policy? But these are issues for another day. (Although, of course, the opportunity of reviewing a better way will be lost if the proposed Amendment (by a conservative evangelical in the Diocese) before us were to be accepted.)

We have a great responsibility to consider what we believe to be in the best interests of the Church of England. To weigh seriously the lead given by the Archbishops and the House of Bishops, to have concern for what those who elected us would wish, besides what we may consider to be matters of theological 'conscience'. I have come to prefer the word 'understanding' for its worth remembering Hamlet's words: 'conscience doth make cowards of us all.'

Lay Woman

68. This vote was lost in 2010, at the election of this present Synod. So although the failed vote was not too unexpected, it was a shock that the lay group would not support the appeal of four Archbishops, and would not trust any Women Bishops to be compassionate to those who do not accept women as priests.

I personally had a dark night of the soul and wondered how to continue as a Subdeacon, Eucharistic Administrator, Server and Cathedral Guide.

It took a while, and a lot of prayer, to stop reeling and decide to make even more effort to extricate the Anglican Church from the danger she is now in.

Are we still the tolerant Church which welcomes all?

Are we still trying to proclaim the Gospel to all?

Are we able to spread the message to the world that women are equally important in the Kingdom of God, or shall we fail this glorious opportunity?

It is, in my view, urgent to undo the harm with a single measure; before this corrosion spreads too far, and the Anglican does not survive. The world outside thinks we are absurd. We must try to tell them how glorious and important the real message is.

Lay Man

69. I am no longer on General synod having decided not to stand again last time after 25 years! I was on the GS fringe group of MOW leading up to the vote. We worked hard at strategy on synod itself in order to win over the hesitant and in some cases the opposed.

It was a great blow to me personally that the tactics of the political opposition groups had made sure that their number was sufficient to give a NO vote in the House of Laity. **We must press ahead and make this work ... then we can get on with the real mission of the church. Not that having women bishops is not mission but we should be able to overcome our internal wrangles and concentrate on outside problems.**

The negative decision last November has caused me personal pain but I am still an Anglican ... a lay woman grateful never to have had a call to ordination otherwise I might have committed murder! But, like many lay people I feel a call to what I do as a layperson.

Lay Woman

70. I am saddened that my time on GS has been dominated by the Women Bishops issue to no avail. I stood and was elected on a pro-women ticket. The opposition is well funded, organised and well entrenched. They have no interest in any form of compromise or acceptance of women, despite their public stance. I have little hope that GS or the House of Bishops will come up with anything meaningful during the life of the present GS. All I can see is a round of pointless and face-saving discussions trying to square an impossible circle. **I am convinced that we should now separate principle from practice and demand a single-clause measure, with any "provisions" not enshrined in any form of legislation.** We need a new and representative General Synod. Nothing will happen until then. In my discussions with parishioners since the November vote (and with others sympathetic to but outside the Church), my view that the Church of England has become seriously irrelevant and a subject of ridicule has been confirmed. This must change. I hope that the new Archbishop will take a lead and that the House of Bishops will take a proper and supportive lead for a change.

Lay Man

71. I want to comment on how people in community have been affected - head teacher said yesterday that it had made the Church an institution that was completely out of touch with ordinary folk. Teenagers also told me that it made them feel devalued by the Church. Brought the views of a man in leadership out who told me I had to just get on with it and that he could imagine how much we would have cackled had we 'won.' **But will all that I'm hoping that the next round of conversations takes us into a better place than the last proposed legislation would have.**

Lay Woman

NOTE

Responses have been anonymised but WATCH has the names and dioceses of all contributors

Contributions came from the following 30 dioceses:

*Gloucester, Oxford, Durham, Sheffield, Lichfield
Bristol, Guildford, Southwark, Liverpool, Manchester
Blackburn, Winchester, London, Chester, Exeter
Ripon & Leeds, Worcester, Bath & Wells, St Alban's, Chelmsford
Newcastle, Coventry, York, Ely, Canterbury
Salisbury, Portsmouth, Wakefield, Peterborough, Lincoln*