

14/17 Forum of Synod

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

Key Points

- The current format of afternoons and evenings midweek remains the preferred format for Synod, although starting 45 minutes earlier and reducing Synod to 4 days is a compelling option to contract the overall meeting time.
- The Standing Committee has made no recommendation to reduce the number of days on which an ordinary session of Synod meets.
- The current location of the Wesley Theatre in the CBD remains the preferred location for Synod meetings, although seating capacity is concerning.

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to respond to the request of Synod resolution 14/17, regarding the arrangements for the forum of Synod.

Recommendations

2. Synod receive this report.

Background

3. At its session in October 2017, the Synod passed resolution 14/17 in the following terms —

‘Synod requests Standing Committee to review the arrangements for the Diocesan Synod and report to the next Synod in relation to –

- (a) the logistics of contracting the meeting time from the current format which comprises 5 afternoon and evenings,
- (b) possible alternative arrangements in relation to the convening of Synod in so far as they relate to the times and where Synod meets.

In preparing a report for the next Synod, Standing Committee should consider the reports, resolutions and learnings which came from Resolution 40/99 Weekend Meetings of the Synod.’

4. At its meeting on 26 March 2018, the Standing Committee constituted a committee (the **Committee**) to undertake the work requested in Synod resolution 14/17. The Committee members are –
 - The Hon Peter Young (Chair)
 - Mrs Robyn Donohoo
 - Mr Malcolm Purvis
 - Mr Michael Rowe
 - The Diocesan Secretary
5. The resolution specifically requested that the reports, resolutions and learnings which came from Resolution 40/99 Weekend Meetings of the Synod be taken into consideration. The Committee reviewed these, and several other reports provided to the Synod in recent years, namely —

- (a) 'Size and Structure of Synod' Report on Synod Resolution 28/84,
 - (b) 'Future Form of Synod Meetings' preliminary report to the Archbishop (1995) and 'Final Report to Synod' (1997),
 - (c) 'Weekend Synod Meetings' Report (1999),
 - (d) 'Weekend Meetings of the Synod (40/99)',
 - (e) 'Weekend Synod Meetings (9/01)', and
 - (f) 'Synod attendance' (2014).¹
6. The requests of the resolution will be addressed by first considering the efficiency of Synod business (focusing on alternative meeting days and formats), and then considering alternative locations and venues.

Efficiency of Synod Business & Alternative meeting formats

7. There are two components to be addressed if contracting the meeting time of Synod: (1) using the time available more effectively, allowing a reduced amount of time overall, and (2) selecting a suitable alternative meeting format in which to conduct the meetings over fewer days.
8. In response to Synod's resolution 40/18, the Standing Committee produced two reports for Synod ('Synod Standing Orders' and 'Enhancing Engagement of Synod Members') which among other things, recommend several measures intended to allow Synod to use its time more effectively, addressing component (1). Accordingly, this report makes some brief suggestions on efficiency but focuses on component (2) – the possible alternative meeting formats for Synod.

Efficiency of Synod business

9. Noting the significant amount of Synod business time given over to presentations (7% on average for the past two years), a number of options to limit the impact of presentations upon the time of Synod were considered, including –
- (a) Preventing organisations that have presented to Synod in the previous 2 years from making a presentation.
 - (b) Limiting presentations to 10 minutes.
 - (c) Limiting to 30 minutes the amount of time of Synod which may be scheduled for presentations (in addition to the Missionary Hour).
 - (d) Hosting a special evening, perhaps in the week prior to Synod in which organisations can make their presentations. It is not considered likely that many people would turn up to such an evening, and as a result, organisations would shortly seek to present at Synod regardless.
 - (e) Requiring all presentations to be in the form of a video and restricted to 5 minutes as per the approach frequently taken by Mission Property Committee. This forces a focused message and gives certainty around time, while also providing a change in the format of Synod. (Alternatively, all videos could be made available online.)
10. Ultimately, a key problem with introducing any rules for Synod presentations is that it is fairly common for those seeking to give a presentation to move a procedural motion suspending business rules to allow their presentation. Once that suspension of rules is approved by the Synod, any other rules (such as those suggested above) are ineffective. The Bill for the Conduct of the Business of Synod Ordinance 2000 Amendment Ordinance 2019 and its accompanying report 'Synod Standing Orders', proposes introducing positive business rules for presentations into the Synod business rules. The intention is to give presentations slightly less prominence than motions, and less time, as well as restricting them to be held prior to the supper break. This approach removes the need for business

