

GENERAL SYNOD – GUIDE TO SYNODICAL PROCEDURE

This Guide has been produced by the Synod Team of the Central Secretariat of the Archbishops' Council to provide an accessible guide to Synod procedure, and will be made available in the Synod Members' Resources online, in the General Synod area of the Church of England website [here](#) ("the Synod website"). We would welcome feedback on its style and content. You are welcome to send further queries to synod@churchofengland.org. Queries which may be of wider interest will be added (suitably anonymised) to the document.

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Introduction

1. The General Synod's procedure is set out in its Standing Orders, which are available [here](#). This Guide is intended to set out the key points of procedure with which members of the General Synod need to be familiar. Related documents are the Guide to the General Synod, which explains administrative and housekeeping matters, and the [Guide to Legislative Procedure](#), which explains the process for making legislation in more detail.
2. The General Synod was created by the Synodical Government Measure 1969 as the successor body to the Church Assembly which had existed since 1919. The General Synod consists of the Convocations of Canterbury and York (the ancient provincial synods of the two provinces), joined together in a House of Bishops and a House of Clergy, with a House of Laity added to them. The General Synod's functions are set out in Article 6 of its Constitution (this is Appendix D to the Standing Orders). Each of the Houses and Convocations has its own standing orders, which are in the annexes to the Standing Orders.
3. The Synod's business falls into five broad categories:
 - a) Legislative Business (SO 47-77): The Synod approves Measures (which, on receiving the Royal Assent, have the force and effect of Acts of Parliament), Canons and subordinate legislation (orders, regulations and instruments).
 - b) Liturgical Business (SO 78-90): The Synod also authorises forms of service for use in the Church of England.

- c) Scrutiny: The Synod receives annual reports from the Archbishops' Council and its Audit Committee (SO 106). At each group of sessions members can ask Questions of the central Church bodies (SO 112-117).
- d) Financial Business (SO 108-111): The Synod approves the budget of the Archbishops' Council and the apportionment among the dioceses of the sums to be paid by the dioceses to the Archbishops' Council.
- e) Other Business: The Synod's final function under its Constitution is 'to consider and express their opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest.' Some motions are moved on behalf of central Church bodies, some are sent to the General Synod by diocesan synods (Diocesan Synod Motions – or DSMs – SO 7) and some are moved by individual members of the Synod with the support of other members (Private Members' Motions – or PMMs – SO 6).

What papers and communications can I expect before a group of sessions?

- 4. The Business Committee meets about six weeks before each group of sessions to settle the Agenda. The outline timetable is published online as soon as possible after that, and you will receive an email telling you when that is available.
- 5. The Agenda and papers for the session are usually made available two weeks in advance. All papers for the Synod are made publicly available on the Synod website, and you can also access them via the Synod app . Papers from previous Synods are also available on the Synod website. You will receive an email notifying you once the papers are available on the Synod website and app. There are two main series of papers, all with a unique number: 'GS' is the prefix used for all papers and reports for debate by the Synod, and 'GS Misc.' is used for background papers provided for information, but not normally for debate.
- 6. Hard copies of papers are no longer routinely provided as we seek to reduce costs and carbon footprints. If this poses a particular challenge for you, please contact synod@churchofengland.org

Agenda

- 7. The Synod's Agenda contains a useful summary of the dates and times of meetings, deadlines and email addresses for submitting Questions, amendments etc. as well as listing the business which the Synod will be considering. It is normally divided into five sections:
 - a. Timetable and General Agenda (items numbered from 1);
 - b. Special Agenda I : Legislative Business (Items numbered from 500);
 - c. Special Agenda II : Liturgical Business (Items numbered from 600);
 - d. Special Agenda III : Private Members' Motions;
 - e. Special Agenda IV : Diocesan Synod Motions.

Report from the Business Committee

- 8. At every session there is a report from the Business Committee which contains useful practical information and background notes about particular items of business. You may find it helpful to read this first, to get an overall view of the business for the session, before reading the rest of the papers.

