

A Survival Guide
to
General Synod

Third Edition (2015)

Foreword

The Business Committee is indebted to Sue Johns, who retired from General Synod in July 2015, for revising this 'Synod Survival Guide' based on her own experience of being a new member and her long service on General Synod.

Sue herself says:

"When I was first elected to General Synod in 1990 I was unbelievably naïve. Despite having a wonderful mentor, it took me the best part of the first five years to truly understand what Synod was all about and how, having understood all its intricacies, I could best serve and use its function to see the church pass constructive legislation.."

The Business Committee hopes this survival guide will help you short circuit some of the confusion you can feel as a new member of Synod. It is not meant to be ever so serious, though the underlying message clearly is!

The Business Committee

TOPICS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Accommodation

In York everyone stays on campus so it's more or less stress free. Hold that thought if you find the two meetings in London difficult to survive before you get there! London can be a daunting, impersonal place. The challenge to keep within your budget is a tricky one so you may want to find a family member or friend to give you a roof over your head but the joy of finding a hotel is that it does encourage you to meet new people and make new friendships. At the end of a long day in the debating chamber, you can feel pretty exhausted and so witty conversation with someone who hasn't been there is tough. Ultimately, you will find what works for you but try out a few options.

Agenda

This is the 'go to' document when you're trying to sort out what you need and what's happening when. You will receive an agenda in the electronic circulation and hard copies will be available on arrival at Synod. The hard copy is distinctive in that it has pink pages. It lists everything you ever thought you might need to know about the Group of sessions and some you didn't begin to imagine you would. It has the timings of the sessions and worship. It lists the order of the business for each day, including the strict 'not later than' rubrics that help keep us on the straight and narrow. It lists deadlines for submissions, legislative and liturgical items as well as setting out, in full, all the Diocesan Synod and Private Members' Motions. You can (try to) plan your coffee and tea breaks with the help of the Agenda but watch out... it doesn't always run exactly as planned and things do get moved around. So, if you're taking a break, keep one eye and ear on the screens and loudspeakers.

Amendments

These can be a mixed blessing. They can rescue an out-of-date motion (typically a Diocesan Synod Motion that has had to wait years to reach the head of the queue). They can strengthen an unspecific motion. They can tweak words and they can also be a more or less certain ticket to speak in a debate. They can sometimes be annoying; a classic example was when we were debating a change in a Standing Order that was seeking to increase the number of endorsements required to submit an amendment. We had eight amendments that steadily decreased the number from ten to two. Tedious! However, there is no option but to spend time doing just that. Why is this important? Unnecessary amendments are time consuming so please use them sparingly and wisely; your fellow members will appreciate it.

If you feel strongly enough that a motion could be improved by an amendment then seek the advice of senior members from your Diocese and/or the staff at Church House. The Agenda will set out the deadline for submission so make sure you have got two Synodical friends lined up to endorse your amendment. Once the deadline has passed, the staff put all the amendments that have been received into a logical order – sometimes according to where the amendments 'strike the text', sometimes in order

of how radical they are in their approach to the motion. Here's a frivolous, but simple, example of how they might be ordered:

"That this Synod request bacon and eggs for breakfast."

Amendment 1 – "leave out all the words after "request" and insert "a continental breakfast"

Amendment 2 – after "bacon" insert ", sausage".

There are a few "can't do's" with amendments. You can't negate the motion by inserting the word 'not'.

Regardless of deadlines, if the Chair gives permission, you can propose an amendment from the floor of the chamber during the debate. However, this rarely happens since it can easily give rise to confusion over what's proposed!

Appointments Committee

This is the body that advises and appoints people to the various committees and councils etc. that need members to do the work. When you become a member of Synod, you will be asked to fill in a questionnaire that will be used to form a database of people's expertise and interests. You may be reluctant to 'pigeonhole' yourself in terms of your church tradition but the more information you offer on this form, the easier it becomes for the Appointments Committee to do their job to ensure a range of expertise and balance.

Archbishops' Council

The Archbishops' Council is made up of *ex officio*, elected and appointed members (and the two Archbishops, of course), and you will encounter this through elections very early on in your journey on Synod. The Clergy elect two Prolocutors (one by the clergy in the Province of York, one by the clergy in the Province of Canterbury) and the House of Laity elects a Chair and Vice-Chair and they all become *ex officio* members of the Archbishops' Council. The House of Bishops, the House of Clergy and the House of Laity also elect two members each to the Archbishops' Council. All of these elections take place within the first couple of months of the Synod being elected. In some cases there are separate hustings where candidates for these roles can introduce themselves to the electorate. It's tough to decide who to vote for when you're very new and don't know anyone, so it may help to chat to people who have been around a little longer.

