

35/04 Use of the word “Priest”

(A report from the Standing Committee)

Background

1. At its session in 2004, the Synod passed resolution 35/04 as follows –

“Synod -

(a) reaffirms the decision of motion 20/97 -

Synod considers -

(a) *that the good reason for our reformers retaining the word ‘priest’ in the Book of Common Prayer is its derivation from the Greek ‘presbuteros’, (which means a senior person, and ‘elder’, or a mature leader); and*

(b) *that much of this meaning has been lost, because modern English has come to use ‘priest’ to mean a person who mediates between man and God,*

and therefore encourages all involved in liturgical revision, in place of the word ‘priest’, to use words like ‘elder’, ‘president’, ‘presbyter’ or ‘minister’.

(b) considers that our continued use of the word “Priest” in legislation and formularies describing New Testament ministers, may be confusing, and

(c) asks that the Standing Committee bring to the next session a report, on the practicality of replacing the word “priest” with words such as “presbyter” or “senior minister” in all our legislation and formularies.”

2. At its meeting on 12 December 2005, the Standing Committee appointed a committee comprising Mr Neil Cameron and Mr Robert Wicks to prepare and bring to the Standing Committee an ordinance and such recommendations that are considered necessary or desirable to give effect to the terms of resolution 35/04.

Existing steps

3. The committee noted that a number of steps have already been taken to reflect the intention behind resolution 35/04. In particular, the form for ordination of priests used during the last 2 years has typically included in its heading the phrase "also called presbyters". This reflects the title used in the APBA form of service for the ordination of priests (page 790). On at least one occasion, the form for such a service was further modified by using the word presbyter in the rubrics for the service while retaining the word priest in the text to be spoken.

4. Last year, a brochure published by Ministry Training and Development about full-time paid ministry in the Diocese used the word presbyter throughout.

5. Subject to one qualification, the committee can see no reason why references to the word priest cannot be replaced with the word presbyter wherever used in all forms of service authorised for use in this Diocese. The committee regards such a change as a variation to an authorised form of service which is not of substantial importance for the purposes of section 5(1) of the Schedule to the General Synod - Canon Concerning Services 1992 Adopting Ordinance 1998. The committee takes this view in light of the reference to presbyters in APBA and the fact that the word "minister" is effectively used as a synonym for the word priest in BCP.

6. In order to avoid any challenge to the validity of the orders of those ordained priest under a varied form of service, the committee considers that any use of the word presbyter in the form of service for the ordination of priests should be limited in the manner referred to in 3 above.

Further steps

7. The committee considers that the following further steps could be undertaken to give effect to the terms of resolution 35/04 –

- Include a provision in the Interpretation Ordinance 1985 stipulating that in the ordinances of the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney and all regulations made under those ordinances, the words "priest" and "presbyter" are synonyms.
- Change references to "priest" to "presbyter" in ordinances and regulations as appropriate.

8. Any change in the terminology used in the constituting ordinance for a school or organisation should be made with the agreement of the school or organisation.

Recommendations

9. The committee recommended that the Standing Committee –
- (a) approves of the approach outlined in paragraphs 3 to 6 above concerning the use of the word presbyter in forms of service authorised for use in this Diocese, and
 - (b) requests that legislation be brought to a future meeting of the Standing Committee to amend diocesan ordinances and regulations in the manner referred to in paragraphs 7 and 8 above, and
 - (c) requests that, where appropriate, the word presbyter be used instead of the word priest in drafting ordinances and forms of liturgy, and
 - (d) requests that a suitable form of this report (excluding the attached table but including a summary of any action taken by the Standing Committee subsequent to receiving this report) be printed for the Synod.

Response of the Standing Committee

10. At its meeting on 26 June 2006, the Standing Committee adopted each of the committee's recommendations. On 31 July 2006, the Standing Committee gave affect to the recommendation in 9(b) by passing the *Presbyter (Amendment of Terminology) Ordinance 2006* and, with the Archbishop, amending the *Regulations Re Authorities for Lay Ministry*.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

ROBERT WICKS
Diocesan Secretary

21 August 2006