



**Office of the Primate
Anglican Church of Australia**

Media Release

28, September 2007

The Anglican Church's highest legal authority, the Appellate Tribunal, has cleared the way for the consecration of women as diocesan bishops across Australia.

In a majority decision the Tribunal has ruled that there is nothing in the Church's Constitution that would prevent the consecration of a woman priest as a diocesan bishop in a diocese which by ordinance has adopted the Law of the Church of England Clarification Canon 1992. Not every diocese has done so.

The ruling impacts only on diocesan bishops and not assistant bishops most of whom are elected and confirmed under provisions of the Assistant Bishops' Canon 1966 which seems to retain the requirement for candidates to be male.

One of the central issues in the ruling allowing women to become diocesan bishops concerned the definition of 'canonical fitness'. In the Church's Constitution, adopted in 1962 it was clear at that time canonical fitness included a requirement for 'maleness.'

The 'maleness' requirement was removed in a process that began in 1989 when a canon (church law) was passed that amended the Constitution to redefine 'canonical fitness.' The canon came into effect in 1995 after 75% of dioceses, including all metropolitan dioceses, adopted it.

The Tribunal, made up of three diocesan bishops and four lay people, experienced lawyers, ruled four to three that given the changes to the constitution it would be possible for women priests to be consecrated as diocesan bishops where diocesan rules allowed it.

Dr Aspinall said the ruling is a significant day in the life of the Anglican Church of Australia. "This means that whenever there are vacancies in dioceses that have adopted the 1992 canon and whose own diocesan law permits it a woman can become a diocesan bishop.

Women bishops are active in several Anglican provinces around the world but the issue has been the subject of much debate in Australia with some strongly against the move.

The Archbishop said the debate has been healthy. "The Anglican family across Australia is a diverse group and we are mature enough to engage in robust debate on many issues.

"There will be some in our family who will be unhappy with this ruling and it is now our urgent duty to offer care for those who retain a conscientious objection to women bishops."

While the decision is a significant event the Primate again highlighted the important distinction made by the Appellate Tribunal in relation to assistant bishops. "This will not stop the consecration of women priests as bishops but ironically, as the law stands, there appears to be an impediment to women being appointed assistant bishops," said Dr Aspinall.

Further Information:
Darrin Davies
Director of Communication
Anglican Diocese of Brisbane
07 3835 2210, 0420 970 605, ddavies@anglicanbrisbane.org.au