

The Committee on Women in the Episcopate

MEMBERSHIP:

The Rt. Rev. Edward W. Jones, (Indianapolis), *Chairman*
The Rt. Rev. Roger J. White (Milwaukee)
The Rt. Rev. John B. Coburn (Massachusetts, Retired)
The Rt. Rev. Arthur Williams (Ohio, Suffragan)*
The Rev. Patricia Wilson-Kastner (New York)
The Ven. Denise Haynes (Newark)
The Rev. Charles Price (Virginia)
Mr. David B. Beers (Washington)
Dr. Patricia Page (California)

*At the time of his appointment, the Rt. Rev. Arthur B. Williams was a Presbyter. Subsequently, he was elected to be the Bishop Suffragan of Ohio.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK

The Committee on Women in the Episcopate was formed in compliance with Resolution B30a, adopted by the 1985 General Convention. The committee, appointed by the Presiding Bishop, was charged to articulate the compelling reasons why the Episcopal Church was prepared to proceed with the consecration of a woman to the episcopate, should a diocese elect a woman. It is important to note, as the explanatory comments accompanying Resolution B30a sought to point out, that the committee had not been asked to reopen the question whether women should be admitted to Holy Orders, this question having already been decided by the 1976 General Convention.

During the triennium (1985-88), the committee met four times, the last meeting at the time of the September 1987 meeting of the House of Bishops, in order to present the report to the House of Bishops. At that meeting, some members of the House of Bishops questioned whether a minority report ought also to be included. The House of Bishops concurred, and asked the Bishop of Eau Claire, the Rt. Rev. William Wantland, to oversee preparation of a minority report.

Both the report of the committee (endorsed by 113 of the 130 bishops voting at the September 1987 meeting) and the minority report are to be included as a part of the Episcopal Church's report to the 1988 Lambeth Conference of bishops, and are to be sent to the Standing Committees of each diocese. For reasons of length, it was decided that it would not be feasible to include the full texts in the Blue Book report. However, copies are available from the Episcopal Church Center.

At the request of the Presiding Bishop, the Committee on Women in the Episcopate appointed a special subcommittee to meet with representatives of the gathering of bishops who had signed a May 1986 Statement of Witness, opposing the ordination of women to the episcopate. While the subcommittee was unsuccessful in agreeing upon formal proposals for resolving differences with those opposed to the ordination of women, there was a general feeling that the discussions had been both honest and helpful.

The chairman of the Committee on Women in the Episcopate was also asked by the Presiding Bishop to represent him on the primates' Working Party on Women in the Episcopate. The Primates' Working Party was formed by decision of the primates of the Anglican Communion, meeting in Toronto in March 1986, and in compliance with a Lambeth Conference 1978 resolution calling for inter-provincial consultation before any province should proceed with the consecration of women to the episcopate.

In summary, two points need to be underlined.

1. The report of the Committee on Women in the Episcopate (which has now been sent to the several Standing Committees and to bishops of the Anglican Communion) does not propose reopening the question whether women should be so ordained. Rather, the report represents an attempt to articulate what seemed to be the mind of the Church when the historic decision to ordain women to the presbyterate and the episcopate was made in 1976, and to describe the experience of the Episcopal Church in the intervening years.

2. It is not the intention of the report to persuade other branches of the Anglican Communion, or other Church bodies, what they ought to do in this matter. But the report is an effort (and a good effort, the committee believes) to be both responsible and accountable to the wider Anglican Communion, as well as to our ecumenical partners.

Because Resolution B30a, adopted by the 1985 General Convention, made no provision for funding the work of the committee, there is no financial statement attached to this report. Expenses for the four committee meetings and the two meetings of the sub-committee were funded through the Office of the Presiding Bishop.