Article 7 / Article 8 business

Business which falls within Article 7 and Article 8 of the Synod's Constitution and for which there are very special procedures; the former involving reference to the House of Bishops, and, potentially, the Convocations and House of Laity as well; the latter to Diocesan Synods.

Boards, Councils, Committees, Commissions of the Synod and the Archbishops' Council

This is where most of the work takes place! If we were to try and do all the work we need to as a whole Synod it would probably be a full-time job. All these bodies will want to share what they do with you so they will invite you to presentations or fringe meetings. However, if you are really keen to find out more then do approach them yourself. They are populated by elected and appointed members. There is absolutely no reason why new members shouldn't stand for these elected places so if you think you can serve – go for it! Don't wait to be asked. Oh, and by the way, your expenses to attend meetings are paid.

Breaks

Officially Synod doesn't get many! One for lunch in London and two - lunch and dinner - in York. There is free tea and coffee available during the morning and afternoon. However, if you need a break during the business – take one. You will soon see how people leave at the end of a speech or between items of business, nodding to the Chair as they exit and enter. There is a simple rule of courtesy which is to not wander around while someone is speaking. If you hear the Division Bell while you are out then that's a signal to head back to the debating chamber – pronto! – as a vote (division) is about to take place.

Business Committee

The Committee has the responsibility for ordering the business of Synod and setting the Agenda. The Chair and nine members are elected by Synod and the Archbishops' Council appoints two of its number to it. Accountable to Synod; as the Agenda is debated every time we meet. It is also undertaking a programme to change the way the Synod works together.

Chairs (not the furniture)

Chairing a debate is TOUGH! Some make it look deceptively easy but trying to choreograph the speeches to balance content, gender, north/south and church tradition whilst spotting people who have said they want to speak as well as ones who suddenly pop up is an unenviable task. Be grateful that there are people prepared to do this and be gentle with and generous to them.

The convention for addressing them is: Mister or Madam Chair or, in the case of an Archbishop, Your Grace.

Don't wink or wave at them to attract their attention if you want to speak: stand quietly and wait patiently to be called.

One last tip, you will get a list of who is chairing what at the beginning of each group of sessions. If you are keen to speak in a particular debate there is nothing to stop you 'chatting up' the appropriate person. But be warned! – they don't all like it.

Church Commissioners

The Church Commissioners manage a diversified investment portfolio from which they provide financial support for the Church, mainly through support for parish ministry and mission in low income dioceses, supporting bishops' ministry, cathedrals and historic clergy pensions. There are 33 Commissioners; some elected by the three Houses of Synod. You'll often see the First and/or Third Church Estates Commissioner answering Questions or presenting reports.

Church House

Hidden behind Westminster Abbey, Church House is a collection of meeting rooms and offices that is the base for our London meetings. It's a bit of a maze but you only really need to know where a few rooms/facilities are. Starting from the bottom up, the cloakroom is in the Basement (along with some toilets). On the Ground Floor there are two entrances/exits – one into Dean's Yard and the other onto Great Smith Street. Up some wide, sweeping stairs, the first floor has the key rooms – the Chapel, the Assembly Hall (debates happen here), the Hoare Memorial Hall (refreshments found here), the Bishop Partridge Hall (Information Desk and papers found here) and more toilets. There are also meeting rooms on the first floor. Finally, up another flight of stairs you will find the Gallery, for public, press and member use.

Church Tradition

You think you're simply "Church of England" but oh! no... we are a rainbow church whose spectrum is wide. From Conservative Evangelical to Anglo-Catholics with every hue in between. Think about where you place yourself on the spectrum; you'll need that for the Appointments Committee questionnaire. But it is important for Synod members to work across traditions and listen carefully and respectfully to people with different perspectives. The group work that takes place at Synod is aimed at encouraging this kind of interaction.

Cloakrooms

You will find somewhere to leave coats and luggage in the basement at Church House. At York University you have your own room for the most part, until you have to check out. There is little room to hang coats in the Concourse in the Central Hall at York, but there is rarely any need for coats anyway. Luggage can be left at the Porter's Lodge in the College where you're staying.

Clothes

At York, the dress code is casual; occasionally smart casual (e.g. for the Minster service on the Sunday morning). It's often very hot (and airless) in the Central Hall where the debates take place so t-shirts and shorts are often seen, which makes it tricky guessing who belongs to which House! Some of the college accommodation is a bit of a trek so do come prepared with jackets and brollies in case it turns cold and wet.

