

Does General Synod matter?

If you believe that the Church of England is more than a collection of parish churches which do their own thing, then yes, the General Synod does matter!

This is where decisions are taken which shape the life, liturgy, financial health, mission and ministry of our Church. This is where representatives of the whole Church – dioceses, cathedrals, religious communities, universities, armed forces; bishops, clergy and lay people – meet to debate and decide the future direction of our Church.

Some decisions make little visible difference to most people; others radically change the nature of the Church of England. The ordination of women to the priesthood or the introduction of *Common Worship* would be obvious examples of the latter from the last twenty years.

Who elects General Synod?

The clergy and lay members of deanery synods elect their diocesan representatives to the Houses of Clergy and Laity of the General Synod.

Why do elections to General Synod matter?

This year we will be electing a new General Synod for the next five years, 2010 - 2015. If we are to elect members who will truly represent the people of the Church of England, we need to encourage good candidates to stand – and make sure that deanery synod members **VOTE**.

This hardly seems rocket science, but the truth is that, in past elections, in some dioceses too few candidates stand to trigger an election, and few dioceses achieve more than a 50% turn-out. Can we buck the trend in 2010?

If there are insufficient candidates for an election, everyone who stands automatically gets a place – however eccentric or unrepresentative. Those who really care about an issue will make sure that they put up

candidates – and get their supporters out to vote; those who are less passionate tend to leave it to others to do the Right Thing (whatever that might be!)

This time one of the Big Issues is likely to be women bishops (whatever happens in the July group of sessions), and many will stand on that ticket. The outcome of this election will therefore to a very large extent determine whether we *do* decide to ordain women as bishops (or decide not to) – and what provision we make for those opposed to this development if we decide to go ahead.

Whichever way it goes, there will be hurt and dismay for some. But this is not the only issue which will face our Church in the next five years. There will be major decisions on the priority of mission and the need to shape financial resources and ministry accordingly; church buildings; the Anglican covenant, to name but a few. We need to remind the electorate to consider the whole spectrum of church affairs when casting their vote.

What do members of General Synod do?

- Attend debates during Synod meetings (twice a year, each lasting 4 or 5 days). This is not compulsory, but people who do not go are failing in their primary responsibility to represent their dioceses.
- Worship together each day in a rich variety of ways.
- Vote: Decisions at Synod are *always* taken by voting. Sometimes this is a show of hands; sometimes an electronic count. Usually a simple majority will do; sometimes a two-thirds majority is required; sometimes the Synod votes as a whole; sometimes it splits into Houses (Bishops, Clergy, Laity). Members vote according to individual conscience – though some groupings in the Synod meet to discuss issues together. But members do not represent their electorate if they do not vote. With the introduction of electronic voting in February 2008 it is now possible to see *who* voted – as well as *how* they voted. Check it out! (<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas>)

- Speak: widely held to be the important part, but not everyone who wants to speak can be called. Some members have opinions on every subject; others only stand to speak if they have a particular contribution to make. But it's the majority who listen carefully to the debate and then vote who actually take the decisions.
- Keep in touch with the electorate: the wider church has the right to know what goes on at General Synod - and members should be closely aware of the issues facing their particular constituency.

What should I do?

- Consider standing as a candidate yourself;
- Approach and seek to persuade those you believe would represent the diocese well. The only formal qualification is to be on an electoral or Cathedral roll in your diocese;
- Spread the message that this is important! (especially among members of deanery synods who are the electorate);
- Find ways of enabling candidates and voters to exchange views on issues of local and national significance. Traditional hustings may still have a place, but what about newer forms of communication? Blogspaces on diocesan websites; twitter; facebook etc.;
- Quiz candidates carefully on issues which matter to you. Don't assume that they will reveal all in their election addresses;
- Research the attendance and voting patterns of those standing for re-election and publicise it;
- **Encourage/remind/badger/bribe (well possibly not!) voters to do their homework and VOTE!!** Email is a useful tool here. Let's aim for at least a 90% turn-out this time.
- Visit www.generalsynodelections2010.org for more information

2010
 is election year for the
General Synod
of the Church of England
 as well as the nation!

So what?

*A short guide to why this matters
 and what you can do about it.*