

Anglican study says women bishops needed: Traditionalists dissent

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The Church of England will be “increasingly isolated and anachronistic” unless it accepts women as bishops, a working party of the Anglican Church has concluded.

“Gender-blind equality of opportunity will remain a central feature of Western society,” said the committee in its report published in November in London. “The Church of England will not be able to commend the gospel effectively if its structures embody sexism in a way that contemporary society no longer finds acceptable.”

Women have been ordained as priests in the Church of England since 1994, following a decision two years previously. However, acceptance of women bishops does not follow automatically from the 1992 decision to accept women as priests, states the report, which presents practical and theological arguments both for and against women bishops but makes no formal recommendations.

The Church of England’s governing general synod will debate the report in February 2005 as the first stage of a process that could see women consecrated as bishops beginning in 2009, those attending a press conference on November 2 were told. Asked about relations with the Vatican, Michael Nazir-Ali, the bishop of Rochester and working party chair, said without elaboration that there were already “significant movements in Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism for ordaining women.”

Women bishops have been accepted in principle in 14 out of 37 provinces in the worldwide Anglican Communion, although they have been appointed only in three—New Zealand, Canada and the United States—according to the report.

In England, the traditionalist movement Forward in Faith said the working party had “diligently and even-handedly” examined the issue, but reiterated its call for creating a “third province” if the consecration of women bishops goes ahead.

The province would exist alongside the two existing Church of England provinces of Canterbury and York, and would minister to those unable to accept the authority of

women bishops. -*Ecumenical News International*