In London things tend to be more formal with clergy often wearing their dog-collars and the laity in business attire. However, it can get very hot and stuffy in the Assembly Hall so layers are great, especially as the air con can over compensate and cool it down too much.

Complaints

Let's hope you won't need to refer to this at all, but if you do have cause to complain go first to the staff on the Information Desk. If they can't help resolve the matter then they may suggest you write to the Clerk to the Synod or the Chair of the Business Committee (who may be contacted via the Clerk). There are specific procedures for any concerns regarding fringe meetings (see below).

Contingency Business

Occasionally, business is dealt with more quickly than expected and a gap opens up in the Agenda. We fill that with what's called Contingency Business, business we only take if there's time for it. It will be set out in the Report of the Business Committee and the Agenda but, as it can happen at any time, you might want to be prepared by having the papers with you at all times.

Convocations

The ancient provincial synods of the Provinces of Canterbury and York. They are both made up of an Upper and Lower House (Bishops and Clergy respectively). Clergy members of Synod are Proctors in Convocation. The Convocations meet occasionally, mostly to discuss particular items of liturgical and legislative business falling within Article 7 or matters specifically relating to the clergy. Both Convocations elect a Prolocutor – a kind of chair or spokesperson.

Dean of the Arches

An ancient title/role; the most senior ecclesiastical judge who is an *ex officio* member of Synod.

Division Bell

Most votes are taken by a show of hands. However, a loud ringing sound activated in the refreshment room and elsewhere – should signal a mass movement back to the debating chamber. It will be rung for two reasons:

- one House is not quorate (not enough members present in the chamber); or
- a vote will be taking place in two minutes.

Elections

Places on Boards, Committees, Councils etc. are mostly filled through elections. Candidates are required to be nominated to stand and must get their nomination proposed and seconded by fellow Synod members. They also have to provide a mini-

CV. The voting papers will carry all that information and your photo. The mini-CV has a 100 word limit so you need to be focused and concise; bullet points are useful. When drafting the mini-CV, restrict yourself to specific relevant skills, not all of your amazing talents. All elections use the STV system and most take place in the first six months after the Synod has been elected.

Electronic Voting

This is a simple system and it saves a lot of time! The system is easy to use. You have a “chip and PIN” card to use with a handset you collect as you go into the chamber. When a counted vote is required – and there are several reasons why – first; insert the card (chip first) into the machine. Your options appear on the screen but it’s usually 1 = for, 2 = against and 3 = abstain. Choose one and then remove your card.

If the handset you’ve chosen doesn’t work, don’t panic! It only takes about 20 seconds to register your vote so just wait until your neighbour has finished and borrow theirs. As soon as you choose a number from 1 – 3 it’s logged so you don’t have to keep your card in place throughout the vote.

‘Ex Officio’

Most Synod members are either elected by their dioceses (as in the House of Clergy or Laity) or are on Synod because they are members of the House of Bishops. There are a few Synod members who are entitled to membership because of an official role that they hold for one of the National Church Institutions. This includes members of the Archbishops’ Council (see above), the Pensions Board, the Church Commissioners and the Second Church Estates Commissioner (an MP who speaks on Church matters in the House of Commons and who is therefore entitled to speak and vote on Synod).

Expenses

There are allowances which are explained more in the official Guide to Synod (provided separately in your welcome pack and also on the Synod website). For your attendance at Synod, you claim your expenses from your Diocese. For attendance at a committee meeting, you will be given a claim form by staff at Church House. However, the one thing you need to know is you have to keep all your receipts to attach to your claim as debit/credit card receipts are not enough.

Filing

The good news is it just got easier! Well, in terms of physical storage space that is but only if you don’t opt to receive paper copies of all the papers. From the start of this quinquennium, the default position will be for you to receive your papers electronically (though you can, if you prefer, ask for hard copies). Given that iCloud storage is costly in terms of its carbon footprint; why not just buy a memory stick and keep all your Synod papers on it. If you opt for the hard copies, I suggest you clear a space for a new filing cabinet so that you can keep them all in order and to hand for future

reference. Or neither of the above – just download them from the Synod website whenever you need to.

Food

Again, let's get the easy one out of the way first. All your meals and snacks, tea and coffee will be provided for in York. If you want to go on a diet don't start it in early July.

In London, tea and coffee is provided free of charge but that is it. There are cold snacks and/or hot lunches that can be purchased in the Hoare Memorial Hall. There are also snack bars, coffee shops and local supermarkets within very easy walking distance of Church House. Remember to keep your receipts to go with your expenses claim.

