

Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

June 2007

IVOR GUILD
Writer to HM Signet

THE COVENANT

Synod discussed the question of whether, by way of Covenant, some degree of regulatory certainty could be given to the Lambeth Conference as one of the Instruments of Communion in the Anglican Communion. The Synod was being asked to give commitment to the process 'in principle' but not to the details, and an indication of the synodical process by which the Covenant might be adopted. It was therefore remitted to the Faith and Order Board to decide how this could be done. The Bishop of St Andrews considered that the process was a means of broadening discussion; others were concerned that, if the Church committed itself to the process, it committed itself to the outcome; yet others described the whole concept of a Covenant as very un-Anglican.

It was resolved to affirm commitment 'in principle', leaving it to the Faith and Order board to respond to the outstanding questions, after comment from dioceses.

CONGREGATIONAL STATUS

A change to Canon 36 restricted the structure of congregations to incumbencies, joint incumbencies and linked charges (abolishing independent and dependent congregations). Considerable modifications had been made to the draft Canon since it was passed for the first time and an appropriate constitution for joint incumbencies added (which might include the terms of any Agreement between the vestries of the incumbencies). The altered Canon was passed without opposition. Canon 37, which dealt with the independent congregations, was repealed but the Canon will remain in force for priests in charge of what are presently independent congregations. These changes led to a host of verbal alterations to other Canons and these were passed en bloc.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

A new code of practice on the protection of children and vulnerable adults has been produced to comply with changes in legislation. This was passed unanimously.

CHARITY REGULATIONS

It was decided not to apply for Designated Religious Charity status and changes were therefore proposed and passed to the Digest of Resolutions to clarify who were to be regarded as the Charity Trustees of the General Synod. Provisions were also introduced for indemnity insurance. The Digest further required alteration in respect of the body publishing the Church's newspaper, as it was to become the responsibility of the Synod.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

When the Clergy Discipline Canon was introduced, it was envisaged that provision would be made for a grievance procedure for clergy. The procedure would not be set out at length in Canon 53 but would be contained in an Appendix that could be altered by a simple motion of the Synod. For such a step to be taken, however, it would require a formal alteration to the Canon to be passed twice. At this stage, the Committee producing the Appendix was eager to obtain the views of members on the draft, which was now published in the Synod papers. After comment, the proposal for an Appendix was passed unanimously.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

It had been agreed in 2006 that the form of membership should be changed to make it clear who was responsible for the running of a charge. This became more urgent when the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator intervened. A new Canon was drawn up separating the Congregation and the Electoral Rolls, with only those on the Electoral Roll being able to vote at Annual Meetings and to serve on the vestry. The maintenance of the Rolls would be the responsibility of the vestry in consultation with the Rector. Initially, all those on the Communicants Roll would qualify for membership; but new members would be added if they signed the appropriate declaration.

The proposal stimulated considerable discussion and was passed by the Houses of Clergy and Laity, but the bishops voted 3 in favour and 4 against.

STRATEGIC REVIEW

In 2006, the Synod passed a motion requiring the Standing Committee and the College of Bishops to explore innovative models of financial and administrative organisation in an effort to reduce overall expenditure and ensure a more equitable allocation of funding. Questionnaires were sent out to dioceses and an Interim Report was issued.

There was no strong feeling for a reduction in the number of dioceses, nor was it felt that the present quota system was unfair. A central payroll system had been discussed but was not recommended. It was decided that the Review should continue, possibly as an ongoing process.

AGE DISCRIMINATION

Certain Canons were thought to infringe the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, in particular those fixing minimum ages for bishops and for the ordination of priests and deacons. These were accordingly removed, as were provisions for the retirement age of clergy, which would be altered to give the clergy the right to apply to their bishop for an extension of office beyond the age at which they would otherwise have to retire.

RURAL COMMISSION

Synod discussed concerns about proposals, such as the loss of many rural post offices, which seemed likely to damage rural communities in Scotland. It was agreed to set up a Rural Commission to identify the major changes impacting adversely on rural communities, to look at ways in which the Scottish Church might mitigate their effects and to suggest the most appropriate forms for rural ministry in such circumstances.

doi:10.1017/S0956618X09001732

General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia

October 2007

GARTH BLAKE SC

Wentworth Chambers, Sydney, Australia

The 14th General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia was held in Canberra,⁷ against a backdrop of a number of important circumstances. Within the Anglican Church, the Appellate Tribunal had determined by a 4 to 3 majority that there was nothing in the Constitution to prevent a woman becoming a diocesan bishop. Within Australia, there were issues of drought and

7 Further details of the proceedings of the General Synod are available at <<http://www.anglican.org.au/gs2007.cfm>>, accessed 30 May 2008.