



Open Synod Group

Newsletter

Spring 2019

President : Right Rev Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover

Chair : Robin Back, Norwich

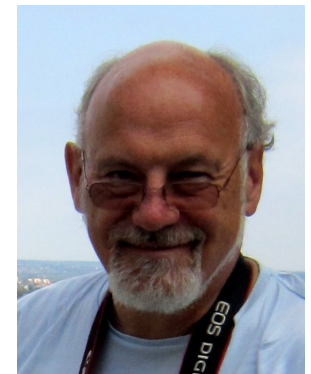
Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells

Editorial

We live in interesting times where protagonism is the main game to be played. As I write, Parliament has had the meaningful vote and a Vote of No Confidence in the Government and the Nation is bracing itself for the next steps. Personally, I believe that the current turmoil has been escalated by the arrogant self-interest of those in authority coupled with a lack of sensitivity to all the stakeholders involved in the process. As we continue to grapple with the issues that face our Church, my hope and prayer is that we ensure that we can continue to demonstrate through our processes and practices that we can deliver change to a diverse community in a way that can be a shining example to the secular world.

This Newsletter doesn't tackle any of the big issues. What I have sought to do is to get the drain covers up on some of the "Nuts & Bolts" activities in Synod. Past Newsletters have dealt with the Queen Victoria Clergy Fund, Legislative Committee and the Church Buildings Council. This time I have included insights into the Archbishops' Council, the use of Private Member's Motions, the Standing Orders Committee and the Dean of the Arches. I am grateful to Mary, Anthony, Clive and Charles for their contributions.

As always I remind everyone that the views and ideas that are expressed in any articles, including this editorial, are not specifically endorsed by the Open Synod Group.



Chair's Reflections

Robin Back, Chair, Open Synod Group

Hoping it's not too late, the Open Synod Group committee wish all our readers a Happy and prosperous New Year!

In my last contribution to this newsletter, I spoke of the 'Open' nature of the Open Synod Group (OSG) and reflected on the opportunities this might present to host forums on the challenges facing our Church. Our first forum in this new series was planned to take place on the Friday of General Synod at lunchtime. Sadly, this will not happen on this occasion but will be held over for the future.

Whilst we feel there is no shortage of areas of concern facing our Church, we hope future forums might also include positive issues where our role in our society offers hope and encouragement. Your committee is not clairvoyant so if readers have especial thoughts in this area, please contact us.

The quiz at last July's Group of Sessions was well patronised. Many thanks to those who attended and congratulations to the winners – also the youngest team competing. We have another quiz night planned for July this year and of course we have 2020 in view. We now have a tradition of offering something different at the last of the Quinquennium's group of sessions and we expect 2020 to continue the habit.

Special thanks to our Secretary, Penny Allen, who has worked her usual magic in managing our affairs whilst your Chair has been commuting between the Antipodes, UK and Switzerland with grandchildren for the last 6 weeks.

Look forward to seeing our readers at the February Group of Sessions.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Back', with a horizontal line underneath it.

The Continuing Exposure of the Internal Workings of General Synod

The Archbishops' Council

Mary Chapman, Ex-Officio, Archbishops' Council

SERVING GOD THROUGH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Coordinate, promote, aid and further the mission of the Church of England, the statutory object of the Archbishops' Council, and the purpose that called me to seek appointment as a Trustee.

I had assumed that my previous governance experience would be eminently transferable to service in one of the Church's national institutions. It was a significant underestimate of the challenge. The complexity of Church of England structures and inter-dependencies of decision-making leaves room for confusion about the roles and functions of the various bodies. A constant focus for the Council is to ensure that the work we do gives clear expression to our designated purpose.



