

General Synod of the Church of England

A meeting of the House of Laity was held in the Assembly Hall, Church House on 7 February 2011.

THE CHAIR *Dr Philip Giddings (Oxford)* took the Chair at 1.45 p.m.

The Chair led the House in prayer, remembering Dr Christina Baxter whose father had recently died.

The Chair: Welcome to the first substantive meeting of the House of Laity in this quinquennium. It is my pleasure to introduce to you the members of your Standing Committee, beginning with our newly elected Vice-Chair, Tim Hind. (*Applause*) The Committee comprises Chair and Vice-Chair and those elected by the House to the Appointments Committee and the Business Committee, so I will ask the three members elected to the Appointments Committee to stand in their places, so that we know who they are: Susan Cooper, Sarah Finch and Aiden Hargreaves-Smith. (*Applause*) They are complemented by the three members of the Business Committee: Anne Foreman, Sue Johns and Gerry O'Brien, whom we also welcome. (*Applause*) Finally, as it were to complete the set, we welcome the two elected members of the Archbishops' Council: Christina Rees and Paul Boyd-Lee. (*Applause*)

All of us on the Standing Committee ask for your prayers for us in our work to facilitate the work of the House in the coming five years and also for the work of the Synod.

THE CHAIR *Mr Tim Hind (Bath and Wells)* took the Chair at 1.50 p.m.

Co-option of Dr Priscilla Chadwick to the House (HL(11)1)

The Chair: Before I invite Philip to speak on this item, I would like us all to congratulate him on his election to this post. (*Applause*)

Dr Philip Giddings: I beg to move:

‘That Dr Priscilla Chadwick be co-opted to the House of Laity in accordance with the provisions of Rule 42(2) of the Church Representation Rules’.

Members of the House have the paper which has been circulated for this item and which includes most of the background. I am sure we are all aware of the important work which is being done by the Dioceses Commission to ensure that the Church of England has, in its diocesan arrangements, structures fit for the task of mission and pastoral care in the first part of the 21st century. It is our privilege as a Church to have available to us someone of the calibre of Dr Chadwick to serve us in the important capacity of chairing the work of the Dioceses Commission.

It is a misfortune, in a sense, that our statutory rules and arrangements create a situation into which we are so tightly boxed as to how we can proceed at this moment with the chairmanship. Those of us who served on the Synod which put through the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure need to hold up their hands for having missed this particular piece of nonsense (if I may put it that way, with apologies to the Legal Adviser) in that Measure, and I am sure the House will want to see that point being looked at.

However, we are where we are, and we need as a Church to ensure that the work of the Dioceses Commission can go forward, and go forward with as much continuity as possible.

I am aware that this House has been very jealous, in the proper sense, of its position as the House which represents the laity of the Church of England and does so by means of election. I am acutely aware of that because I have, from where you are sitting, made the point myself on a number of occasions when the issue of co-option or other routes of getting people into the Synod has been addressed, and it is right that the House is jealous of that position. You may be asking yourselves why, in this situation, Dr Chadwick did not stand for election, as the rest of us did, last summer.

There are two answers to that question. One is a general one, that if the chair of the Dioceses Commission is an elected member of this Synod the chair will come from a

particular diocese, and that may prove, at best, inconvenient and, at worst, a considerable problem in the work of the Commission, should that turn out to be a diocese whose structures and geography need to be addressed. So there is a general point there about its being inappropriate, for the role, for an elected member. The second point is that, in Dr Chadwick's particular case, she had moved dioceses and did not consider it was appropriate anyway to offer herself, so soon after moving into a diocese, for election.

So the only route that is available to us, given the present legislation and the desire which, as far as I am aware, everybody recognizes, that the chair of the Dioceses Commission should be a layperson, is for the House of Laity to be invited to co-opt Dr Chadwick once again to its membership. I am moving that we do that, on behalf of the House of Laity Standing Committee.

I am aware that some members are concerned about the possibility that a co-opted member's vote might make a crucial difference to the outcome of debates on some very controversial issues, particularly those which require special majorities. I have been in touch with Dr Chadwick about this, and she has told me that her practice is not to vote on particularly controversial issues. This can be clearly seen from her voting record. So I can confirm, for example, that Dr Chadwick either did not vote or registered abstentions on votes on women bishops. Dr Chadwick has also authorized me to say that it is her intention to maintain her practice of not voting on particularly controversial issues, including specifically Article 7 or Article 8 business, which requires special majorities.

