

GENERAL SYNOD

LIVERPOOL DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION ON
COMMON WORSHIP BAPTISM PROVISION

BACKGROUND NOTE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

1. The Baptism and Confirmation rites were introduced into the Synod in July 1995 as the first element of the new Common Worship provision. They were authorized in November 1997 for use from Easter 1998, and were published in an interim edition.
2. Unlike other parts of the Common Worship provision that were considered later, the Baptism and Confirmation services were not used experimentally in parishes before authorization. During the synodical revision process, some parts of the service which the Liturgical Commission had intended to be optional were made mandatory.
3. The Baptism service in particular attracted critical comment from the outset. In response to this, the Synod authorized amendments in 2000. These
 - permitted use of the form of the Decision in *The Alternative Service Book 1980* 'where there are strong pastoral reasons' (*Christian Initiation*, p. 168),
 - permitted the minister, 'if pastoral circumstances require' to paraphrase the Commission, use 'similar words', or include its content in the sermon (*Christian Initiation*, p. 72, p. 101: note 15), and
 - made several mandatory parts of the service optional.

The Baptism service as amended was included in the main Common Worship volume published in 2000.

4. In 2005 the Synod made further amendments. These permitted:
 - deferring the Commission until the beginning of the Sending Out, and
 - use of the ASB form of the Decision other Initiation services than Baptism.
5. All of these amendments were included in the definitive edition, *Common Worship: Christian Initiation*, which was published in 2006.
6. It will be noted that the 2000 and 2005 amendments modified the original provision in respect of the Decision and the Commission. No change was made in respect of the Prayer over the Water (the third element of the rite mentioned in the Liverpool Diocesan Synod motion). The Holy Baptism service already included, in addition to the Prayer over the Water in the main text (*Christian Initiation*, p. 69), three seasonal Prayers over the Water (pp. 152, 158, 162-3). Each of the four prayers is available for use with and without congregational responses. The seasonal forms 'may be used on any

occasion to meet pastoral circumstances' (p. 150). In considering whether a further alternative Prayer over the Water is required for use in certain pastoral circumstances, the Synod will therefore need to consider not just the suitability of the Prayer in the main service for those circumstances but also that of the three existing alternatives.

7. Criticism of the Baptism service has continued despite the amendments made in 2000 and 2005. It is not clear whether such criticism primarily reflects a lack of awareness of those amendments and/or insufficient attention to the terms of rubrics and notes which permit the omission or paraphrasing of material or reflects a view that, when eventually the time comes to review the Common Worship provision a more extensive revision or indeed replacement of the Christian Initiation services may be needed..
8. The House of Bishops is clear that now is not the time to embark on the long and complex process involved in such a revision or replacement. Any revision of the Baptism and Confirmation services would inevitably raise theological issues with which the Church of England has in the past not found it easy to grapple, not least during the process of devising liturgical texts.
9. More generally, the House does not believe that the time has yet come to begin a further major round of liturgical revision. The widespread hope was and remains that the authorization of Common Worship has ushered in a season of stability in the Church of England's liturgical provision.
10. The publication of *Common Worship: Festivals* in 2008 marked the conclusion of a process of liturgical revision that had begun more than forty years earlier with the authorization of the Series One services. The Series One, Two and Three services of the 1960s and 1970s and *The Alternative Service Book 1980* were all authorized for limited periods, which in some cases were extended (the ASB initially for ten years). The Common Worship services, by contrast, and now also the Series One Marriage and Burial Services, are all authorized for use 'until further resolution of the Synod'.
11. What the Liverpool Diocesan Synod Motion proposes is not a replacement or revision of the Common Worship Christian Initiation services but the provision of three additional texts, as alternatives to
 - the two existing forms of the Decision,
 - the four existing forms of the Prayer over the Water, and
 - the Commission.

As noted above, the first two of these are mandatory parts of the service, whereas in respect of the third use of an authorized text is not mandatory. If the Synod were to pass the Liverpool Diocesan Synod Motion, the House would be content to request the Liturgical Commission to prepare the drafts for the three supplementary texts involved.

12. The Financial Comment will indicate the likely cost of this work in terms of staff time and members' expenses. It is relevant to note here that the former full-time post of Secretary of the Liturgical Commission and Worship

Development Officer has recently been replaced by a half-time post. In consequence, any staff time devoted to work on liturgical texts would mean that less was available to support in other ways an improvement of the quality of worship offered in the Church of England.

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