

Weekend Synod Meetings

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

Introduction

1. In 1997 the Synod received the report about the Future Form of Synod Meetings published on pages 413 to 432 of the 1998 Year Book. Paragraphs 59 to 65 of the report considered the possibility of weekend Synod meetings.
2. The Standing Committee advised the Synod that it had appointed a committee comprising Justice Ken Handley, Deaconess Margaret Rodgers, the Rev Peter Tasker, the Rev Stephen Semenchuck and Mr Geoff Kyngdon to consider and make recommendations to the Standing Committee about weekend Synod meetings.
3. The committee has recommended that weekend Synod meetings be trialed in 2001.

Consultation

4. In considering the question of weekend Synod meetings, the committee sought the views of Synod members and parish councils. A questionnaire was circulated to 296 clerical members, 488 lay members and 266 parish councils seeking comments on -
 - (a) the principle of the Synod meeting on a Sunday;
 - (b) the effect on Sunday services;
 - (c) days and hours of meeting for weekend meetings of the Synod; and
 - (d) the place of meeting.
5. In addition, the committee sought comments on the proposal for a minister to appoint an assistant minister as the minister's alternate to attend a meeting of the Synod, and the proposal for a parish council appointing an alternate for a parochial representative who is unable to attend a Synod session.
6. 85% of clerical members and 41% of lay members/parish councils responded to the questionnaire. In the remainder of this report, the lay responses means the responses of the lay members and parish councils.

Synod Meeting on a Weekend

7. The questionnaire showed that Synod meetings on a Sunday would be unpopular, with only 36% of clerical responses and 42% of lay responses expressing no objection to a Sunday meeting. However, only 22% of clergy responses and 28% of lay responses were in favour of a full day Sunday meeting.
8. The priority of ministers is to lead their congregation on a Sunday rather than attending a Synod meeting.
9. A substantial majority of the clerical and lay responses indicated a willingness to attend Synod meetings on a Saturday, even from 9am to 9.30 pm. A larger majority indicated a willingness to attend a Synod meeting on a Friday from 1pm to 9.30pm. For many, meeting only on a Friday evening was considered to be a waste of time, particularly for those with long distances to travel.
10. In conclusion, provided that the Synod does not meet on a Sunday morning (and preferably not on a Sunday at all), then a substantial majority of the responses (73% of clergy responses and 66% of lay responses) indicated a willingness to attend a weekend Synod meeting.

Place of Meeting

11. Few people (less than 15% of those responding) indicated a willingness to meet away from the Sydney CBD.
12. There are several possible venues in the Sydney CBD (for example, the Darling Harbour Convention Centre South and the Wesley Centre) which are capable of seating 800 to 1,000 members with provision for public galleries, administration, Archbishop's retiring, meeting and media rooms.
13. The committee considered whether there was a suitable regional venue but could not identify one. Wollongong and places further south were not considered because of the difficulty for the majority of members in travelling there by public transport. Over 70% of responses indicated that easy access by public transport was a requirement for a Synod meeting venue.
14. The State Sport Centre and the Sydney Showground and Exhibition Complex at Homebush Bay the meeting room facilities required for a Synod meeting. However, these facilities are unavailable until after the Olympic Games and are difficult to get to by public transport.

Possible Weekend Synod Meeting Formats

15. The committee noted that a 5 day ordinary session of the Synod, meeting which meets from 3.15 to 9.30 pm each day with a break for dinner of 1¼ hours, meets in total for 25 hours. Having regard to the responses to the questionnaire it suggested the following formats for weekend Synod meetings -

Format 1

Friday 9 am (starting with the Synod service) to 9.30 pm (2 meal breaks)

Saturday 9 am to 9.30 pm (2 meal breaks)

Repeat 2 weeks later

Total meeting hours exclusive of meal breaks - 42.5 hours.

Format 2

Friday 1pm (starting with the Synod service) to 9.30 pm

Saturday 9am to 9.30 pm (2 meal breaks)

Tuesday 3.15 to 9.30 pm

Wednesday 3.15 to 9.30 pm

Total meeting hours exclusive of meal breaks - 25 hours.

Format 3

Friday 1 pm to 9.30 pm (starting with the Synod service)

Saturday 9am to 9.30 pm (2 meal breaks)

following Friday 3.15 to 9.30 pm

following Saturday 9am to 9.30 pm (2 meal breaks)

Total meeting hours exclusive of meal breaks - 30 hours.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Weekend Synod Meetings

16. The advantages of weekend Synod meetings are -
- (a) more meeting hours are potentially available without requiring more meeting days;
 - (b) there would be time for Synod members to have fellowship together;
 - (c) lay members would not have to take so much time off work to attend the Synod;
 - (d) a wider range of people could offer themselves as lay representatives, with less clash with business hours;
 - (e) representatives would be relaxed and fresher because attendance is not required after a full day at work; and
 - (f) more time would be available for gospel matters.
17. The disadvantages of weekend Synod meetings are -
- (a) loss of the only full day each week with the family (2 Saturdays in 1 month may be particularly onerous);
 - (b) fatigue of members during a full day of meeting;
 - (c) a 4 day meeting may require changes to the Standing Orders, particularly with regard to ordinances, questions and notices of motion;
 - (d) increased venue and staffing costs over the weekend;
 - (e) a split Synod meeting is disruptive and interrupts the flow of business; and
 - (f) it may not be possible to answer some questions over a weekend.

Alternates for Ministers and Parochial Representatives

18. There were different views as to the proposal for alternates. Only 36% of clergy responses favour the appointment of an assistant minister as an alternate, while the lay responses were evenly divided on the question. Both clergy and laity are strongly in favour of the parish council being able to appoint an alternate for a parochial representative who is unable to attend.

Standing Committee's Responses

19. On balance, the Standing Committee thinks that weekend Synod meetings should be trialled. Its preference is as set out in Format 3 but with total meeting hours, exclusive of meal breaks, to be 25 hours.

20. The Synod Membership Ordinance 1995 Amendment Ordinance 1999 has been prepared for the Synod's consideration to allow for a minister to appoint an assistant minister as an alternate and for an alternate to be appointed for a parochial representative who is unable to attend the meetings of the Synod.

Recommendation

21. Standing Committee recommends to the Synod that it trial weekend Synod meetings in 2001 on the following basis -

- (a) meeting on Friday afternoon and evening and all day on the next day (Saturday);
- (b) repeating this a week later;
- (c) total meeting time, exclusive of meals breaks, to be 25 hours.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

MARK PAYNE
Diocesan Secretary

16 August 1999