

Church of England formally approves women bishops

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) Twenty years after women were ordained as priests, the Church of England is set to appoint its first woman bishop by year's end or at the start of 2015.

On Monday (November 17), the church's two most senior leaders, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and Archbishop of York John Sentamu, signed the change into church, or canon, law after asking the General Synod, made up of bishops, clergy and laity, to signal their approval by a show of hands.

The shattering of what's called "the Church of England's stained-glass window" marks the culmination of years of campaigning for reform.

In July, the synod, voted overwhelmingly in favor of legislation to create women bishops.

Hilary Cotton, chairwoman of Women and the Church, an advocacy organization, told reporters she is now hopeful the reform will lead to "changing the culture of the church."

U.S.-born Christian Rees, a member of the synod's House of Laity, said Monday's ceremony would change the public perception that the Church of England has "a problem with women."

Speculation mounts on who will be the first woman to wear purple in a church so long divided on this issue, but no front-runner has emerged in reports coming from Canterbury.

Four contenders for the title of first woman bishop are Vivienne Faull, dean of York; June Osborne, dean of Salisbury; Canon Philippa Boardman, canon treasurer of St. Paul's Cathedral in London; and Jane Hedges, dean of Norwich.