¹ Each of reports (b)-(f) are available on the SDS Document Search: <https://www.sds.asn.au/document-list> by searching the report title.

rules to be suspended for presentations that meet the conditions prescribed by the rules, making it more likely that –

- (a) Presentations are limited to the prescribed time and conditions, and
- (b) Presentations that seek to deviate from the prescribed limits are more likely to be opposed and successfully blocked.

Accordingly, this approach seems reasonable and likely to have some positive effect.

11. During the consideration of proposed policies and ordinances, the committee stage can become quite detailed with relatively few members participating in debate. In such circumstances, remitting the committee stage of bills to a special committee consisting of only those particularly interested in the Bill could prove fruitful. However, when the progress of the committee is reported to Synod, time would have to be spent summarising the amendments made in committee. On balance this could be beneficial to consider, although more extensive use of the current huddle system should make this move unnecessary.

Alternative Meeting days and formats

12. Synod typically meets over 5 days, with afternoon and evening sessions from 3.15 pm to 9.30 pm, having a meal break from 5:45 pm to 7:00 pm. The meeting days are Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in one week and the Monday and Tuesday in the following week. The total time scheduled for business during Synod (excluding meal breaks) has recently been 24 hours and 45 minutes.
13. There are numerous possibilities for alternative formats for Synod meetings. Some possibilities that were specifically considered, along with some brief comments on each, include –
 - (a) Meeting Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoon and evening (as current) followed by a final meeting day on the Saturday to focus on a key issue. This format would result in approximately three less hours for business and relies on a full day meeting Saturday. Synod members have expressed little appetite for meeting on a Saturday as described in 16(a) below.
 - (b) Holding the Synod service and Presidential address in the Cathedral on Monday evening and then meeting Tuesday through Thursday with either a Saturday special day or fixing a reserve day perhaps in the following week. Some synods in other dioceses adopt this approach, and little time is saved, although the format could be modified to have synod proper commence at 1:30pm on the first day. Again this format relies on a meeting on a Saturday.
 - (c) Splitting Synod into 2 sessions that are 6 months apart. This format was considered to be unhelpful due to the problems of (i) needing to repeat any business not resolved in the first portion of the session, and (ii) the reasonable expectation that during the months between portions of the Synod, the circumstances of matters of discussion may change making initial debates or even decisions irrelevant.
 - (d) Holding Synod in part or entirely during long weekends. (To be avoided.)
 - (e) An 'evening only' format meeting on Monday – Thursday evenings for 2 consecutive weeks from 6.00 pm to 9.00 pm was also briefly considered, noting that the evening sessions are considered easier for the majority of members to attend, and hence the more significant matters tend to be scheduled for the evening. This format would have a significantly larger impact upon family time, cost to attend and cost to host, accommodation, meals etc; and is not considered desirable.

Trial of weekend Synod in 2001

14. In 2001, the Synod trialled holding an ordinary session over four days, being Friday afternoon/evening sessions followed by an all-day Saturday session; repeated the following week. This allowed a total of 24 hrs for the meeting. Following that session, Synod members were surveyed and the results presented back to Synod in the report, *9/01 Weekend Synod meetings / Feedback from Synod Members*. The following are the key learnings –
 - (a) With regard to meeting on Saturdays, many Synod members valued the Saturday sessions in contrast to weekday evenings, as the longer meeting times on Saturdays allowed greater continuity of business; and for being *less* invasive upon work, home and ministry time. However, many other Synod members expressed that there was no relative benefit in meeting

on Saturday, and still other Synod members expressed a strong preference for the weekday evening sessions with rationale including —

- (i) the Saturday sessions intruded *more* upon family time, sports, etc than weeknight sessions,
- (ii) Saturday sessions intruded upon weekend ministries (e.g weddings), and
- (iii) the Saturday sessions were too long and contributed to additional fatigue, which had significant impact upon Sunday ministries.

