

The Diocesan Doctrine Commission's terms of reference

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

Key Points

- The Diocesan Doctrine Commission was established by a resolution of the Synod (19/81). Over 40 years the Commission has generated many valuable reports on important theological issues confronting the Diocese.
- At this time it is appropriate to review the text of the original resolution, in order to reflect developments in the way the Commission is constituted and organised.
- It is proposed that the terms of reference be updated by the Standing Committee to further clarify the operation and processes of the Commission, especially with regards to the reception and publication of reports.

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to recommend revising and expanding on the 1981 Synod resolution that originally established the Diocesan Doctrine Commission (**the Commission**).

Recommendations

2. Synod receives this report.
3. Synod, noting the report 'The Diocesan Doctrine Commission's terms of reference', requests that the Commission appointed by the Archbishop in consultation with the Standing Committee pursuant to resolution 19/81 –
 - (a) be comprised of ten persons, to serve for a term of three years,
 - (b) have a Chair, appointed by the Archbishop from among the members, and
 - (c) consider and report on issues which may be referred to it from time to time only by the Synod, the Standing Committee, or by the Archbishop,and encourages the Standing Committee to approve suitable Terms of Reference for the Commission that reflect the recommendations of this motion.

Background

4. The Commission was established via Synod Resolution 19/81, which was moved by Deaconess Margaret Rodgers, and passed by Synod on 8 October 1981. It reads as follows –

“Synod requests the Archbishop, in consultation with the Standing Committee, to appoint a Diocesan Doctrine Commission, to consider and report on issues which may be referred to it from time to time by the Synod, the Standing Committee, or by boards and committees set up by the Synod. The Commission to be comprised of ten persons.”

Discussion

5. The recommendations advocated in this report have been developed in consultation with the Chair of the Diocesan Doctrine Commission, and are presented with his endorsement.
6. Further, these recommendations seek to codify and detail existing practices that have developed over time, rather than make changes to the way the Commission operates.

7. It is appropriate that these matters be dealt with at this time to –
 - (a) recognise the need to clarify inconsistencies that have arisen (between the intent of the original motion, current practice, and the processes presumed by the written statement on the Doctrine Commission website),
 - (b) recognise that terms of reference have developed over time without being formally agreed to through proper processes, and
 - (c) seek to address ambiguities that exist around the status of Commission reports.
8. The proposed refreshed Synod resolution is commended with thankfulness for the work of the Commission over the past four decades, and in order to renew, clarify and focus its work for years to come.

Amendments to the Resolution establishing the Commission

9. Synod Resolution 19/81 does not state that the Archbishop may refer issues to the Commission. The reports on the public website include six that were specifically requested by an Archbishop, and the website states that the Archbishop may refer issues to the Commission. It is recommended that the motion clarify that the Archbishop (along with Synod, and the Standing Committee) may refer issues to the Commission.
10. Synod Resolution 19/81 anticipates that “boards and committees set up by the Synod” may refer issues to the Commission. This has never occurred in practice, and it is recommended that the referring entities be limited to the Synod, the Standing Committee, and the Archbishop.
11. Synod Resolution 19/81 does not specify a term of office for members of the Commission. Members are conventionally appointed for three-year terms, with a date of retirement linked to the first Standing Committee meeting after the first session of each Synod. It is proposed that the Synod resolution specify a three-year term. The date of retirement of members can be specified in the terms of reference.
12. The Commission has a Chair, but the method of appointment is not defined. The present Chair was appointed from the members by the Archbishop. It is proposed that this practice be formalised in the Synod resolution.
13. If the proposed Synod resolution is passed, the Commission will be regarded as established jointly by Synod resolutions 19/81 and xx/23, with the 2023 resolution supplementing the 1981 resolution.

The terms of reference

14. Revised terms of reference will be considered by the Standing Committee following Synod and thereafter published on the publicly accessible page of the SDS website. The proposed revisions to the terms of reference are set out in marked-up form in Appendix A and explained below.
15. The sentence “Topics may include specific doctrinal debates within the Church itself or issues confronting society more broadly.” will be deleted. This keeps the focus on “important theological issues” and reduces potential confusion or overlap with matters that might be more properly referred to the Social Issues Committee.
16. The sentence “Once completed, the report is presented to the requesting body and published.” will end at “body” and the words “and published” will be deleted. This will be replaced with the phrase, “and is usually then published on the Commission’s website.” This acknowledges that publication is typical but that in certain circumstances a requesting body may ask that a report not be published.
17. A new section will be added relating to the response to reports requested by the Standing Committee or the Synod. All reports requested by the Synod will be provided to the Standing Committee in the first instance, for response, before presentation to Synod. It is considered that Standing Committee is likely to be the most productive context for substantive debate of matters raised by Commission reports.
18. A report may be endorsed or commended by a requesting body, or simply received or noted. A requesting body may also ask that further work be done, or potentially reject a report, but the

requesting body will not be invited to amend a report. It is the intention that, usually, a requesting body will respond to a motion inviting them to 'endorse' a report.