Notice of amendments, following motions etc

9. The General Notes in the Agenda give the deadlines for various types of Synod business, including Questions , [amendments, and following motions](#).
10. Additionally, a separate Notice Paper is included with the Agenda setting out deadlines (where applicable) for specific items of business.
11. Whatever the deadline for giving notice, it is helpful to give as much notice of motions or amendments as possible to enable any difficulties to be identified and resolved. Notice of following motions and amendments should be addressed to the Clerk to the Synod and can be emailed to:
amendments@churchofengland.org.

Notice papers

12. Any corrections to the agenda or papers, and advance notice of following motions and amendments will be available as a Notice Paper, which is available on the app and on the website.

Order papers

13. The order of business for the entire group of sessions is set out in the Agenda, but for each sitting (ie morning and afternoon) the order of business is set out again in full in an Order paper, including any amendments to the business). So the Order paper is the most up-to-date document, and members should have it to hand for each sitting.

Amendments and following motions

14. If you wish to put down an amendment or a following motion to business before the Synod, please email it to amendments@churchofengland.org.
15. For amendments to most business, you will need the support of two other members (this does not apply to amendments to legislative or liturgical business or to amendments to proposed changes to Standing Orders).
16. It is always a good idea to seek advice on the wording of an amendment before completing and submitting a form, so please contact amendments@churchofengland.org if you want help with this. During the group of sessions, please ask at the Information Desk for guidance and the staff will see that a member of staff contacts you. Staff may in any case need to speak to you before accepting the amendment (eg to discuss how an amendment that is out of order might be reworded so that it is in order).

Private Members' Motions (SO 6)

17. Members are welcome to put down a motion for debate. Private Members' Motions (or 'PMMs') usually require support from a minimum of 100 members for the Business Committee to schedule them for debate (see SO6(9)).
18. When we receive notice of a PMM (by post, email to @churchofengland.org synod.pmm@churchofengland.org or through the App) we may wish to speak to you to check the wording and to confirm that it is in order.
19. Once a PMM has been accepted, notice will be given in a Notice Paper and it will subsequently be listed under Special Agenda III at the back of the Agenda for the

next group of sessions. Members can sign up to support a PMM using the Synod app, and all current PMMs will be made available for signature by members (in the Bishop Partridge Hall in Church House in London, or the Concourse in the Central Hall at the University of York).

Who's who in the session

20. There is a raised area at the front of the Assembly Hall and the Central Hall which is called the Platform. The Chair for the item sits in the middle of the Platform. The Chair will be either one of the Presidents or one of the Panel of Chairs (see SO14). The powers and duties of the Chair are set out in SO 15; note in particular SO15(2) - the Chair has the power to finally determine any question of order, business or procedure, and their determination is not open to debate or question.
21. To the Chair's right is an Administrator, who will be the Secretary-General, the Clerk, or a member of the Synod team. The Administrator advises the Chair on which speakers to call, the Closure (see SO 31), speech limits (see SO 22), variations in the order of business, and extending the sitting time (see SO 15(6)). To the Chair's left is a Registrar, who is a lawyer in the Church House Legal Office. The Registrar is in charge of the voting, and advises the Chair on procedural matters. The Registrar also keeps the list of those who have spoken in the debate, and operates the lights which indicate when speakers have one minute left of their permitted time (orange) and when their permitted time has ended (red).

Requests to speak

22. We encourage you to give advance notice if you wish to speak in a debate. Requests to speak are passed on to the Chair of each item of business and help the Chair when preparing for the debate, with a view to securing a balanced debate that properly reflects the range of opinion on the issue.
23. If you are making your maiden speech, ie speaking at Synod for the first time, please do include this in your request to speak. The Chair will try to encourage new members to make their first speeches.
24. You can make a Request to Speak using the Synod app, or by email to requesttospeak@churchofengland.org before a group of sessions or at any time during the group of sessions, right up to the start of the debate itself. It is easiest if you use the app, because this has fields for all the information needed. If you send the request by email, please give your name, Synod number, Diocese or Constituency, the number of the item on which you wish to speak, whether you are for or against the main motion or wish to speak to an amendment, and an indication of the points you wish to make. You can also fill in a hard-copy Request to Speak form, which are printed on pale blue paper and are available from the Information Desk.
25. Please note, however, that anyone who stands to speak in a debate can be called and submitting a Request to Speak in advance does not give you an automatic right to be called. In some debates many more members may wish to speak than it is possible for the Chair to call to in the time available. The choice of speakers is entirely a matter for the Chair.