Having been asked on balance whether they preferred the weekend Synod meetings or the usual weeknight format, only 85 out of 231 members who answered that question preferred the weekend, while 146 preferred the weeknight format.

- (b) With regard to contracting the session to four meetings of Synod, rather than five, there was a generally more positive response, with the following rationale given –
 - (i) Synod members had a reduction in costs associated with travelling to the session, parking, meals, accommodation and babysitting.
 - (ii) The shortened meeting time led to a sense of urgency in addressing the business of Synod.

Results of recent survey of Synod members

15. At its meeting in February, the Standing Committee requested that all Synod members be surveyed regarding their recent experience of Synod. The survey responses have provided data which speaks directly to this matter. A summary of the relevant data is provided in tables below.

| Q7. Which formats of Synod suit you and your availability? | Responses |
|---|------------------|
| (current practice) Meeting three days one week, two the next, with afternoon and evening sessions | 64% |
| Compressing the current five days to four days | 24% |
| Meeting Friday afternoon and evening, and all day Saturday; then repeated two weeks later | 20% |
| Meeting on a Saturday instead of, say, two of the mid-week evenings | 17% |
| Other suggestion | 11% |

| Q8. Are there any changes which could be made to the Synod (meeting days, times, locations) which would increase your attendance in the future? | Responses |
|--|------------------|
| No | 77% |
| Yes | 23% |

16. By question 7, 64% of respondents indicated that the current format of Synod suited them and by question 8, 77% indicated that there were no changes which could be made to the Synod (meeting days, times, locations) which would increase their attendance in the future. In interpreting these results, we must recognise that there may be some element of self-selection: parishioners who cannot attend Synod in its known format will not allow themselves to become Synod members, and hence their view on preferred formats is excluded.
17. 302 Synod members responded to the survey. When the data was analysed further, the following emerged –
- (a) 10% (31 respondents) indicated the current format didn't suit them but meeting on a Saturday instead of two mid-week evenings would.
 - (b) 15% (44 respondents) indicated the current format didn't suit them but it would suit them to meet Friday afternoon and all day Saturday, then repeated two weeks later.
 - (c) 4% (13 respondents) fall into both categories listed above.
 - (d) Combining the data in (a)-(c) above, 21% of respondents indicated the current format didn't suit them and some other format would; but the best of the formats suggested only received 15% support.
 - (e) 15% (46 respondents) indicated the current format didn't suit them and simply desired a reduced meeting time from five to four days.

- (f) There were seven 'open ended responses' out of 302 respondents, stating a strong desire for Synod on Saturday; and four 'open ended responses' explicitly opposing the use of Saturdays.
18. Having considered the alternatives, the historical data and the survey responses, the current program for Synod meetings (afternoons and evenings mid-week across two weeks) clearly seems the most appropriate format with strong majority support expressed; although this clearly is not ideal for all members.

Meeting on fewer days

19. Having established that meeting afternoons and evenings during the week remains the most suitable format for Synod, we consider the logistics of meeting over fewer days within that format. The following paragraphs outline the logistics of two options: contracting the meeting time (1) to four days, or (2) to three days.
20. Some considerations –
- (a) Currently both sessions (afternoon and evening) of Synod are scheduled to last 2.5 hours. It is unreasonable to schedule a session to go beyond three hours without a break, and any break needs to be sufficient to accommodate 500 people exiting, refreshing and re-entering. Hence three hours must be an upper limit on session length with a preference for something closer to 2.5 hours; and any break should be at least 30, preferably 45 minutes.
 - (b) Many members find it hard to attend the afternoon sessions as it is, so extending earlier into the afternoon will disadvantage these members further.
 - (c) Many Synod members travel long distances home each night, and extending beyond 9:30 pm will further disadvantage these members.
 - (d) The current format of Synod meetings schedules 24 hours and 45 minutes of meeting time across five days. On each day of Synod, there is at least 30 minutes of material (Prayer and Bible Study, hymns, formal matters and some procedural motions) to start the day which presumably would not be required in the overall tally if that day of Synod is not held; so the total amount of time scheduled can be reduced accordingly. On this basis, in order to provide an equivalent amount of time for business, a four day Synod should aim for 24 hours and 15 minutes; and a three day Synod should aim for 23 Hours and 45 minutes.
 - (e) In the 'Synod Standing Orders' report and accompanying Bill addressing the request of resolution 40/18, the Standing Committee is proposing several modifications to the business rules intended to result in a greater proportion of Synod's time available for Synod business. Adopting these measures is expected to bring savings in time which should allow some flexibility in modifying the timing and format of Synod meetings.