Those assurances should help us in our desire to defend the elected role of this House as the representatives of the laity, playing our proper part in the governance of the Church of England, and I hope that members will receive those assurances from Dr Chadwick in the spirit in which they are given. With those assurances I am very willing to propose the motion in my name, on behalf of the Standing Committee, confident that to co-opt Dr Chadwick to this House is in the best interests of the Church, of the General Synod and of the House of Laity.

Mr Justin Brett (Chichester): It grieves me to have to do this because Dr Giddings is someone for whom I have the utmost respect, but I am afraid that in this case I think he is wrong.

I have two things initially to say about this proposed co-option. The first is that I consider it to be an abuse of process and the second is that I consider it to show a very cynical attitude on the part of what one might call the centre of the Church towards the Synod in general and this House in particular.

It is clear, from the constitution of the Dioceses Commission as laid down in the Measure which brought it to life, that the chair of the Commission is to be a member of Synod. That is the sequence: they are a member of Synod first and then they are the chair of the Dioceses Commission. In other words, they are elected to Synod first and then they are the chairman. There is a reason as well why it cannot be a co-opted member and why that person also cannot be on Archbishops' Council or anything else, and that is to guarantee some degree of independence. It does not seem terribly much like that from where I am standing at the moment.

We have, as a House of Laity, some democratic legitimacy: not a great deal but we do have some. If we make this co-option, we may as well negate that. What on earth is the point of asking people in the Church as a whole to vote for us to do a particular job if the first thing we do is chuck that authority over? The whole point is that, despite what Dr Giddings has said, Dr Chadwick could have stood for election. She did not. Whether or not she may talk about coming from a particular diocese, she is actually going to come from a diocese anyway, is she not, because everybody does because they are geographical. I am sorry, but that is something of a specious argument. If we add to that the fact that she did not consider herself suitable to stand for Synod, she is going to be a member of this Synod that she does not feel herself suitable to stand for; I am not terribly impressed by that either. Then again, we are told that her practice will be not to vote on contentious issues. I remind the House again that she will be a member of this Synod; yet she comes as a member determined not to vote.

We are in danger of encountering something in this quinquennium which we encountered in the last one and which I think that we as a Synod and as a House of Laity did not deal with particularly well: the tendency to be used as a doormat by people who are quite convinced that they know what is best for the Church without needing to consult anybody else first. If we agree to this co-option we are putting aside any of the authority that was vested in us by the people who voted for us.

I am sorry that this may look like a slap in the face for Dr Chadwick; it is not intended to be. It is not about her at all; it is about something far more important. If we are to have any legitimacy as a Synod and as a House of Laity we put a marker down, and we put it down now, by voting against this.

Mr Gerry O'Brien (Rochester): I want to preface my remarks by saying that I am speaking in general terms. I am not speaking about Dr Chadwick in particular.

I think our Chairman has made a very persuasive case as to why in this instance we might consider making a co-option, but I would like to remind the House of Laity that our predecessors in times past have been very reluctant to co-opt anybody for any reason. I can recall cases where Members of Parliament were to be co-opted and we turned them down. The reason we do this is because we are primarily a representative House. Each one of us has some legitimacy to be here because we have been elected by a quota of electors from our dioceses to speak on their behalf on various issues. We have different points of view but behind each of us are 40, 50, 60, 70 electors, members of deanery synods, who have voted for us to be here to speak when they are not here to speak for themselves; and every time we co-opt anybody we are diminishing the representative nature of our Synod.

I am a little concerned that there are a number of posts for which membership of this Synod is a prerequisite. Our chairman is chair of Mission and Public Affairs. He has retained that position by virtue of being elected by the electorate in Oxford diocese to return him to this Synod. Had he not been re-elected or had he not stood for re-election, we would be looking for a new chair of Mission and Public Affairs. We are now saying that, when it comes to the Dioceses Commission, it should not be incumbent on that person who was a member of Synod to secure re-election along

with everybody else. I think as a matter of principle this House ought to put down a marker, to say that the way into this House is by democratic election and by achieving a quota of votes in our dioceses.

I hope that we will put that marker down today, to say that this House is a representative House, that we represent the laity of the Church of England and that anything which is done to diminish our representative nature is to be deplored.

Mr Malcolm Halliday (Bradford): In my previous existence I was, for 25 years, diocesan secretary in Bradford and presiding officer in elections. I took the view that there might be a need to co-opt mid-term in order to bring in a particular expertise; but my advice was always that when the normal elections came up a person who had been co-opted should throw themselves at the mercy of the electorate. I hold to that in this case as well, and I agree with the two previous speakers.

