

## NOTES ON QUESTIONS / MOTIONS AT DIOCESAN SYNOD

### Background

Diocesan Synod considers matters referred from General Synod, Deanery Synods, PCCs and from individual Diocesan Synod members. It formulates diocesan policy on a wide range of issues, assists the Bishop and their staff to support and oversee the work of the diocese, approves the budget, and debates important local and national issues affecting the Church.

The functions of the Diocesan Synod are set out in the Synodical Government Measure 1969 and include to:

- Consider matters concerning the Church of England and to make provision for such matters in relation to their diocese, and to consider and express their opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest;
- Advise the bishop on any matters on which he may consult the Synod;
- Consider and express their opinion on any matters referred to them by the General Synod and, in particular, to approve or disapprove provisions referred to them by General Synod;
- Consider proposals for the annual budget and to approve or disapprove them;
- Consider the Annual Report and Accounts of the Diocesan Board of Finance.

The Diocesan Synod may not make any statement purporting to declare the doctrine of the Church; this role is reserved for the General Synod.

### Questions

Questions can be asked in advance under Standing Order 69 by any member of Synod. As a general rule, questions must:

- Be short, precise, factual and not emotive and not ask for an expression of opinion.
- Seek information or press for action.
- Be about something the answering body is responsible for.
- Be based on fact not speculation.
- Not ask for information which is available elsewhere.
- Not be intended to pursue individual members' personal interests.

Questions under Standing Order 69 should be addressed to Officers of the Synod and to the Chair of any body established by the Synod. Therefore, questions cannot ask the "Diocese's view" on a matter. It should be remembered that the diocese is a geographical area rather than a specific organisation. Also ensure that questions do not seek to affirm the questioner's own view, particularly where the view of the Church is conveyed and expressed at National level. Standing Order 70 provides that questions shall not ask for an expression of opinion or for the answer to either an abstract legal question or a hypothetical problem, and it is for the president of their appointee to decide whether the question is in order.

Under Standing Order 69 , the person asked may, without reason given, refuse to answer that question, and may give a written reply to any question if, in their opinion, this would give a clearer answer to synod. A member may ask up to two original questions at any one meeting and a member who has asked a question may ask one supplementary question in respect of each such original question. This limit on questions is indicative that the questions procedure is not intended to give rise to general debate.

Standing Orders 25 and 26 provide that 10 days' written prior notice of any questions under Standing Order 69 is required, to be delivered to the Diocesan Secretary by hand or post. At this time, the proposed questions are analysed to ensure they fall within those permitted by the Standing Orders.

Standing Order 27 sets out certain exceptions where notice is not required. Also note that no notice is required for a supplementary question by a member who has asked a question under Standing Order 69.

The purpose of this procedure is not intended to give rise to general debate; Standing Order 35 provides that "a member shall not speak unless upon a motion or amendment, save as provided in Standing Orders 32 (points of order), 33 (personal explanations) and 69 (questions)." Therefore, members cannot ask supplementary questions in relation to another member's question. However, it should be noted that members can also ask questions, without notice, in the informal session at the end of Synod.

## MOTIONS / DEBATES

A motion is a formal statement presented to the Synod for debate and to be put to a vote. Motions can come from individual members, Bishop's Council, Deanery Synods, or the General Synod. Motions from Deanery Synods or individual members should be sent to the Bishop's Council via the Diocesan Secretary. It is recommended to contact the Diocesan Secretary as soon as possible for advice on preparing and wording the motion to ensure it does not contradict Standing Orders, overrule existing legislation, or other technical issues. Deanery Synods should authorise their Standing Committee to agree the final wording of any motion to ensure minor amendments can be properly approved before the matter is taken to Diocesan Synod.

The general procedure for debate is as follows:

- a) The motion is put by a member of Synod;
- b) The Synod will discuss and debate the motion;
- c) Any amendments to the motion (duly notified in advance) are proposed and voted on;
- d) The final motion, with any successful amendments, is formally proposed;

e) The Synod votes.

