

## 1.20 DIOCESAN SYNOD

### What is Synod?

Synod is the gathering of the clergy and lay representatives of the Diocese with the Bishop to make decisions about our corporate life in Christ.

We begin each Synod session by coming together as the Body of Christ in a celebration of the Eucharist; the business meetings which follow are an extension of the Eucharistic gathering.

The Bishop together with the Synod governs our corporate life as Anglicans in Newcastle, and our relationships within the Anglican Church generally, and in some respects, with the wider society. Synod members elect the Diocesan Bishops, most members of the Diocesan Council, other Diocesan committees, and representatives on wider church bodies, such as General Synod and Provincial Synod.

Synod also makes decisions in many important areas, such as:

- Promoting, enabling and resourcing our mission;
- Establishing how clergy are appointed to, and removed from, parishes, and how parishes function in terms of their finances, property and office-bearers;
- Ensuring children and vulnerable people are protected in church and church related activities;
- Managing and monitoring Diocesan finances and budgets, and the oversight of Diocesan property;
- Encouraging and sometimes implementing change in areas such as who can be ordained (Newcastle Synod was a pioneer in the Women's Ordination Movement), and in ecumenical relationships; and
- Considering Canons from General Synod.

Synod also comments on issues and concerns in Australian society from the Gospel perspective, such as care of the environment, marriage and family life, education, and refugees.

### Who are the members of Synod?

As with parliaments, Synods are in effect divided into "Houses" – the House of Clergy and the House of Laity - who both meet with the Bishop.

### The Bishop

The Bishop presides over (chairs) the meeting.

No Ordinance of Synod will be binding without the Bishop's assent as well as that of a majority of members of the Houses of Clergy and Laity. Although in practice it has been unusual, the Bishop is entitled to enter into the debates of the Synod, and will nominate another person to chair the meeting while participating.

### **The House of Clergy**

All ordained persons in the diocese who hold a full licence from the Bishop, such as Incumbents, assistant curates and chaplains, are members of Synod. The Assistant Bishop is a member of the House of Clergy.

Deacons and Priests licenced and ordained by the Bishop for Local Mission (OLMs) within the Diocese elect 14 of their number as representatives to the House of Clergy, but no more than three OLMs may be elected from within any Area Deanery.

Clergy who have the Bishop's "permission to officiate" (such as retired Clergy) are not members of Synod.

### **The House of Laity**

Laity are members of Synod in a number of categories. The majority are elected representatives from their parishes. Parishes are entitled to elect three representatives.

As well as parish representatives, there are also appointed members. Ex officio Synod members are the officers of the Diocese (the Chancellor, the Deputy Chancellor and the Diocesan Business Manager), the Trustees of Church Property, CEO's of Anglican entities within the Diocese and School Principals.

Lay members are elected at the beginning of each term and hold office for the whole Session of Synod (three years) unless they resign. To be eligible for election to Synod, they must be over 18 years of age, be residents of the Diocese of Newcastle, and be a communicant member of the Anglican Church of Australia. Elections are held in parishes when the Bishop issues a Mandate, a formal document authorising the holding of elections. The Bishop also issues a Mandate to summons Synod to meet.

While Synod members are always free to discuss matters before Synod with their congregations and Parish Councils, they should remember that they are not delegates from their parishes. Their parishes cannot direct them in how they should vote on any matter.

### **Why become a Lay Member of Synod?**

Synod plays a crucial role in the governance of the church. Members of Synod have a significant responsibility to their parishes and to the Diocese. People interested in representing their parish at Synod should be available, and prepared, to attend each entire annual session of Synod for the duration of their elected term.

The membership of Synod should also reflect the membership of the whole Diocese. People within the Diocese with as many different experiences of life as possible, who feel they can contribute to the church in this way, should consider representing their parish at Synod.

Potential members do not need to have special legal or other expertise, or even be confident as a public speaker. The most important attributes are a willingness to attend Synod faithfully, to read all Synod papers carefully, to listen attentively, and to vote responsibly in all decisions that come before Synod.