There is one specific question that I have about the paperwork, a piece of information about Dr Chadwick's Church existence. We have two sides of A4 setting out her distinguished professional and educational experience but there is no indication whatsoever as to what her involvement is at parochial level and what her experience is in parochial church councils, et cetera. I would be interested to learn that, as the Dioceses Commission is involved in reorganizing the Church of England to better mission, and mission happens at parochial level.

Canon Peter Bruinvels (Guildford): In 1985 I was one of four MPs who were elected to Synod in our own right. At that time there was a move for Liberal Democrats and Labour to be put forward as co-opted members, and that was turned down. As a general rule co-options are not a good thing because, as we say, exceptions do not make good law. However, in this particular case I do think we have a very worthy candidate in Dr Chadwick. In 2008 I was privileged to propose her from the floor to be co-opted then, and I can say at the moment that she still is an outstanding person. She is offering continuity when we have a vice-chairman, Richard Seed, who has retired from Synod and effectively, as we know, at the moment Dr Chadwick is without a seat.

It is a bizarre situation that we had the Synod dissolved in the summer and yet we now have to wait until February for continuity of the work, and we already have a very good paper before us.

The Dioceses Commission needs someone with experience, someone who is prepared to stand up, who should be independent. It is a matter of regret that no one was found within the makings of the House of Laity actually to be the chair, but Dr Chadwick came to the rescue; she has shown that the Dioceses Commission now has teeth; she is a doer; she has superb credentials for the role. She has been independent so far and she has been neutral; there seemed to be no hint of conflict in what she is doing. I believe she is in the Southwark diocese – it says so in the papers – and if there was a Southwark plan then no doubt she would hand it over to Professor Michael Clarke, the newly elected vice-chairman.

There is one thing that does worry me, and I congratulate both you, Chairman, and Dr Giddings, as Vice-Chairman and Chairman respectively, and that was when Dr Giddings said that the person, assuming it is Dr Chadwick, will not be able to vote particularly on Article 7 or 8 business or on controversial issues such as women bishops. If someone is a full member of Synod, they ought to be allowed to vote. I have no idea how she would vote on such matters, but it seems to me that either we endorse her and say that she has the right to take a full place in Synod or we do not. That is not good news.

We have ongoing work with the Dioceses Commission at the moment. There is plenty going on and a number of dioceses are getting very twitchy about what is going to happen. We must ensure that this situation does not happen again so that, whoever is in the post, it has to continue until the next quinquennium; we also need to look very carefully at our working principles. It could have been that someone from Archbishops' Council could have perhaps been the candidate for the Dioceses Commission; it could have been someone from the Business Committee or the Standing Committee (and congratulations to all those who have been elected). I do not think we are devoid of talent but, if we do go down this route, I must request that this is really the one exception. We must not have other co-options coming. I see in the paperwork that we have potential for four more. We work well together, we trust each

other, and therefore if this does go ahead it should be a one-off. However, in Dr Chadwick's position as a member of the Board of Education, Church Universities Advisory Group, and the first woman chairman of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference, she deserves our support.

Mr Adrian Greenwood (Southwark): I have to say that I was not going to speak in this debate because I thought it was a pretty straightforward item. However, the content of the first three speeches made me think that I ought to make a contribution.

The most exciting debate on the agenda for this group of sessions, in my view, is GS 1815, memorable because that was the date of the battle of Waterloo. Towards the end of that document is a very interesting slogan which, if I am given the opportunity tomorrow afternoon, I will repeat endlessly: the laity are being challenged, like the whole Church, to turn the rhetoric about the role of the laity into reality, in order to galvanize and, I think, save our Church. So here we have an opportunity as a House of Laity to conduct some business about co-opting a single person with eminent qualifications to the House so that she can continue her excellent work as chair of the Dioceses Commission, and what do we get? We get a series of pharisaical speeches about very minute points.

I think we need to recognize that we are being watched. We are the House of Laity and we are being given an enormous opportunity this week to turn the rhetoric of lay involvement into reality. I suggest that the way *not* to do that is to vote this down. The way to do it is to support the recommendation and get on with translating this fantastic opportunity of seizing the Church from the clerical domination of the past 50 years into actually being the Church: the priesthood of believers and the ministry of all. That is what is really important. I hope members will support this co-option.

Mrs Christina Rees (St Albans): Just a little bit of background material on this because some things have been said about Dr Chadwick which I think need a little clarifying. She did not seek this post; she was invited to do it. It is perhaps slightly out of the ordinary and perhaps there are some people sitting in this room right now who are thinking, 'If only I'd been asked. I am eminently suitable and I would have agreed to

do it'. However, she commended herself particularly to the Appointments Committee and then she also commended herself to the Archbishops.

