

GENERAL SYNOD**PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION: CANON B8****Background Paper from The Revd Christopher Hobbs**

1. Recently a journalist read the upcoming agenda for General Synod, and tried to make a big deal about my Private Member's Motion concerning the wearing of robes. Passing this PMM is not a charter for shell suits, or jaffa cakes and coke. If we change Canon B8, it won't change Canon C27 which describes clergy being dressed as a sign and mark of holy calling and ministry.
2. The wearing of robes is a long tradition in our church. The motion that I am bringing before the synod is not arguing for robes to be abolished. It is quite a modest proposal that where the bishop and the church council agree, robes need not be worn.
3. Some synod members may not be aware that there are Church of England churches where robes are not worn, or not worn frequently. At Morning and Evening Prayer robes are meant to be worn 'normally'. But at communion services and occasional offices canon law says robes shall be worn.
4. Why would some clergy not wear robes? Perhaps they are part of a Fresh Expression, meeting in a school, or around café style tables. Perhaps it is a Sunday night in the summer and it is just a few people, and the people are gathered in a circle, and robes are just too stifling. For some clergy it may be that they consider the awesomeness and splendour of God is most properly conveyed through spoken word; or that the clergy and the laity are together the people of God; or that in the New Testament we are all priests, some are elders, and apart from modesty no particular clothing is prescribed. Most commonly robes and vestments are dispensed with because they are seen in some contexts as a barrier in communicating the gospel.
5. Some churches haven't worn robes frequently for years. You could say it is traditional not to wear them in those churches! I came to England more than thirty years ago, and in some of the churches I went to then, robes were not worn. Those churches are still flourishing and many seeing people come to Christian faith for the first time, in fact they are probably amongst the best attended churches in the Diocese of London. Church of England churches differ from one another in all sorts of respects: which songs are sung, which hymn books used, style of robes or vestments, length of sermons and prayers, which Bible translation is read, which form of liturgy is used and so on. Common Worship provides for creativity and flexibility, and local decision making, in Anglican worship. We are not a uniform Church, but celebrate Anglican liturgical variety.
6. This PMM asks the Business Committee to bring draft revised canons to Synod, at which point there would be further opportunity to debate the question. Readers also might like clarification about their attire.
7. Michael Perham Bishop of Gloucester is at the forefront. Since January 2006 his policy has been that 'where a minister and PCC have thought through the matter

carefully, I am content that the requirements of the canon should be set aside in furtherance of the church's mission in the cultural context in which it is set'. (See the Diocesan Website, Bishop's Occasional Paper 004, *The Use of Robes and Vestments*) I also commend the Grove booklet W197 that I have already given to members of synod, *Clergy Robes and Mission Priorities* by Andrew Atherstone. I still have some copies, available on request.

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London 153