Contracting the meeting time to four days

21. Holding Synod over four days could be achieved in the following format –
- (a) Meet on Monday and Tuesday one week, followed by Monday and Tuesday the following week.
 - (b) Commence the afternoon session at 2:30 pm (rather than 3:15 pm) and break for dinner at 5:20 pm (rather than 5:45 pm), resulting in 20 minutes of extra meeting time per day.
 - (c) Dinner break from 5:20-6:30 pm, resulting in 5 minutes less for dinner, but 5 minutes more for business.
 - (d) Commence the evening session from 6:30 pm (rather than 7:00 pm) and finish at 9:30 pm (as per current), resulting in 30 minutes of extra meeting time per day.
- Overall this would result in 55 minutes of extra meeting time per day.
22. This format would provide a total of 23 hours and 20 minutes of scheduled meeting time (55 minutes less than the desired amount for a four day session). While the start time could be set to 2:20 pm to bring the scheduled available time to 24 hours, that seems disadvantageous on balance due to the awkward start time and the 3 hour long afternoon session that would result.
23. If Synod were to plan only four days of meeting in a session, it may be tempting to hold the four days within one week, either consecutively or perhaps with a break on the Wednesday. For the following reasons, the recommendation is to meet two days one week, and two days the next –

- (a) Synod currently benefits from a few days between sessions to review and reflect upon the work done so far and proposed amendments yet to be considered. The return to business in week two often includes the fruit of collaboration, or opportunity to address problems raised in week 1. If the days are held within one week, much of the benefit and time saving associated with collaboration outside of sessions may be lost.
- (b) Some Synod members stay in rented accommodation during Synod. Holding the Synod over 4 consecutive nights will take these members away from home for the full four days. Holding the Synod in one week with a break on Wednesday will introduce a gap day, with associated increased expenses.
- (c) Any consecutive days of Synod are quite taxing upon Synod members, who not only attend Synod, but often work during the day and engage with Synod materials. Similarly, Synod staff work after the evening session and prior to the afternoon sessions the next day to answer questions, help members with amendments and procedural questions, and prepare the business paper. Holding four days in a row, or in one week, may simply be too demanding for all involved, especially if each day is commencing earlier than at present.

Accordingly, the four day session is most compelling as an option if held two days (presumably Monday and Tuesday) one week and two days (Monday and Tuesday) the next.

- 24. Adopting this format for Synod has the following benefits –
 - (a) There is one less day of expenses for members associated with accommodation, driving, parking, public transport, meals, baby sitters, time off work, etc.
 - (b) The slightly earlier meal time will mean more outlets in nearby food courts are open to serve dinner (many eateries in local food courts close by 6:30 pm).
 - (c) The cost to host Synod should reduce by 20% – approximately \$15,000 once venue hire, A/V, security, printing, and staffing costs are taken into consideration.
- 25. The 45 minute earlier start time will have a consequent reduction in the amount of time available to produce the business paper, which is already a demanding deadline. However, the Diocesan Secretary is confident that if the deadlines for notice of amendment were brought forward by 45 minutes to 10:15 am, and the Synod doors opened (with printed forms of the business paper available) 45 minutes prior to the session rather than the current 60 minutes, a shift to four days would be able to be managed, if held across two weeks as suggested.
- 26. The option to hold Synod over four days as described, by adoption of a 45-minute earlier start time and five minutes less for dinner is compelling. The question appears to be: Do the benefits of one less day overall outweigh the inconvenience of the earlier start time and the slightly reduced time for business?