Under Standing Order 38(a) every matter debated in the Diocesan Synod must be moved by a member. Standing Order 26 requires 10 days' notice of a motion arising from the Synod agenda, subject to Standing Order 27.

Standing Order 37 limits speeches to 10 minutes (15 minutes for reports) unless otherwise determined by the Chair. However, if a speech is longer or shorter, the Chair should also consider the time limits for anyone who has a right of reply (Standing Order 57).

The mover of the motion has (under Standing Order 36(iii)) a right to reply at the conclusion of the debate, as long as the reply does not introduce any new matter and closes the debate. Standing Order 35 provides that a member may not speak unless to a motion or amendment, and no speaker may speak more than once, except as may be permitted under Standing Order 36. Under Standing Order 30, it is for the Chair to call upon members who wish to speak, and to determine the order of speakers.

The interruption of a speech by another member is not permitted save as provided in Standing Orders 32 and 33.

Subject to certain exceptions contained in Standing Order 44, Standing Order 43 provides that any member may move to amend a motion, although an amendment to an amendment is not permitted. The amendment must be dealt with before that motion is put, or any further amendment is moved. Before an amendment is moved, a written copy must be provided to the secretary, unless this requirement is dispensed with by the chair. An amendment may be made by leaving out words, by leaving out words in order to insert other words, or by inserting or adding words. An amendment shall be relevant to and shall not have the effect of negating the main motion or amendment.

Standing Order 49 provides that amendments are moved and put to the vote in the order in which they first affect the main motion or amendment to which they relate. If more than one amendment is received affecting the same place in that motion or amendment, they are moved and put to the vote in the order determined by the chair. By their permission, during the debate on an amendment, other amendments may be discussed but not moved.

Some matters may not lend themselves appropriately to the format of a debate because Synod is not being asked to reach a decision on a particular issue and consequently there is no motion to be determined. This may have been provided for in the Agenda, although Synod may itself provide for a discussion on a particular item under Standing Order 59 (Suspension of Standing Orders) although this requires a majority of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members present and voting to be carried. In either case the normal rules of debate would be suspended and instructions as to the conduct of such an item will be given by the Chair. This may include provision, for example, for the conduct of a "straw poll" or for members

to participate in discussion either as a whole meeting or in smaller groups, which may in turn be asked to provide written or oral feedback.

At the end of debate, the Secretary will normally be asked to appoint tellers from amongst the officers present under Standing Order 68. If the Chair calls for a show of hands members are asked to raise one hand above head height. Failure to do this could mean that the vote is not counted. These arrangements may be varied from time to time if the circumstances require and the Chair will announce any variation at the time of the debate.

Standing Order 32 deals with Points of Order, and a member who wishes to raise a Point of Order may interrupt another speaker to do so. The member interrupting should however indicate immediately the number of the Order which s/he believes may have been breached, and draw the attention of the Chair to the alleged breach by way of a question. An example of this would be as follows: "A point of order, Mr. Chairman. Is the speaker not in breach of Standing Order 37, his speech having exceeded ten minutes?"

Points of Order should be distinguished from Procedural Motions under Standing Order 50, for which notice may not be required. There are 7 types of procedural motions set out in Standing Order 50 and these should be studied carefully before a Procedural Motion is submitted by a member or allowed by the Chair. A member wishing to move a Procedural Motion may not interrupt a speaker. S/he should stand in her/his place immediately once the speaker has sat down and, without waiting to be called, ask the Chair for consent to move the Procedural Motion s/he desires, for example "Your Grace, will you allow a motion that the debate now be closed?" or "that the synod do pass to the next business."

Under Standing Order 40, where a motion or amendment is rejected, it cannot be brought again before Synod again for at least 12 months.

Note also Standing Order 113, which provides that the board shall not spend Synod's funds for which it is responsible without a money resolution. Standing Order 112 provides that except with the consent of the standing committee and the board or their authorised representatives in the synod, no motion involving expenditure shall be put to the vote unless thirty-five days' notice of the motion has been given to the standing committee and the board, so as to give opportunity for their views on the proposal to be formulated and expressed during the debate.