Only Synod members can participate in Synod debate, and in Synod elections. Other interested people (including media representatives) are welcome to attend and observe Synod, but must remain within an area designated as the “Public Gallery” (as at parliamentary sittings). Occasionally visitors are invited to address Synod on a specific topic, but only with the prior agreement of Synod.

### **What is the Business of Synod?**

The main business of Synod is the governance of the Diocese. This takes the form of legislation and resolutions, as with parliamentary governance, as well as elections to key Diocesan and national bodies. Synod also provides an opportunity for members to ask questions of fact, principally of the Bishop, who is styled the “President”.

### **Legislation**

Diocesan Legislation is binding, in that clergy, lay office holders, such as Churchwardens, Parish Councils and Incumbency Appointment Board members, and all members of the church resident in the Diocese are required to act in accordance with its direction on matters concerning ministry, church membership and church property. Clergy swear to uphold the Ordinances of Synod when they are ordained and again when they are inducted into parish appointments.

For the church to hold its consensual unity, its legislation needs to be uniformly respected even if its operation is inconvenient in particular situations. Many ordinary church attenders might be surprised to learn what some pieces of Newcastle church legislation say about their membership obligations and limitations. Synod members need to give careful thought to potential long term implications when exercising their vote to adopt new legislative requirements intended to have effect indefinitely.

Synod Legislation usually comes from two sources:

1. Certain canons passed by General Synod can only take effect in the Diocese if adopted by the Diocesan Synod; and
2. Draft legislation promoted by Diocesan Council.

Synod can also ask Diocesan Council to prepare legislation in a particular area for consideration at a future session, and individual Synod members can bring draft legislation privately, though this is unusual and generally not advisable.

### **Resolutions**

While usually not binding, resolutions are influential statements that recommend certain courses of action or offer comment on matters of concern. Most are directed internally to parishes, the Bishop or Diocesan Council. Other Synod resolutions often deal with matters of concern in the wider Church

and community, offering formal advice or comment to the General Synod, the Anglican Communion, Federal and State Governments, and other bodies.

They are an important means by which the Anglican Church can make its views and perspectives known in a considered and respected way. The resolutions of Synod are recorded in the Synod synopsis in the annual Diocesan Year Book, and on the Diocesan website.

### **Elections**

Synod members elect people to a number of Diocesan committees, as well as those who will represent Newcastle Diocese on wider Anglican bodies. Diocesan committees elected by Synod, either fully or in part, include the Diocesan Council, the Social Responsibilities Committee, the Incumbency Appointment Board, the Clergy Emoluments Advisory Board, the Bishop Nomination Board (the body responsible for ensuring that the Synod to elect a Bishop has sufficient information and workable procedures), Christ Church Cathedral – Lay Members of Chapter, Newcastle Diocesan Missions Committee, Board of Management for the Anglican Savings and Development Fund, Board of Enquiry, Panel of Triers, Board of the Samaritans Foundation, Property Approvals Board, and the CEY Ministries Board.

Synod also elects Newcastle Diocesan representatives on the Provincial Synod (which includes representatives of the other seven Dioceses in New South Wales) and the national General Synod of the Anglican church of Australia.

These elections are held at the first session of each new Synod, with nominations called in the Bishop's Mandate summoning Synod to meet.

### **Questions**

At the beginning of each session of Synod, the agenda provides an opportunity for members to ask questions. These are directed to the President (or to another member of Synod relating to a Bill or other business in which that member is concerned), and must be confined to questions of fact, not opinion.

Answers to the questions are usually given publicly when Synod resumes on the next day, unless the matter is complex and requires more research. In this case, the answer will be provided to Synod members in writing at a later date.

### **Other Synod activities**

Synod also provides a forum where those attending can hear about Diocesan activities, such as the Church's response to natural or other disasters, through information presentations. Other presentations might highlight the work of mission and welfare agencies or diocesan committees. Synod must first give leave for presentations to be made.

## How does Synod work?

### The Mandates

The Bishop issues a Mandate (authorization) for the election of a new Synod, in accordance with the rules established by the Synod Administration Ordinance 1998 (as amended).

