



Geoff Crawford: Church of England

The Church of England's General Synod has called for a change to the canons governing the impediment to ordination after divorce.

A Private Member's Motion brought by the Revd Canon Mark Bennett (pictured), Team Rector of the Thatcham Team in the Diocese of Oxford, calls on General Synod to review Canon C4 and explore how it could be amended or replaced.

Introduced in 1991, Canon C4 sets out the procedure to be followed when a candidate for ordination is divorced and remarried, and the former spouse is still alive. Or when a candidate has married a divorced person, whose former spouse is still alive. In both cases, as outlined in the **Secretary General's explanatory paper**, a faculty must be obtained from an Archbishop prior to ordination.

Prior to the debate, General Synod was briefed about the impact of the current C4 process on those exploring ordination, and anomalies within the current system including that those who divorce and re-marry after ordination have no equivalent process. During a wide-ranging debate, further details of how the canon could be amended were discussed.

In a paper **introducing the motion**, it is outlined that it is estimated that one in six of all ordinations now require a Canon C4 faculty. Introducing the motion, Canon Mark Bennett said this "is clearly an unintended consequence of a well-intentioned piece of legislation which was designed for a small number of exceptional cases.

"A replacement system is badly needed."

An amendment moved by the Revd Dr Andrew Atherstone, Latimer Fellow Wycliffe Hall, was accepted by Synod which asked for new directions to be issued from the Archbishops to devolve responsibility for the administration of the process to diocesan bishops.

Introducing the amendment, the Revd Atherstone said "My amendment allows us to focus our efforts where they are needed – on the practicalities of improving the faculty process."

"At the heart of the problem, is that everything must be funnelled through Lambeth or Bishopthorpe."

"Which means a bureaucratic system, more about paperwork than pastoral care, and far removed from the people who know ordinands the best and can come to the wisest judgments, which is in their local dioceses."

Speaking during the debate the Archbishop of York welcomed the amendment from the Revd Atherstone, saying it was an "entirely sensible and Godly way forward for us to deal with the pastorally sensitive area, in a way which upholds our understanding of marriage."

The General Synod motion as amended, shown below, was clearly carried - For: 300; Against: 12; Abstentions: 7.

Notes to editors

The motion as amended was passed as follows:

‘That this Synod request that the Archbishops’ Council introduce the necessary legislation to revise Canon C4.5 so that a diocesan bishop or acting diocesan bishop may grant a faculty to remove the impediment under Canon C4.4, with national assessment guidelines issued by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York acting jointly to ensure consistency across dioceses

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