I think there is an absolutely irrefutable logic in what Justin Brett has said, and I hear the important points made by Gerry O'Brien, but in this instance I am certainly minded to go with what Peter Bruinvels has said he is going to do. Yes, it is an exception but she has proved her worth; she is particularly suited for this; and I am very minded to vote for her co-option. I too regret that she does not feel (and this is a self-denying ordinance; she has not been asked to do this) that, as a co-opted member, she can vote in this House or in Synod in general, but I would like to see her continue with the work that she has started, bearing in mind this is an exception and perhaps then paying some attention to how we allow these things to happen. I do think Dr Chadwick is very well suited for this, and I support her.

Mr Philip French (Rochester): I wish to speak both in admiration of Dr Chadwick and against this proposition. Dr Chadwick is as ill-served by what we are now doing, it seems to me, as this House could be. She has served this House, the Synod and the Church with distinction, with competence, with energy and with grace. We have the evidence of that in a thoughtful and thorough document which we are to debate later in this group of sessions. Yet the points that Justin Brett and others have made have great force. It is the normal practice of this House to follow the words that we write in the Measures and not to co-opt without quite exceptionally good reasons.

It seems to me that we are trying to solve the wrong problem here. Classically, what one does in these circumstances is to have an elected chair of such a body and as it were a chief executive selected for his or her particular competence, experience, capability and track record. There must surely be a better solution than the one before us, which invites us to throw out the good Dr Chadwick with the bathwater.

I will be voting against this proposition but I would ask members to think whether we could not do it a better way.

Mr John Freeman (Chester): On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I beg to move:

‘That the question be now put’.

This motion was put and carried.

Dr Philip Giddings, in reply: May I say to the House that we are in a very difficult situation, and I very much agree with what Philip French said at the beginning of his speech: there is no one who is worse used by this situation than Dr Chadwick herself. We should not be here, but we are, and that is the situation we have to try to resolve.

The issue before us is the difference between that which is normal and that which is genuinely exceptional, and I believe that this is a genuinely exceptional circumstance in which the best way forward is to co-opt, even though this House, quite rightly – and I spoke in the debate to which Peter Bruinvels referred earlier – normally does not go for co-options, particularly in a case where people could stand for election.

I undertake to the House to bring to the Standing Committee the proposal that the issue of co-option, the way of filling these sorts of post, should be examined so that, hopefully in the life of this General Synod, we can address the question of finding a better way of achieving what is required.

To address, first, the point that Justin Brett made, the issue here is where the independence is required. The independence that is necessary in the work of the Dioceses Commission is independence – impartiality would be a better word – between dioceses. A person who is elected to this Synod, to this House or the House of Clergy, is elected to represent that diocese and that is what creates the problem with regard to impartiality. This Synod rightly requires that people who lead major pieces of work for the Church are accountable to the Synod. That means having some way of participating in our proceedings.

I need to emphasize that, if we co-opt her, Dr Chadwick is not debarred from exercising her right to vote. What I have reported to you is her intention to continue her practice, which is not unique to her, of not voting on controversial issues of a particular kind.

The question was raised by Mr Halliday about Dr Chadwick's involvement at parochial level. I do not know whether she has been involved in PCCs, but it is clear from her CV, which is in front of you, that she has extensive involvement with Church schools, and if that has not brought her into engagement with parochial life I would be very surprised indeed; so I think we can be assured that she is well versed in the ways and the culture of the Church of England.

The question the House has to address is whether these particular circumstances are sufficiently unusual to persuade us to set aside our normal practice, and our desire rightly to defend the role of this House as the democratically elected representation of the laity of the Church of England, to solve this particular problem; and then, as I undertake, to go on to look at what must be a better way of dealing with this sort of question than where we are today. It is on that basis that I invite the House to give its agreement, by a majority of two-thirds, to the motion standing in my name.

The motion was put and The Chair ordered a division of the House, with the following result:

<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstentions</i>
82	44	5

The motion was therefore lost.

THE CHAIR *Dr Philip Giddings (Oxford)* resumed the Chair at 2.25 p.m.

Any Other Business

The Chair: We have five minutes to go before we need to vacate this room in order to have it prepared for the meeting of the full Synod. I would need a very great deal of convincing that we should move on to any other item, and in the absence of anyone standing I declare the meeting of this House to be closed.