Parish representatives are elected in response to the Bishop's Mandate and is usually conducted as part of the elections held at the parish annual meeting in accordance with Section 4B of the Synod Administration Ordinance 1998. If a replacement member is needed, the Parish Council is required to make an appointment.

The Bishop also convenes Synod by issuing a Mandate, or summons, to members. The Mandate states vacancies for which elections will be held and provides deadlines for the submission of nominations and motions.

Practical information about the venue, parking, catering and other organisational details is provided, and should be read carefully. Other mailings supply copies of reports from the various bodies accountable to Synod, such as the Diocesan Council, together with the Roll of Members, details of the motions submitted, budget papers and a list of nominees for any elections.

### The Presidential Address

Synod sessions commence with the Synod Eucharist in Christ Church Cathedral on the evening before the first session of the Synod. At the commencement of the first session of the Synod the Bishop delivers the Presidential Address, sometimes called the "Charge" to Synod. In this address, the Bishop customarily offers a perspective on matters confronting the Diocese, the wider Church, and the community, often outlining plans and directions, and may also offer a view on matters coming before the Synod meeting.

### Standing Rules and Orders

This is the name given to the meeting rules for the conduct of Synod. They have been finely honed over more than 150 years that Newcastle Synod has been meeting, and provide a carefully considered, comprehensive means of running a meeting that is fair to all participants, while respecting the seriousness of Synod business. The Standing Orders can be found at: <http://www.newcstleanglican.org.au> with a full copy included in the Synod Business Paper.

### Synod Committees to inquire and report

When a topic requires further work before coming to a conclusion, Synod may resolve to appoint a committee to report on the matter. Standing Orders provide a procedure for setting up a Select Committee of Synod, but this is rarely used because of the complex process to settle on who should

serve on the committee. Synod often requests the Diocesan Council to establish committees and provide reports. Synod can do this by Ordinance.

### **Taking part in Synod**

Synod can be daunting at first because of its formal style and detailed rules of participation. Many long term members are happy to participate simply by attending Synod faithfully, listening carefully to debates and presentations, and voting – both in debates and elections – responsibly. They then report back to their parishes by whatever means their Incumbent and Parish Council provide, to ensure Parishes are kept fully informed of Synod decisions.

Their participation is of great value. Others are keen to take a more active role, by speaking in debates (see below) and proposing motions. People who take part in this way need to ensure they understand the key elements of the Standing Orders.

### **In Debate**

When addressing Synod, either in moving or seconding a motion, asking a question or speaking in debate, Synod members are expected to address the President (except when the Synod is in Committee when members address the Chair of Committees). They must also identify themselves by name and by their Synod membership. So the formula is for members to commence speaking by saying: “Mr President, name (for example Mary Smith), parish (“St John’s, suburb)”. Note: Synod members name their parish in this context only if they are a member of Synod as an elected parish representative. If not, they should identify their membership category, for example “Mr Cec Shevels, CEO Samaritans Foundation” or “The Reverend Rod Moore, Chaplain Coordinator Corrective Services” rather than giving the name of a parish.

Synod is a formal assembly, governed by carefully developed, precise rules of participation. Synod members are expected to speak and behave in a manner that reflects the seriousness of the meeting, and in a manner befitting to a Christian assembly. This is not to say there cannot be moments of humour and even good fun! But members must not speak derogatively of other Synod members or of anyone else in the course of a Synod speech. They are generally assured a better hearing from other Synod members if they have a positive and respectful contribution to make. It is also unacceptable for Synod members to hiss speakers, or “cat call”, or behave in any other way which could be interpreted as partisan. The Standing Orders are strict about inappropriate speech and behaviour.

### **Synod Courtesies**

Synod members stand when the Bishop enters or leaves the Synod hall. When a member enters or leaves the hall while the meeting is in progress, it is customary for them to incline their head slightly to the Bishop, as they would do in Parliament or a Court of Law.

### **Synod dress**

The Bishop, as President of Synod, is traditionally dressed formally in an episcopal cassock. This suggests to Synod members that a degree of care is required about their own dress code. In earlier generations clergy were expected to dress for Synod in cassocks. This is not the case in Newcastle, where a more informal style of dress has become acceptable for both Clergy and Laity. “Smart Casual” is generally the expected minimum dress code with Clergy wearing Clerical collars.