Fringe meetings

Fringe meetings are arranged by Synod members themselves or by various other bodies mainly to provide members with an opportunity to hear about a new initiative or give feedback or learn about something that isn't on the Synod's Agenda. The content and participants of Synod fringe meetings are the responsibility of the organisers. All those participating in Synod fringe meetings (and also displays) are required to abide by the Business Committee's Policy on Fringe Meetings and Displays which is available on the General Synod website at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2246136/policy%20for%20displays%20and%20fringe%20meetings.docx>

It is highly unlikely at the beginning of your journey on Synod, but if you would like to book a room for a fringe meeting, an email is sent round by Church House staff in advance explaining what you need to do. Circulation of details about fringe meetings is electronic and each individual one will carry details of when it will take place and where; what they will provide either free of charge or for a small contribution; who will be speaking and how you get your name on the attendance list. Beware, however! There are often multiple events taking place at the same time so before you commit to one make sure that there isn't another lurking that you would prefer to go to.

The Information Desk always has a list of what fringe meetings are happening when and where so if you lose the details you can ask the staff. Don't expect them to know which meeting you've decided to go to, though, because they don't always have that information!

Galleries

There are two main groups of people who sit in the gallery – the public and the press and ne'er the twain shall meet! Their allotted areas are clearly marked though some members of the public seem to wander into Synod areas on occasions. In London it's so much easier to keep a close eye on who is sitting where and, with a large number of additional seats, many Synod members actively choose to sit in the gallery as the debate is easily heard (though you can't participate in the debate or vote from there). The public are not entitled to applaud speeches –though they don't always stick to this!

The press gallery is definitely more distinct and has times of heightened activity – usually when we’re debating something they deem to be ‘juicy’! Again we have some strong protocols with the press, in particular the cameras. However, they do love to snap Synod members playing Solitaire or Candy Crush during the business (or worship...) or falling asleep during an item of business. You have been warned! (And the images also sometimes end up on Twitter). Try to look alert and business-like at all times, as with the webcast and social media those in the chamber are **always** on display.

Groups of sessions

Essentially, these are the meetings of the General Synod. Sometimes called the York Synod or the London Synod (or the February Synod), for example; but more properly the July group of sessions or the February group of sessions. A session is the proceedings of the Synod on a particular day; and a session is divided into a morning, an afternoon and (in York only) an evening sitting.

Group work

Synod has increasingly been making use of small groups to help Synod members discuss issues and prepare for debates in a more informal space away from the debating chamber. Topics at recent Synods have ranged from the environment and social policy to the Reform and Renewal programme and the legislation on Women in the Episcopate. Members of groups are drawn from across Synod, mixing up dioceses and traditions and are an excellent opportunity to meet, talk and pray with Synod members from other regions and perspectives whom you might not otherwise know. The Business Committee tries to schedule group work in a purposeful way so that it supports and complements the more formal business of Synod.

Houses

There are three – Bishops, Clergy and Laity. Feel sorry for the diocesan bishops – they have no choice about membership, it goes with the role. However, they do have a carefully constructed rota to avoid someone asking whether the House of Bishop’s is quorate. (More of that later, but it may well mean that none of the Houses is, but the Bishops are most vulnerable as it’s easy to spot if there isn’t the number needed.) The House also includes some elected suffragan bishops.

The House of Bishops meets regularly throughout the year and you will get a short note telling you what they discussed. The other Houses meet infrequently and usually around a group of sessions. The House of Bishops has greater influence in relation to some kinds of business.

The other two Houses are just as self-explanatory, but they don’t, on the whole, have the same kind of powers that the House of Bishops exercises.

Legislation

One of the primary functions of Synod is Legislation! The General Synod is a

legislative assembly and its Measures have the same force and effect as an Act of Parliament.

For those of us that don't have a legal bone or gene in our body it's a challenge! You will find a flow chart diagram of this process in the Member Resources material on the Synod website. This will also be provided in the induction material given to new members on the PEN drive.

Lights

In front of the Chair and also replicated on each lectern (where you will speak from if called) are three lights – green, amber and red. The green one comes on as you start to speak; it changes to amber when you are into the final minute of your allotted time and red when your time has ended. If you see the red light bring your speech to a rapid but coherent ending. So start winding up when the amber light comes on, not the red one. Don't push your luck by trying to carry on after the red light has come on or the Chair (and occasionally Synod) will lose patience and you could well lose any sympathy there might have been for the point you were trying to make. If you do ride the red light you'll hear a loud bell which really is the signal to shut up and sit down!

