

## Synod Membership Ordinance 1995 Amendment Ordinance 2016

### Explanatory Report

#### Key Points

- Principles relevant to a review of the Synod's membership include ensuring ex-officio members of the Standing Committee are also ex-officio members of the Synod, maintaining generally the current balance of clergy and lay persons on the Synod and not increasing the number of non-parish clergy who are members of the Synod
- The Regional Bishops and the Archdeacon for Women's Ministry should be ex-officio members of the Synod under Part 9
- The Principal of Moore Theological College should be added as an ex-officio member of the Synod under Part 9
- The number of Nominated Organisations under Part 6 should be reduced from 7 to 5
- Levels of attendance at the Synod are not likely to be significantly improved by modifying the composition of its membership or with modest reductions in the size of its membership

#### Purpose of the bill

1. The purpose of the bill for the *Synod Membership Ordinance 1995 Amendment Ordinance 2016* (the "bill") is to make changes to the membership of the Synod and to the basis upon which certain members become and cease being members.

#### Recommendations

2. That Synod receive this report.
3. That Synod pass the bill as an ordinance of the Synod.

#### Background

4. At its meeting on 14 September 2015, Standing Committee resolved as follows –

"Standing Committee, having agreed to promote to the Synod certain amendments to the membership of the Synod and the Standing Committee, agrees to establish a committee at its November meeting to report to Standing Committee with any further amendments the committee considers should be made to the *Synod Membership Ordinance 1995* and the *Standing Committee Ordinance 1897*."

5. At its meeting on 16 November 2015 Standing Committee appointed as members of the committee Dr Robert Tong (Chair), Canon Phillip Colgan, Bishop Chris Edwards, Mr Jeremy Freeman, Canon Stephen Gibson, Mr Doug Marr and Dr Laurie Scandrett.

6. During the course of its work, the Standing Committee also asked the committee to consider the composition and size of the Synod membership in light of figures over the last 4 years which show a consistent absence of 37-40% in the attendance of members at Synod.

7. At its meetings on 22 August 2016 and 19 September 2016 the Standing Committee considered the recommendations of the committee and requested that the bill be promoted to the Synod.

#### General discussion

8. The committee identified a number of principles relevant to its consideration of the membership of the Synod and the Standing Committee. These include –

- (a) Ex-officio members on the Standing Committee should also be ex-officio members on the Synod.
- (b) The current balance of clergy and lay persons on the Synod should generally be maintained.
- (c) The number of non-parish clergy who are members of the Synod should not be increased.

9. The committee expressed a view that the Synod should retain the character as the house of the parishes.

10. The committee also took the view that care should be exercised in extending the concept of representative Synod membership beyond its current levels, as reflected for example, in the Nominated Organisations under Part 6. The committee did not regard it as necessary or appropriate to attempt to provide direct representation on the Synod for all aspects of diocesan life, for example chaplains. Appropriate Synod

representation for various interest groups within the Diocese is appropriately achieved through the existing categories of membership, particularly Parts 6, 7 and 8.

11. The committee spent time considering Part 6 membership of the Synod (Nominated Organisations). The rationale for including a Part 6 membership is that certain organisations are expected to make a particular contribution to Synod and have a particular reason to be represented on Synod. The committee affirmed the current mechanism by which the Standing Committee nominates organisations under Part 6 every 3 years. However the committee believes that the Standing Committee should consider whether service organisations such as Sydney Diocesan Secretariat and Anglican Media Council should continue among those nominated under Part 6. A stronger argument could be made for including an organisation such as Ministry Training & Development.

**Explanation of specific changes**

*Regional Bishops and Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry as ex-officio members of Synod (clauses 2(i) and 3)*

12. In order to give effect to the principle referred to above that ex-officio members of the Standing Committee should also be ex-officio members of the Synod, the bill provides that the Regional Bishops and the Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry be ex-officio members of the Synod under Part 9. In certain circumstances a Regional Bishop could be summoned to Synod under another Part, for example as an acting rector of a parish. In such circumstances membership under Part 9 would take precedence.

13. While this proposal conflicts with the principle referred to above of not increasing the number of non-parish clergy who are members of the Synod, on balance, the proposal is considered appropriate in view of the leadership brought to the Synod by the Regional Bishops and Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry and the small increase in the number of non-parish clergy members represented by the proposal.

14. In order to ensure that the office of Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry is recognised generally in the ordinances of the Diocese, the bill provides for a definition of “Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry” to be included in the Schedule to the *Interpretation Ordinance 1985* (in much the same way as the offices of Chancellor, Diocesan Secretary, Regional Bishop and Registrar are currently recognised).

*Principal of Moore Theological College (clause 2(i))*

15. In view of the theological leadership that the Principal of Moore Theological College brings to the affairs of the Diocese, it is considered appropriate for the Principal to be an ex-officio member of both the Standing Committee and the Synod. The Principal of Moore Theological College is already an ex officio member of Standing Committee. In relation to the Synod membership, the bill provides that the Principal of Moore Theological College is an ex-officio member under Part 9.

