

Church of England moves to allow women bishops: Fierce opposition from traditionalists

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The Church of England will proceed with legislation to allow the ordination of women bishops, despite fierce opposition from Anglican traditionalists. After a marathon 12-hour debate in York, the church's General Synod on July 12 rejected calls for further delays in developing a draft law to allow female bishops. The earliest women bishops could be ordained is 2014.

But the decision did little to tamp down furious infighting that some fear could prompt conservatives to defect to the Roman Catholic Church.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams told London's *Daily Mail* newspaper July 13 that avoiding a schism over the contentious issue would be "desperately difficult." Williams's earlier attempt at a compromise—allowing conservative congregations to be overseen by male bishops—had been rejected July 10, but he insisted that the Synod's decision to go ahead was "not the end of the road."

Meanwhile, Rachel Weir of the group Women and the Church described the Synod ruling as "momentous." Since 1994, some 5,000 women have been or dained priests in the Church of England. In 2005, church leaders approved in principle the idea of women bishops.

The next step for Williams and his no. 2 official, Archbishop of York John Sentamu, is to draft legislation allowing women bishops and send it to all 43 dioceses for approval. If a majority of the synods approve the draft, it will be presented to the 2012 General Synod.

If all three houses—bishops, clergy and laity—approve the measure by the necessary two-thirds majority, women bishops could start being ordained in 2014. - *Religion News Service*