List of Members

This lists everyone who is a member of Synod. Name, address, email address and their Synod number – very important! You will receive a copy on arrival and then there will be frequent updates circulated. It would be perfect for an online only record as that way it could always be up to date... who knows, that might happen!

Liturgy

Another important function of Synod is to debate and approve changes to the Church's Liturgy.

Maiden Speech

Being a member of Synod is not just about speaking so it is possible you will never make a speech – voting is the most important thing you will do. If you do wish to speak then you may want to observe a few debates to get a sense of the protocol. Some people wait years to speak and others make a Maiden Speech at their first group of sessions – it may simply depend on when Synod debates a subject you are both passionate and knowledgeable about! Chairs often give preference to Maiden Speakers (you tick a box on the blue Request to Speak form) so make sure you deploy it wisely. There are microphones and lecterns so you can put your notes (or your iPad) down on the lectern. (By the way, it's a good idea to bring a back-up hard copy just in case your device seizes up...)

Microphones

There are two available in London and York. If you know you want to speak, it is advisable to try and get a seat near one as that saves time and speeds up the

business. There is an engineer who will control the sound levels so speak naturally but don't hold your notes (paper or electronic) between your mouth and the microphone or you may hear cries of "Can't hear"! The Chair calls two people at a time so when the first is speaking, the second can prepare by moving to a lectern.

Mini-CV

If or when you do feel called to stand for election to one of the many Boards, Councils., Committees etc. you will be asked to write a short piece in no more than 100 words that summarises why you are the ideal candidate for the role. Don't churn out the same one for every election, 100 words is not a lot so you need to craft each one to fit the post and show off your relevant expertise.

Mobile phones

Make sure yours is on silent or vibrate mode or even turned off! Increasingly, people Tweet from the floor of Synod which allows those not there to get a real flavour of the debate. Some use Facebook or blogs for more structured comments. However, to avoid the wrath of your fellow members just keep your phone and other electronic equipment on silent.

Motions

Apart from the motions that are sponsored by Boards, Committees, Councils etc., there are two ways to get a motion onto Synod's Agenda. The first way is via a Diocesan Synod Motion (DSM). The second is by putting up a Private Members' Motion which attracts a sufficient number of signatures for the Business Committee to consider scheduling it for debate.

A Diocesan Synod Motion (DSM) is brought forward by the diocese that sponsored it. An example would be a parish that felt strongly about an issue – let's say they felt that solar panels should be fitted to every church roof or it would be helpful to have a specific prayer for the FA Cup Final. They pass a motion at their PCC, then the local deanery is persuaded and finally the Diocesan Synod agrees that it's the way to go. It comes to General Synod as it was passed in the diocese and is then able to be scheduled for debate. DSMs are carried over from one quinquennium to the next so can get a little out of date.

Private Members Motions (PMMs) are altogether different. They are sponsored by an individual member of Synod, again invariably about something they feel passionate about. Let's say you felt that all clergy should wear a clerical shirt for the liturgical season instead of their own choice, black, grey, pale blue, floral. Your PMM is then placed in a prominent position and people can sign up to show their support for it to be debated. (That might not mean they agree with it, but they want to 'air the matter'.) Members can also sign up electronically between groups of sessions. If you fail to get 100 signatures within three groups of sessions your PMM slips below the horizon but if you do attract the required 100 signatures - and who wouldn't sign up for liturgically dressed clergy?! – it can then be scheduled by the Business Committee for debate. Others can overtake you as you wait though, so don't rest on your laurels and you may

want to lobby (gently, of course) people to sign it. PMMs lapse at the end of the quinquennium so, even if you've got your 100 signatures but it hasn't yet been debated, it never will be!!

DSMs and PMMs are often listed at the front of the Agenda as contingency business.

Name

You might often hear this shouted out at the start of a speech when the speaker, in a fit of enthusiasm, launches into their speech and forgets to say who they are! Whenever you address the Synod (unless you are assisting with worship) start with your name, diocese and Synod number.

Notice Papers

These are mostly, but not always, primrose yellow and numbered sequentially, starting at 1. They give notice (hence the name) of anything you need to know about to help you during the group of sessions. For example, the list of Chairs for each debate, security arrangements (orange in colour), financial implications of the business (pale green) and then the amendments that have been notified. You will find hard copies in racks by the entrances to the debating chamber and also by the Information Desk. Electronic copies are not colour coded

Order Papers

More a mustard yellow, these are produced every day and sometimes twice a day depending on the amount of business that we are discussing and the number of amendments tabled. They marshal (list in order – hence the name!) all the business set out in the Agenda with the addition of any amendments etc, into one convenient document. They can be found in the same places as the Notice Papers.