19. A key point is that a requesting body must have the opportunity to receive and respond to a report before it is published. The following new text will be added detailing the process for publication of reports –

“Once a report has been received by the requesting body, it will be made publicly available unless otherwise requested. A note will be added to the published report, commenting on its reception and status.”

An example of what this may look like is shown in Appendix B.

20. It is recognised that, in the case of the Synod, for example, some months may pass between the completion of a Commission report and the first opportunity for that body to receive the report. Nevertheless, it is appropriate that a report not be published until the body that requested it has had an opportunity to receive it. The proposed text also allows for a requesting body to decline to recommend publication of a Commission report on the website.
21. Existing reports already publicly available on the website (dating from 1983-2023) will continue to be publicly available. Over time, details of the reception and status of historic reports, where known, will be added.
22. The following details will be added to elaborate on the term of office of members of the Commission –

“Members retire at the first meeting of the Standing Committee following the first ordinary session of the Synod, and are eligible for re-appointment. At the first meeting of the Standing Committee after the first ordinary session of the Synod, the Archbishop recommends to the Standing Committee names of persons for appointment to the Commission.”

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee.

BRIONY BOUNDS
Diocesan Secretary

17 July 2023

Extract from the SDS website, with marked-up changes:

Diocesan Doctrine Commission

The Diocesan Doctrine Commission prepares reports on important theological issues confronting the Diocese. ~~Topics may include specific doctrinal debates within the Church itself or issues confronting society more broadly.~~

A report is initiated when the Archbishop, Synod or Standing Committee requests a theologically-informed consideration of a particular matter. Once completed, the report is presented to the requesting body, and is usually then published on the Commission's website. ~~and published.~~

A report requested by the Synod will first be presented to the Standing Committee for discussion and response, before being presented to Synod. A requesting body may ask that further work be done, or potentially reject a report, but the requesting body will not be invited to amend a report.

Once a report has been received by the requesting body, it will be made publicly available unless otherwise requested. A note will be added to the published report, commenting on its reception and status.

Constitution and Current Membership

The Doctrine Commission was constituted by the Archbishop as a result of a request from Synod in 1981 and consists of ten members appointed by the Archbishop every three years in consultation with the Standing Committee.

Members retire at the first meeting of the Standing Committee following the first ordinary session of the Synod, and are eligible for re-appointment. At the first meeting of the Standing Committee after the first ordinary session of the Synod, the Archbishop recommends to the Standing Committee names of persons for appointment to the Commission.

Current members of the Doctrine Commission are:

The Rev Dr Mark Thompson (Chair)
The Rev Dr David Höhne
The Rev Dr Edward Loane
The Rev Dr Gavin Perkins
The Rev Dr Willis Salier

The Rev Dr Andrew Shead
The Rev Robert Smith
Bishop Michael Stead
The Rev Dr Danielle Treweek
Mrs Beth Webb

Reports by Diocesan Doctrine Commission

Reports prepared by the Diocesan Doctrine Commission may be viewed [here](#).

Alternatively, they are shown below by year of publication.

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The following is an example of how status and response may be added (see text in blue) to a completed report, using as an example the 2021 report of the Diocesan Doctrine Commission entitled *The Unchanging Heart of Parochial Incumbency*:

Report received by Standing Committee 8 November 2021, which referred a copy to the Stipends and Allowances Committee and approved the printing of a suitable form of the report for the next ordinary session of the Synod. Synod received the report on 12 September 2022 and noted that it was printed at the direction of the Standing Committee.

The Unchanging Heart of Parochial Incumbency

A Report by the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission

On 19 October 2020, the Standing Committee made the following request to the Diocesan Doctrine Commission, regarding the nature of parochial incumbency and the cure of souls:

‘Standing Committee requests the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission to produce a report on the nature of parochial incumbency and the cure of souls, with particular attention to its full-time character (or otherwise), to be provided as theological advice to the Stipends and Allowances Committee as assistance towards their policy review of ministry remuneration and preparation for retirement’.

Introduction

1. In the search for resources to clarify the nature of parochial incumbency with

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