Contracting the meeting time to three days

- 27. Holding Synod over three days requires a substantial shift in approach. Assuming the continued approach of midweek afternoons and evenings, Synod could be held using the current format with an additional session commencing each day at 12:00 noon, running until 2:40 pm; as described below –
 - (a) Commence the early afternoon session at 12:00 noon (rather than 3:15 pm) until 2:40 pm.
 - (b) Afternoon break from 2:40 pm to 3:15 pm.
 - (c) Commence late afternoon session from 3:15 pm to 5:45, as per current afternoon session.
 - (d) Break for dinner at 5:45 pm until 7:00 pm, as per current practice.
 - (e) Evening session from 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm, as per current practice.
- 28. This format would provide a total of 23 hours of scheduled meeting time, 45 minutes less than the desired amount for a three day session.
- 29. Adopting this format for Synod has the following benefits –
 - (a) There would be two less days of expenses for Synod members associated with accommodation, driving, parking, public transport, meals, baby sitters, time off work, etc.
 - (b) The cost to host Synod should reduce by 40% – approximately \$30,000 once venue hire, A/V, security, printing, and staffing costs are taken into consideration.
- 30. Additional issues –

- (a) A start time 3 hours and 15 minutes earlier than current will mean that 2/3rds of Synod business would be conducted prior to the dinner break; which is a serious disadvantage for those members who struggle to attend during the day.
- (b) There will be only three evening sessions in which to conduct the more serious matters.
- (c) The three days would need to be held with a day's break in-between (at least). This results from the time taken to turn around a business paper and the desire to allow time for members to collaborate between sessions on amendments and motions. The rationale is as follows –
 - (i) Printing the business papers for Synod takes 1.5 hours, and the absolute latest it can start is one hour prior to the doors opening for Synod, which is currently one hour prior to the session start. This would mean that the business paper would need to be finished with a target of 9:30 am and absolute deadline of 10:00 am.
 - (ii) Producing a business paper by 9:30 am would require a cutoff for additions to the business paper at 8:00 am at the latest, which would severely impede members from collaborating on amendments to motions, and reduce to nonexistence time to reflect on improvements to suggested motions and amendments while also removing any time for the Order of Business Committee to meet and determine recommendations for the order of business.
 - (iii) Such a timetable is unreasonable and would be unfruitful for productive consideration of the business of Synod, and leaves no time for contingencies, risking escalation of the problems experienced in 2018 when the printed form of business papers arrived late and were scarce for several sessions as a result of existing tight timeframes and a faulty printer.
- (d) If the three days are non-sequential, the timings and deadlines can be better managed; but it would introduce additional problems with members who would otherwise stay in a hotel during Synod, now left with days off in-between. This may also mean that the Synod setup and floor layout would need to be packed up and re-setup each day of Synod, to allow the Wesley Theatre to use the space on off days – or pay the equivalent hire charge, thereby cancelling most of the financial advantages of this model.
- (e) Holding Synod over three days would introduce the need to re-think the order of business over successive days. For example, currently questions are asked and notice of motions may be given only on the first three days, presumably the rationale for this approach would need to be applied to the shorter format, which given the problems with this model already described, seems a fruitless exercise for the purposes of this report.

31. For these reasons, a three day Synod is not recommended.

Alternative Locations and Venues

32. We return to consider the second aspect of the Synod resolution, namely whether there are alternative venues that would suit Synod's requirements. We consider issues relating to the geographic location of the meeting place, and then requirements for the venue itself, before considering some alternative venues.

Locations

33. The location for Synod needs –

- (a) to be accessible by public transport,
- (b) to offer sufficient parking,
- (c) to provide capacity for meals for 500 people simultaneously emerging from a session,
- (d) to be reasonably 'central' for the benefit of members from all areas of the Diocese, and
- (e) to offer sufficient options for accommodation,

and would be highly beneficial to be a short walking distance from St Andrew's House (given the need for staff to produce and provide daily business papers, amendment sheets, and answers to questions with a tight turnaround time).