Out of Order

Occasionally someone oversteps the mark in a debate and contravenes the 'rules' we observe. In that situation, the Chair rings a bell and the speaker is expected to stop and sit down immediately. Most often experienced when a speaker strays off the point or in the debate on the Agenda/Business Committee report or during Question Time when someone launches into a speech rather than making a quick point or asking a question.

Passes

As soon as you get elected to Synod you will be asked to send in a photograph. This will adorn your pass for the next five years and will also be used to compile a master book of photos so that those chairing and assisting the Chair of a debate can try and spot you in the crowd. You must wear your pass at all times as security is extremely tight.

Point of Order

You can interrupt a debate between speeches by making a “point of order”. These are usually procedural motions - eg to enable Synod to close a particular debate by moving to the vote or, if it’s going really awry, to adjourn the debate/move to next business/suspend the sitting.

The motion for ‘the Closure’ of a debate is the most frequent and you’ll often hear a Chair indicating that ‘they will welcome a motion for the Closure’ – ie in effect they think the debate has gone as far as it can. This is the moment when a member can leap up at the end of a speech and shout (loudly, so as to be heard above the applause) “Point of Order!” and then move the motion for the Closure of the debate.

Whatever the implications of the Point of Order – and only one will be taken at a time – the legal officer who sits with the Chair will advise the Chair and they will guide Synod through the process, explaining what will happen depending on which way the vote goes. People sometimes shout “Point of Order!” when it is no such thing, but they are seeking information to explain something and don’t think they’ll be called to speak. The Chair may be sympathetic on the odd occasion, but this is definitely not recommended!

Press

Especially at York when we are all residential, the Press are everywhere. They can be distinguished by the colour of their pass (bright blue) but they have access to the teas and coffees and eat in the college dining rooms alongside members. It’s always a good idea to look around you before you launch into saying something you may not want reported!!

Prolocutor

Pronounced pro-low-cute-er, there are two, one for each Province, Canterbury and York. They are elected by the clergy who have been elected to the General Synod in each Province to represent them in various places. They are joint Chairs of the House of Clergy and they sit on the platform in London and by the Archbishops in York. They are *ex officio* members of the Archbishops’ Council amongst other things.

Questions

Questions are an opportunity to raise an issue in a way that puts the reply on the public record. You are allowed to ask up to two questions each time the Synod meets. The deadline to submit questions is published in the Agenda. They are gathered together in order and the answers printed below them in a small booklet. It’s worth trying to flick through them in advance in case a topic interests you.

A question may be posed to a Board, Council, Committee and even the House of Bishops. You can quiz the Church Commissioners or the Pensions Board or the Secretary General. It’s a time to delve a little deeper and hold those with responsibility to account. Likewise, it can be a chance to elicit detailed information. You must ask

for fact, not opinion. So you can't ask if the Church of England should support vegetarianism, but you could ask if the House of Bishops has considered the issue of vegetarianism recently.

Question Time in Synod is therefore an opportunity to ask Supplementary Questions of those answering questions. The questioner has the right to ask a supplementary question first. It must be relevant to the original question and it must be a question! (You'd be surprised!) It is at the discretion of the Chair how many "supplementaries" are allowed per original question but it is usually two so if you have something you want to ask get ready to stand up and shout "supplementary". Those asking questions are required to go to one of the podiums to put their question, so if you are planning to do so, it is a good idea to position yourself near one of the podiums during Question Time.

As always, the best way to learn the ropes is to observe it a couple of times. More detailed information about forming and answering questions is given in Question Time: A Guide for Members in the General Synod Guide.

Quinquennium

A five-year period, the period for which you have been elected to the General Synod. You may also hear the term 'triennium' – a three-year period over which, for example, the Church Commissioners and Archbishops' Council plan spending to support dioceses.

Reading – as in 'what to read'

Unless you have no other outside interest in your life it is highly unlikely you will be able to read absolutely everything that is sent to you. Everyone develops their own technique. The best place to start is with the Agenda and the Business Committee's Report; if Synod were a play then these would together make the script and director's instructions. They will help you put everything into some sort of order and it helps to develop a series of folders for the electronic papers as well as the hard copies if you choose to receive them like that.

