

GENERAL SYNOD

WAKEFIELD DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION: BACKGROUND NOTE BY THE DIOCESES COMMISSION

1. The context for the Wakefield diocese's motion was the recent Bradford, Ripon & Leeds and Wakefield Reorganisation Scheme from the Dioceses Commission, which the General Synod approved in July 2013. Following Synodical approval, the new Diocese of Leeds (West Yorkshire and the Dales) became a legal reality on 20 April 2014. For the reasons alluded to in GS 1928A, the majority of the Wakefield Diocesan Synod – which in March 2013 withheld its consent to the Dioceses Commission's scheme – would have preferred a national debate on diocesan reorganisation prior to a particular scheme being put forward.

2. The Commission's scheme had been the first such scheme utilising the relatively new provisions of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 which had given the Commission proactive powers to advance diocesan reorganisation schemes following an in-depth review of its powers by a Commission headed by Professor Peter Toyne. Professor Toyne in the foreword to the Report – *A Measure for Measures: In mission and ministry [GS1528]*¹ – set out its general thinking as follows:

“It is ‘the past’ that has produced our present map of Dioceses – a map that bears little resemblance to the reality of the present distribution, structure or mobility of population. Having considered this situation carefully, we concluded that there is a prima facie case for taking a fresh look at the distribution of Dioceses and their boundaries. To that end, one of our main recommendations is that a new Dioceses Commission ‘with teeth’ should be given the brief to keep under active review the diocesan structure of the Church of England, and to make specific proposals for reorganisation to the General Synod.”²

3. The Toyne Commission had been assisted in its deliberations by the Revd Dr Malcolm Brown as its theological consultant. In his essay appended to the Report, he noted that, in Anglican ecclesiology, the local church was manifested in the diocese and the parish, and that the theology of *episcopate* bound the body together. But Dr Brown went on to say that ‘...the aim of the Review Group has been to enable diocesan structures to be flexible enough to enable bishops to discharge their episcopal ministry imaginatively and faithfully.’³

4. The General Synod duly debated the recommendations of the Toyne Report in February 2004. Following a welcoming and positive debate, the Synod passed a motion approving the report's recommendations. The resultant legislation was finally approved by the General Synod, following further debate, in February 2007. S.3(1) of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007 gives to the Dioceses Commission ‘...the duty to keep under review the...diocesan structure of the Church of England and in particular...the size, boundaries and number of dioceses.’

¹ The Review of the Dioceses, Pastoral and related Measures Published in 2004

² Ibid, p.x.

³ *Whose Church? Which Culture?: Discerning the Missionary Structures for Tomorrow* – appendix 1 to the Toyne Report by the Revd Dr Malcolm Brown, p.124 of GS 1528.

5. The Commission first met in September 2008 and considered a paper from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, setting the scene for its work. The paper commented on the Commission's duty of review as follows:

“In a small number of cases reviewing boundaries will necessarily open up questions over the future number of dioceses in that area. Subject to that however, it must be doubtful whether a wide-ranging review of the number and distribution of dioceses will be the best way forward, at least in the early years of the Commission.

It may be that, rather than starting by a theoretical review of the optimum size and distribution of dioceses across the country, the Commission will want to explore specifically what will best serve the future mission of the Church in one or more areas where present arrangements are clearly problematic and then see whether some wider lessons can be drawn.”⁴

6. It was very much with the Archbishops' advice in mind that the Commission set about its task, and in 2009, following consultation with diocesan bishops, it initiated a review of the Yorkshire dioceses, the outcome of which was its Reorganisation Scheme bringing together the Dioceses of Bradford, Ripon & Leeds and Wakefield.
7. In its 2009 Annual Report the Commission set out its belief that ‘...the optimum number and size of dioceses should be determined according to local circumstances rather than ‘a one size fits all’ national approach...’⁵. Indeed, the experience of the Yorkshire Scheme, with a round of consultations that involved over 80 meetings in the dioceses concerned and debate in all the diocesan synods, as well General Synod's own consideration of the scheme in July 2013, has reinforced the Commission's view. Given that there is as yet only experience of one scheme under the 2007 Measure, it seems very soon to be considering a national debate about the organisational shape of the Church.
8. Reorganisation schemes are one of the tools at the Commission's disposal in carrying out its statutory responsibilities for episcopal oversight. Its overriding objective is to assist the Church's mission; and to ensure that the Church's organisational structures serve this end. With this in mind, it has also been promoting joint diocesan working across boundaries, and taking care to ensure that proposals to it from diocesan bishops to fill vacant suffragan sees can be justified on mission grounds and include proper role descriptions. In October 2014 it sponsored a symposium on episcopal oversight to explore these issues further and received contributions with other key players in this area. Further details can be found in our Annual Report (GS Misc 1095).

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(signed)
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Chair

⁴ The Dioceses Commission's Annual Report for 2008 [GS Misc 920], para 16. The full text of the Archbishops' paper can be read at: [http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1793051/dc\(08\)6.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1793051/dc(08)6.pdf)

⁵ Dioceses Commission's Report for 2008 [GS Misc 950], para 22