34. In practice, these requirements all point to a location within the CBD and close to St Andrew's House.

35. The most persistent suggestion for a location outside the CBD has been to move the meeting of Synod to Parramatta (or thereabouts). In the recent survey, six respondents suggested this option providing the rationale that the centre of the Diocese is further west than the CBD. There is an obvious logic to this idea as there are significantly more members travelling east to get to Synod than there are those travelling west. However, those members travelling mainly south or mainly north (some with journeys of up to three hours) would be further disadvantaged should the Synod meeting location move to Parramatta.
36. In terms of determining a 'central location' it is the travel options (road and rail) that dictate the most equitable place to host the Synod meeting, not solely the geographical location. To illustrate this point, it is worth noting that the geographical centre of the Diocese (excepting Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands) is somewhere near Mittagong.
37. It is a simple reality that the CBD is the obvious and best location to host Synod owing to the travel options (roads and rail), and its ability to cater for the large size of Synod from the perspective of facilities, parking, meals and accommodation.

Capacity and features

38. The Wesley Centre replaced the seats in the Theatre in 2014, reducing the capacity from 830 to 759 seats (when setup in Synod format). During an ordinary session there is a need to set aside approximately 80 seats for a public gallery and for staff. Noting that there are just over 800 members of Synod, it is concerning that if all members attended, there would not be enough seats. However, the largest number of Synod members in attendance for an ordinary session in recent history was in 2005 when 628 people attended. The capacity issue is still a concern, and is taken into consideration in the comparison of venues below.
39. With regard to features, any theatre style venue is expected to be able to provide most of the features required for a Synod: an audio-visual system, multiple microphones, a foyer area, etc. However, in addition to these standard requirements, it is important to have sufficient seating on the one level for all Synod members, avoiding the situation where some members are forced onto a 2nd tier and unable to easily approach the front to participate in debate. It is desirable therefore, that any venue have sufficient seating on one level, to hold all Synod members in attendance.

Capacity during election Synods

40. There is some concern as to the Wesley Centre's ability to hold the Synod when significant matters are debated, and larger numbers attend. The next Archbishop Election Synod (in 2020) may be such an occasion. During the last Archbishop's election Synod (in 2013) Synod had 808 members and 758 were present to cast their ballot.
41. Thankfully, during election Synods a public gallery is not required and some extra rows at the front (which are removed for an ordinary session) become available for use, increasing capacity for Synod members by approximately 100 to a total of approximately 780. It is expected that these measures will largely address the issue, however to ensure that every Synod member can attend and participate, for the election Synod in 2020 an overflow room will be organised within the Wesley Centre which will carry a video feed and allow function for members to cast ballots.
42. While the use of an overflow room is not ideal, given the costs involved in considering an alternative venue (outlined below) and given that it is unclear whether there will be significant seating capacity problems, it seems the most reasonable approach. It may be that the future use of an overflow room when significant matters are considered may be beneficial for the purposes of convenience and comfort, even if not strictly required for capacity.

Venues

43. With the above capacity and features in mind, three alternative venues were identified for consideration within or near the CBD close to St Andrew's House. These were: Sydney Town Hall, the International Convention Centre in Darling Harbour and the City Recital Hall. In each case, the

cost for each venue was significantly higher than Wesley, and deemed unsuitable for Synod. (For reasons of commercial sensitivity, the figures are not provided.)

44. Aside from the problem of cost, the City Recital Hall does not offer the single tier of seating desired, and no other option provided any advantage over the Wesley theatre, save for seating capacity; which was not viewed as sufficient to justify the expense of alternative venues. Of course the Christian heritage and purpose of the Wesley Centre makes it a particularly fitting venue for the business of Synod, and brings with it a certain level of comfort and warmth in shared Christian mission.
45. If the rates of Synod attendance or membership significantly increase, either an overflow or an alternative venue will have to be utilised. Based on the information at hand, the likely alternative venue would be the International Convention Centre in Darling Harbour. Until such time as attendance and capacity cannot be ignored, Wesley Theatre is the logical and most cost effective choice of venue.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee.

DANIEL GLYNN
Diocesan Secretary

29 August 2019