The Council seeks to provide strategic direction to the national work of the Church, within a vision set by the House of Bishops and the policy and legislative framework determined by General Synod. A vital aspect of that is collaboration with other national Church bodies and engagement with people in diocesan structures to develop an understanding of the Church's opportunities, needs and resources together with a proper appreciation of the risks the Church faces. Every year we wrestle with decisions about priorities for the allocation of precious resources. The fruits of those debates are encapsulated in the Council's business plan and the budget proposed to General Synod. Council meetings are the opportunity to review progress against the objectives set for the year.

Members of Council also contribute to specific areas of work, either as committee Chairs or by leading task groups for particular programmes. In my case, it is as chair of the Audit Committee and a member of the National Safeguarding Steering Group. During this Quinquennium the Renewal and Reform agenda has taken centre stage with major mission initiatives, the transformation of grant funding and a drive for simplification. At the same time the Council has supported dioceses through provision of new national services, training and advice, the peer review programme, digital resources and national fundraising for church buildings. In addition the Council has oversight of the National Safeguarding Team's work to promote a safer Church and the Central Secretariat's administration of the national governance arrangements.

It is a wide-ranging agenda that is intellectually and spiritually challenging. It has been a privilege to play a part. If you are considering standing for future election to the Council don't hesitate to ask me for more information.

The Use of Private Member's Motions

Anthony Archer, St Albans

Private Members' Motions (PMMs) in General Synod probably owe their origin to the procedure in Parliament where MPs and Lords who are not government ministers can introduce Bills for debate. Only very few actually become law, but by creating publicity around the issue they may affect legislation indirectly. Likewise, in Synod, members have the opportunity to 'get their issue on the agenda'. The procedure is straightforward. Table the motion and solicit support for it. The Business Committee considers which motions to table for debate at each Group of Sessions and, unless there are unusual circumstances, will list one (occasionally two) where they have attracted more than 100 signatures. That level is considered relevant as, with more than 100 signatures, standing orders dictate that the motion must remain on the list after three Groups of Sessions. So far so good. But how to do it effectively.



There are different types of issue. My PMM in July 2005 called for a review of the procedures for senior appointments in the church. I wanted to shine a spotlight on the arcane procedures for the appointment of suffragan bishops, deans and residentiary canons. Against predictable opposition, I successfully moved it and it led to an independent review which produced the report Talent and Calling. Changes were subsequently made. More recently PMMs have been put down for debate that challenge how the House of Bishops and National Church Institutions are handling issues facing the Church of England. My latest PMM (which now looks somewhat time expired) currently tops the lists with [127] signatures. It calls for more determined work on the differing interpretations of scripture on matters of sexuality. Inevitably it has been 'parked' for now owing to the work being done towards the eagerly (if patiently) anticipated report Living in Love and Faith: Christian Teaching and Learning about Human Identity, Sexuality and Marriage. I have resisted suggestions that I should withdraw it as, having canvassed its supporters, the view was that it represents a body of opinion that needs to be noted whether or not it every gets to the floor of Synod.

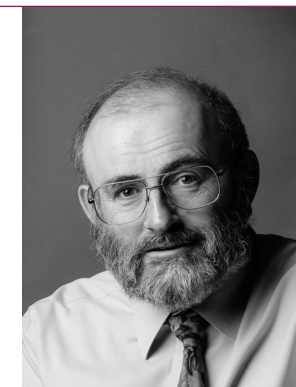
So what might be the advice to those who wish to see an issue debated by PMM? Keep the text clear and simple. Get some advice from other Synod members and the Legal Office before you table it. When it hopefully gets to the top of the list, make sure you have a paper ready to introduce it. PMMs where the mover has produced a compelling paper in advance usually fair better. And remember, your aim is to get the PMM on to the agenda. There will be members who may not support the thrust of the motion but they also want to see it debated. Their support at the early stages is as important as those, like you, who agree with the motion!