### **Presenting Legislation to Synod**

The process for presenting legislation to Synod is quite formal.

It happens in four separate stages:

#### **1. Introduction and general debate**

The mover and seconder of the bill (the draft legislation) explain the purpose of the legislation and how it works. Synod members can then ask questions before Synod votes on it. Opportunity is given for Synod members to ask questions about the bill and its effect in order to understand the matters on which they will be voting. Synod members then debate the general principles of the legislation and how it works. A simple majority vote is required for the bill to move to the next stage. This stage ensures that protracted work on the detail of the bill is not undertaken without general support for the principle of the legislation.

#### **2. Committee stage**

The Synod normally then becomes a “Committee of the Whole House”, which discusses the detail of the Bill. This stage is chaired by the officer known as the Chair of Committees or a Deputy Chair, who are officers elected by Synod at the beginning of each Synod term. This is where any amendments are suggested and, after discussion, a decision is made by a vote. Proposals in Committee do not require a seconder. At the end of this stage, a certified copy of the draft legislation incorporating any agreed amendments is produced. For some simple bills the Committee stage may not be required.

#### **3. Passing of the bill**

This stage is a formal process which happens once the certified copy of the legislation is available. If there have been a number of amendments, this might not be until a subsequent meeting day in the Synod session. The vote is normally taken by the Synod as a whole but it may be “by Houses”, that is, the Clergy vote is taken separately from the vote of the Laity. If the bill is not passed (by a simple majority) in each House (Clergy and Laity) the Bill fails. This is an important form of protection, ensuring that legislation is acceptable to both Clergy and Laity.

#### **4. Assent**

The bill does not become Church Law until the Bishop assents to it. The Bishop may give his assent to the bill immediately or he may take up to a month to do so. The Bishop can decline to assent to the Bill and Bill then fails.

The Diocese's legal officers are always happy to help any Synod member asked to move or second draft legislation.

### **Proposing Synod motions**

Any member of Synod can propose a motion for debate at Synod: each motion must be seconded by another member of Synod. In the Mandate summoning Synod to meet, the deadline for submission of motions is set.

The Synod Business Committee, appointed in accordance with Standing Orders, arranges the order in which draft legislation and motions are placed on the Synod Agenda. In determining the Agenda, the Committee ensures that appropriate time is allocated for legislation to be debated, as it is the first priority of the Synod. Usually it proposes that Bills be made an "Order of the Day", that time allocation requires the approval of Synod once it begins meeting. Next, the Committee ensures that the most pressing motions before the Synod are placed high on the Agenda, followed by the rest of the motions arranged in a suitable order. The Committee aims to balance matters in the most reasonable way open to it.

Motions can also be submitted on the first two meeting days of the Synod session, and after that only if Synod agrees by majority vote (called "leave of Synod"). Unless Synod decides any of these later motions are urgent, they are normally placed on the agenda behind those submitted by the pre-Synod deadline. It is highly likely that later items will not be dealt with before the session concludes. In that case, it is usual for Synod to make a resolution delegating the remaining business to Diocesan Council.

Both the mover and seconder of a motion have the right to speak to it when it comes before the Synod. Their speeches are subject to a time limit – seven minutes for the mover, and five minutes for the seconder. Other speakers have three minutes. These time limits are enforced unless Synod agrees to a brief extension of time. Speakers can ensure they are kept to time limits if, when they write their speech, they remember the general rule of thumb: 100 words takes one minute to deliver. So a seven-minute speech should be no longer than 700 words. There are time limits on debates, as well as a rule that ensures a balance between the number of speakers speaking for and against the motion under consideration.

Motions can be amendments, both to Motions and in the Committee stage of legislation and, need to be written out clearly and handed to the Synod Secretaries to ensure accuracy.

Motions are voted on by the whole Synod, not by separate "Houses". However, if it is desired that the resolution be binding on members of the Church rather than recommendatory, the vote is taken by Houses and requires the assent of the Bishop.

**Once passed, a motion becomes a resolution of Synod.**