You won't be the only one cramming on the train to London or York. However, these are some essential tips that might assist you. With a large, complex report always read the recommendations and see if there are any that particularly stand out for you. Follow them up by reading that section in depth. Set aside the GS Misc papers that are often circulated as nice to read at some point but not vital for this group of sessions – they are often not time critical. Remember, you are not expected to be an expert on everything, though there will be people on Synod who do have the specific expertise you lack, so be prepared to listen and learn.

Reporting back to dioceses

Probably the single most important task you have outside groups of sessions! Your diocese may have a carefully designed plan to make sure that each deanery has a General Synod rep that is linked to them (and probably a couple of others too). Find a way that suits you but that connects with the folks in the pews back home. Make it

real! Today there are so many more immediate ways to communicate with those back home. A daily blog or a publicised diary mean people can live the experience vicariously with you and then chat about it when they next see you. Many Synod members report their activities via Twitter or Facebook. There is an official record of the business the Synod has done each day, but that can be seen as rather dry... because it is simply a factual summary!

Report of Proceedings

The debates at Synod are recorded verbatim in the same way that Hansard reports the business of Parliament. It's a great tool if you want to research something. Once published as a book, it's now only published online so much easier to search.

Reports

Synod spends a lot of time on reports! That's mostly because it discusses an issue and then asks for a report on progress after X years, so they can have a habit of being self-perpetuating. Major reports are often known by the name of the Chair of the group who produced it. A current example being the "Pilling" report on Human Sexuality. Reports are frequently the subject of a 'Take Note' debate which means pretty much what it says on the tin. (It does not imply acceptance of the contents of the report.) Very occasionally, Synod has not 'taken note' but that does little to stem the controversy. Key reports are invariably followed by a motion that uses the recommendations of the report as its basis.

Report by the Business Committee

This explains how the Agenda was formed and is always one of the first pieces of business that is done each time Synod meets. This debate gives you the chance to ask why a particular item is not on the Agenda or why all the business is "church-y" and doesn't include any current topics or topics of wider social interest. You may only argue why it should be included and not make the speech you would have liked to make if it had been on the Agenda.

Requests to speak

It helps Chairs to structure debates and to get a feel for how much interest there is for speaking in a particular debate if you fill in a Request to Speak form. These are pale blue and available from the Information Desk. Filling in a Request to Speak form does not guarantee that you will be called to speak (though if you are making a Maiden Speech it may do) and you will still need to stand in your place in order to be called, but it gives the Chair a hint as to whether what you want to say will add to the debate.

Seating

The vast majority of seats are for anyone to sit on. In York there are more than necessary but the drawback of having space and a slightly cooler temperature at the top is that it's pretty difficult for people on the platform to see you; so if you know you want to speak or suddenly get the urge to respond to a point move to the lower seating

and leap up with gusto. In London seats are at more of a premium if everyone is present, which is why some choose to sit in the gallery. In both London and York there are seats customarily occupied (though not reserved for!) the Bishops – the first two or three rows at the front. There are seats reserved for the Deaf Church representatives and their interpreters and for the Ecumenical Representatives.

Given that security in both venues is increasingly tight, please be aware that there is no option to leave a bag or something on a seat to save it for later. However, it is highly unlikely that there won't be a seat for you. For the first couple of groups of sessions it's often quite a good idea to sit with a few folks from your diocese or with someone else you know who has been on Synod for a while. They can help you with questions you might have as the business unfolds – not that you should chatter away through the debate! – but if there is a departure from the normal business they can explain why.

Security

Over the last few years the need for Synod to become more security conscious has increased. Security staff are there to ensure everyone's safety, so please do be respectful toward them. Always wear your pass visibly. If you wish to go into the public gallery be prepared to undergo the same degree of checks that the public face.

Speaking

Some people never speak. It's not a crime and it's certainly not something to feel ashamed about. Your most important duty is to listen to the wisdom of the debate and decide how to vote. If you do want to speak fill in a "Request to Speak" form that you can get from the Information Desk and then drop it back off there once you have completed it – they're pretty self-explanatory.

Getting called to speak can be quite an 'art form' in itself. Don't wave at the Chair or those who sit either side to help them. It isn't 'done'. Do leap up with purpose and try and get a seat that's in easy view of the platform. There are some people who will try and speak more often than others and occasionally, because of the topic or a procedural motion, they succeed but generally speaking the Chairs put a huge amount of effort into preparing for the debate and trying to ensure that it is not always the same people who are called to speak. The Chairs also attempt to balance the flow of the debate by choosing people who are offering different views and new experiences. So think carefully about how you might make your Request to Speak form stand out from the crowd.

