

Church faces backlash by rejecting women bishops

by [Trevor Grundy](#) in the [December 26, 2012](#) issue

The Church of England plans to rush through legislation to consecrate women bishops after the surprising defeat of that proposal in November at the church's General Synod in London.

The church's Archbishops' Council, which ended two days of closed-door meetings on November 28, said a plan to allow women bishops needs to be "restarted" when General Synod reconvenes in July. Church leaders originally said the issue could not be reopened until 2015.

The 19-member council acts as the standing committee of the three-tier General Synod made up of bishops, clergy and laity.

"There was agreement that the Church of England had to resolve this matter through its own processes as a matter of urgency," the group said in a statement. "The Council therefore recommended to the House of Bishops . . . to put in place a clear process for discussions in the New Year with a view to bringing legislative proposals before the Synod in July [2013]."

American-born Christina Rees, who is a member of General Synod and the Archbishops' Council, said the unexpected defeat of the measure to allow women bishops has left the church "galvanized and activated."

"The 'No' vote on November 20 has proved to be a wake-up call for the Church of England," she said.

Incoming Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby called it "a very grim day for women and their supporters."

The vote shocked both sides of a years-long debate. Many of the 470 members of the church's General Synod were stunned that the House of Laity couldn't garner a two-thirds majority in favor of women bishops. The vote failed by just five votes,

132-74, after easily being passed by the bishops and clergy.

A full 42 of the 44 dioceses of the church had voted for legislation that would have permitted the consecration of women bishops next year. There are 3,600 ordained women in the Church of England and 37 female bishops in the worldwide Anglican Communion, including Africa's first Anglican woman bishop, Ellinah Wamukoya of Swaziland, who was consecrated five days before the defeat in Britain.

In a surprise move, opponents in the General Synod's traditionalist Catholic Group and the conservative group Reform have called for talks to break the deadlock.

The Catholic Group's Canon Simon Killwick and Reform's Rod Thomas had argued that there weren't enough safeguards for dissenters, but said they would not push to block a second vote. "It has never been our intention to prevent the consecration of women as bishops," they said in a joint statement. —RNS

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