

GENERAL SYNOD**DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION:
NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND****Background Paper from the Diocese of Wakefield**

The motion that Wakefield Diocesan Synod is asking General Synod to debate is:

‘That this Synod ask the House of Bishops to facilitate a theologically informed national debate about the organisational shape of the Church we are called to be in order to best equip the parishes to serve the people of our land.’

Overview

1. Our main point of concern is the lack of and therefore need for a proper national debate on the nature of the Church of England as ‘the church for the nation’. The establishment of the Dioceses’ Commission and its ability to make changes is a sensible development in the life of the Church of England. However, we have growing concerns about the impact of the Commission’s work on the church locally and nationally. At present the initiative seems to be entirely in the hands of the Dioceses Commission itself. We believe that there really does need to be a full debate within the Church of England about the sort of church we envisage for the foreseeable future. This should include a proper consideration of the theological, ecclesiological and sociological principles which relate to the nature of episcopacy and dioceses. It is part of a wider need to ‘re-imagine’ ministry at the parish level too.
2. We need to have an understanding of how we expect episcopacy to be focused and delivered in dioceses across the Church of England. This should then lead to greater clarity about how dioceses should be structured in relation to the communities which they serve. We are clear that a piecemeal approach geographically is woefully inadequate. Fewer, larger dioceses are not necessarily the answer. Indeed it may be that we should be looking for smaller Episcopal units with more regionally shared administration and support. Changes in the structure of dioceses must be the result of a reflective consideration of all the issues involved across the national church as a whole.
3. In West Yorkshire, the Diocese of Leeds (West Yorkshire and the Dales) Scheme focuses on just three dioceses, (leaving Sheffield and York to a later date) and failing to propose a strategy for the county as a whole. Neither does it present a vision for the Church of England more widely. The result of this will be a fragmented approach across the country. The lack of clear principles and vision underpinning the Scheme made it very difficult to engage in serious debate and constructive amendments. Signals given in this part of the country will be picked up throughout the Church of England and have long-term consequences for the shape of our Church.

The Wakefield Diocesan Synod debate

4. This matter was debated at the Wakefield Diocesan Synod on 27th June, 2012 when, among others, the following points were raised:
 - Issues such as the relationship between the diocesan and suffragan bishops and the role of cathedrals needs to be addressed at a national level before the Dioceses Commission moves on to pursue any further schemes.
 - There should be clear theological thinking behind any proposals to re-organise dioceses and this needs to be debated at a national level by the whole Church.
 - Formal reports in the past have thought that dioceses should be smaller. If this is rejected why does this necessarily mean that dioceses should then be bigger? A debate is needed to find out what the Church of England wants for its dioceses.
 - Part of the debate by the whole church should be to consider the practical difficulties of having very large dioceses, eg travelling times to and from whole diocese meetings.
 - The Church of England needs an informed debate about what it means to be a national church, the principles being applied to any future re-organisations and the impact of such re-organisations on the Church as a whole.

Conclusion

5. For these reasons, we believe that there should be a national debate. In the long term, this will strengthen the work of the Dioceses Commission and serve our Church more effectively in its task of mission and ministry.

**Wakefield Diocesan Synod
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