The Continuing Exposure of the Internal Workings of General Synod

The Standing Orders Committee

Clive Scowen, London

The Standing Orders Committee is charged with keeping “under review the procedure and Standing Orders of the Synod and must submit to the Synod such proposals for amendment to the Standing Orders as the Committee thinks fit”. It has no elected members: 4 are ex officio (the Prolocutors and the Chair and Vice-Chair of the House of Laity) and the rest (including the Chair) are appointed by the Appointments Committee, presumably for the skills and expertise they bring. Many of us are lawyers, and those who are not tend to have a lawyer’s eye for detail and clarity. Thus to many it must seem to be the ultimate “Anorak” committee. We are served by the Chief Legal Adviser, Stephen Slack, and his staff, and by Standing Counsel, the synod’s draftsman, who do all the heavy lifting.



Having no democratic mandate, we seek to serve the synod by bringing our abilities to bear to ensure that proposed changes in standing orders are in the best and most effective form to achieve their purpose, but do not take an independent or proactive view on questions of policy. Often we are responding to requests from another body or individual, and when a proposal originates with us we seek endorsement from the appropriate body for any policy implication. Because most of the standing orders are concerned with the ordering of the life and meetings of the synod, the “appropriate body” is often the Business Committee. Most of the proposals we are bringing to synod next February originated with, or have been endorsed by, that committee, but in addition two groups of amendments have been sought, and will be proposed to synod, by the Presidents: changes in those Standing Orders under which the Crown Nominations Commission exists and operates, sought by the central members of CNC following the O’Donovan review; and amendments which will allow Anglican Communion guests invited by the Presidents to participate in debates in a similar fashion to the ecumenical representatives appointed by partner churches.

The committee does not “own” the standing orders: they belong to the synod and its members. We would welcome a greater interest from members in the developments of the standing orders and would be happy to consider and consult on proposals members might make. I am sure the Appointments Committee would welcome interest from members in joining the Standing Orders Committee. The current membership is: Geoffrey Tattersall QC (Chair); Revd Canon Simon Butler, Ven Cherry Vann, Dr Jamie Harrison, Canon Liz Paver, Revd Preb Simon Cawdell, David Coulston, Mary Durlacher, David Robilliard and Clive Scowen.

The Continuing Exposure of the Internal Workings of General Synod

The Role of the Dean of the Arches

Charles George QC, Ex Officio, Dean of the Arches

I am a retired environmental lawyer and deputy high court judge. I have been Dean of the Arches, Auditor of the Chancery Court of York, and Master of the (Archbishop of Canterbury's) Faculties since May 2009. I am the senior lawyer in the Church of England.

The Dean of the Arches presides in the Arches Court of Canterbury, which hears appeals from diocesan consistory courts (chancellors) in faculty matters (mainly works to churches and churchyards) and appeals from bishops' disciplinary tribunals under the Clergy Discipline Measure. As Auditor he presides in the Chancery Court of York hearing similar appeals in the northern province. As Master of the Faculties he has overall responsibility for the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office adjoining the West End of Westminster Abbey, which issues Special Marriage Licences in England and Wales for couples not covered by marriage in a parish church (whether with banns or common licence), for example marriages in College and University chapels, in the Temple Church, in hospitals etc. He is also the approved regulator for Public Notaries in England and Wales under the Legal Services Act 2007, and also the regulator for Public Notaries in the Channel Islands, Gibraltar, New Zealand, Queensland (in Australia) and Papua New Guinea.

The Dean of Arches and Auditor is an ex officio member of General Synod, though his practice is never to exercise his right to vote. He contributes to debates on legislation and is chairman of the Rule Committee which makes rules for both the faculty jurisdiction and clergy discipline. He has various powers under Standing Orders, including chairing the Scrutiny Committee which deals with proposed Orders under the Legislative Reform Measure 2018 (see SO 69B(3)).

He liaises closely with Legal Office, the Church Building Council and Historic England; has overall supervision of diocesan chancellors; and (along with the Lord Chancellor) has to be consulted by diocesan bishops on the appointment of new chancellors.



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