Often, especially when the topic for debate is controversial the number of people hoping to speak is often 3 or 5 times greater than the time allowed. So if you are preparing a speech make it very flexible. If you feel confident enough, set it out in bullet points as reminders for what you want to say. Prioritise your points so that you can axe chunks as the speech limit shrinks from 5 to 3 to even 1 minute! Initially, most people do read a prepared text but as you build up your confidence try and ditch the script; Synod warms to that greater sense of spontaneity. Finally, if you're good at it then don't be afraid to slip in the odd little joke but don't do it for the sake of it or every time – it can be counter-productive. If you've heard your point be made by fellow

members, please have the good grace to think whether you actually need to continue to stand and make exactly the same point as someone else. Nobody will thank you for repetition.

Special Agendas

There are four of them: Special Agenda I (Legislative Business); Special Agenda II (Liturgical Business); Special Agenda III (Private Members' Motions); and Special Agenda IV (Diocesan Synod Motions). They are all found at the back of the Agenda and the business in them is incorporated into the main Agenda and the Order Paper for each sitting.

Standing Orders

Standing Orders ('SOs') are essentially the rules of engagement for Synod's business. They are pretty complex - or can appear to be - but often that is because the wording is formal. If you have a mind for detail and like legalese then these are the stuff of dreams! They are constantly being revised and reviewed in order to make Synod's ways of working more effective. So, for example, when we moved to electronic voting the SOs had to be tweaked to allow it but still permit the old way just in case the technology failed. They're quite sophisticated in that sense. One last tip – you don't have to remember them all, but you might want to keep them to hand!

STV (Single Transferable Vote)

You were elected to serve through this voting system and it is the system that all 'internal' elections use. Use all your votes as often as possible. If you don't know the candidates then look at their mini-CVs and also take account of who proposes and seconds them as that can also be an indicator of how they are thought of.

Suggestions

More recently, the Business Committee has been undertaking a programme of work that is aimed at making Synod more effective in the way it works. The Committee is always open to suggestions on how the business might be streamlined and/or enhanced. Fresh eyes are a great source of ideas for how things might be done in a 'smarter' way and your eyes will only be fresh for a short while. So, if you do have any suggestions do let the Synod staff know or write to the Business Committee.

'Take Note' motions

Motions which simply invite the Synod to take note of a report, but not to do anything further with it. These motions can't be amended, only voted against if you think the Synod should not take note. They are a way for the Synod to debate a topic without having to take or express a view.

Voting

The vast majority of voting is done as a whole Synod by a show of hands. Simple motions on amendments for example, are generally speedily dealt with by those voting in favour and those against raising their hand in the air at the appropriate time. For some business, typically legislation and liturgy, there are Standing Orders that state that the vote has to be taken by Houses and/or that a particular majority is needed, most often a two-thirds majority. The electronic voting system then comes into its own. For some motions, where the topic is of national interest for example, the Chair will ask for a division of the whole Synod; again the electronic system is used for speed and accuracy. These figures can then be used to demonstrate the strength of feeling. The other time that the Chair will order an electronic vote is when the show of hands is too close to call.

With some of the more controversial motions where opinion is divided and the vote hangs in the balance, a member can use Standing Orders to request a division by Houses. If 25 other people stand to support it then the vote has to be taken that way. When an eagle-eyed Synod member has spotted that the voting in one House is very marginal calling for a division by houses can make a significant difference!

Worship

Worshipping together underpins what we do and who we are. We pray together and we celebrate the Eucharist in the debating chamber. Quite a powerful image that; taking the sacraments together in the same place where debates and feelings can run high. Group work in randomly selected groups of about 20 aims to deepen and support the work of Synod through worship, discussion and Bible Study. It's a great way to get to know other members. There is also a continuous praying presence at Synod which exists to pray for Synod's work during the time that it meets. The Presidents appoint a Synod Chaplain to oversee Synod worship, so please do feel free to drop him a line (via the Clerk) if you would like to help out by participating in worship, prayer or music at Synod.

York

The University of York is the venue which hosts the Synod when it meets once a year in the Northern Province. The campus is quite large and you will end up doing a lot of walking between the Central Hall (where Synod meets), the meetings spaces, the dining halls and your accommodation which will be dotted around the campus. The days spent at York are longer than those in London as Synod also meets after dinner. The York meeting is also more social as people are all staying in one place and there is more opportunity for meeting and socialising over mealtimes, fringe meetings and in the bar areas!

We hope that you will enjoy being a member of Synod and that this Survival Guide will prove helpful!

The Business Committee