*Number of Nominated Organisations under Part 6 (clause 2(c))*

16. The bill provides for a reduction in the number of Nominated Organisations under Part 6 from 7 to 5. This would effectively be a reduction of one Nominated Organisation assuming the Principal of Moore Theological College becomes an ex-officio member under Part 9.

*Revoking membership under Part 7 and 8 (clauses 2(g) and (h))*

17. The bill gives the Archbishop and Standing Committee an express right to revoke an appointment or person elected under Parts 7 and 8 respectively.

*Revoking the membership of a parochial representative (clause 2(a))*

18. The bill enables a general meeting of parishioners to remove a parochial representative before the expiry of their 3 year term of office in circumstances where the person has ceased being a parishioner of the parish concerned and the rector certifies that, having made reasonable efforts to contact the person –

- (a) no contact with the person has been made, or
- (b) the person has been contacted but did not indicate a wish to remain as a parochial representative for the remainder of the term.

**Attendance at Synod**

19. During the course of its work, the committee noted figures over the last 4 years which indicated a consistent absence of 37-40% of members from attendance at Synod sessions. The issue before the committee was whether changes could be made to the composition and possibly the size of the Synod membership to reduce this level of absenteeism.

20. The committee noted that a report on Synod attendance had recently been considered by the Synod at its session in 2014. As a consequence, the Synod passed resolution 46/14 in the following terms –

“Synod, noting the report on Synod attendance and the desirability of seeking ways to increase the attendance and participation of members at Synod sessions –

- (a) requests the Standing Committee to ensure, as far as possible, that the business it promotes to the Synod focuses on significant issues of policy and strategic direction and that it avoids promoting to the Synod technical or administrative business which can be dealt with by the Standing Committee under its delegated authority,
- (b) requests members who are likely to be unable to attend and participate in any part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ordinary session of the Synod in 2015 to take early action to investigate and pursue options and arrangements that will enable them to attend and participate in the whole of the session,
- (c) requests members who, after exhausting such avenues, are still unable to attend and participate in any part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ordinary session of the Synod in 2015 to consider, in the case of parochial ministers and parochial representatives, appointing an alternate for the session or, in the case of elected or appointed members, resigning their membership to enable the election or appointment of those who can, and
- (d) requests the Standing Committee to review the procedures and ordinances relating to alternate and replacement synod representatives with a view to streamlining the process and removing obstacles.”

21. The committee noted that the requests made by Synod in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of resolution 46/14 have been conveyed to Synod members each year in conjunction with the first Synod mailing in August.

22. The committee also noted that the review referred to in paragraph (d) of resolution 46/14 had not yet been undertaken. To assist the Standing Committee complete this review, the committee offered the following comments –

- (a) The process for appointing alternates for rectors is fairly straightforward and need not be modified.
- (b) However the requirement of parish council consent for the purposes of appointing an alternate for a lay parochial representative is unnecessarily burdensome.

23. Accordingly the bill replaces the requirement to obtain the consent of the parish council with the consent of the wardens of the principal or only church of the parish (clause 2(b)).

24. Beyond this change, the committee did not believe that attendance levels would be significantly improved at Synod by modifying the composition of its membership. Further, unless it is proposed to reduce the size of the Synod membership very substantially, for example to below 200 members, the committee does not believe that a reduction in the size of the membership of the Synod would significantly improve attendance levels. The underlying issues are essentially cultural and possibly theological.

25. The committee noted that all clergy promise in one form or another at their ordination to obey all directions that the Archbishop is lawfully able to give. Such directions include the Archbishop’s summons to the Synod given under the 1902 Constitutions. In that sense, the committee considered that clerical members of the Synod are under a particular obligation to give high priority to their attendance at Synod. The committee felt that it was open to the Archbishop to educate and challenge the clergy in this area as he saw fit.

26. The committee speculated as to whether a theological justification for not giving appropriate priority to involvement at Synod arises from a misunderstanding of the so-called Knox/Robinson theology of church, which predominates in the Diocese. Properly understood, this ecclesiology rightly maintains the priority of the local church over the denomination. However, we are not Congregationalists. Instead, as Anglicans we recognise that we are a fellowship of local churches who work collegially, are led episcopally and governed Synodically (whilst maintaining that the local church is the arena in and from which gospel work is done). However, this predominant ecclesiology appears to lead some to undervalue Synods as important expressions of our collegiality.

27. The committee considered that a failure to appreciate the mutual responsibility Anglican churches have to one another as a broader fellowship may be behind not only a reduced level of attendance by some clergy at Synod but also the maintenance of an “us and them” understanding of the relationship between parishes and the Synod.

28. These are matters which might fruitfully be discussed at Synod, however do not form the basis of any particular provision in the bill.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee.

ROBERT WICKS  
*Diocesan Secretary*

20 September 2016