26. A list is kept of those who have spoken and this is published as a GS Misc after each group of sessions.

Speaking in debates

27. If you wish to speak in a debate, it is a good idea to sit more or less directly in front of the Platform and, in York, in the lower seating levels, otherwise the Chair may have difficulty seeing you.
28. Whether or not you have put in a request to speak, you must (unless special arrangements have been made owing to physical disability) stand in your place if you wish to be called. Anyone who is standing may be called, but precisely who is called to speak is entirely at the discretion of the Chair.
29. Both in London and in York, the Chair calls two or three speakers at the same time, but will indicate the order in which they are to speak. The Chair will indicate how long you may speak for; speeches usually may not exceed five minutes (SO 22(1)), but the Chair may give more or less than that (SO 22(3)); if there are many people wishing to speak, it is not unusual for the limit to be as little as one minute.
30. If you are called to speak, please go to one of the two podiums which are located on either side of the Assembly Hall (in London) and the Central Hall (in York) and speak from there, using the fixed microphone. You should state your name, diocese (or constituency) and Synod number, and then declare any interest you have in the item, before you begin to speak to the item itself. When you speak, address the Chair, not your fellow members.
31. It is customary to listen to speakers in silence (although applause is permitted). There are only two bases on which a member may interrupt when another is speaking:
- a. To make a point of order (SO 19(1)). If you think it is necessary to do this, stand up and call "point of order!" but then wait until the Chair asks you to speak;
 - b. To correct an important misunderstanding of fact concerning that member or what that member has said (SO 19(2)). This requires the permission of both the member speaking and the Chair, so if you think it is necessary to do this, stand up and call "point of explanation!" but again wait until the Chair asks you to speak.
32. A member can speak only once on a question before Synod, unless one of the exceptions in SO 21 applies. If you interrupt another member and your interruption is determined by the Chair not to be a point of order or explanation, you will be deemed to have made a speech on the matter under consideration (SO19(4)).

Indicators

33. Screens in the Assembly Hall in London and the Central Hall in York (and outside the chambers) display the number of the item being debated and the Synod number of the person speaking. There are also coloured lights located on the Platform and on each podium for the guidance of speakers. The green light means that you may speak. The amber light comes on one minute before the end of your

time limit and this is a warning to begin drawing your remarks to a close. The red light comes on to tell you that your time is up and you must stop speaking (though it is acceptable to finish your sentence) and resume your seat.

34. If you continue beyond the red light, the Chair will ring a bell and direct you to stop speaking and resume your seat.

Voting (SOs 36-38)

35. Voting takes place either by a show of hands or by means of a counted vote, which is done electronically using a special handsets. A counted vote can also be conducted by a physical division (see SO 38(7)) but now that would only be done if the electronic system were to fail; if that were to happen, instructions will be given at the time.
36. A counted vote may be either a counted vote of the Whole Synod or a counted vote by Houses. In the case of a counted vote by Houses the question concerned must secure a majority of the votes cast in each of the three Houses in order to be passed (SO 36(3)). There are also some votes by Houses where a two-thirds majority in each House is required (SO36(4)). The Chair will always indicate which sort of vote is being conducted.
37. The handsets for electronic voting are easy to use and instruction will be given. You can register a vote in favour of the motion or against the motion. You may also register an abstention if you wish it to be recorded publicly that you were present but did not vote.
38. Once an electronic counted vote has been concluded, the result of the vote is announced by the Chair. Only the number of votes cast for and against, and abstentions recorded, is given at the end of a vote. A detailed record of the votes cast, showing how each member voted on the question or if they recorded an abstention, will be posted on the Synod website as soon as practicable after the group of sessions, but not during the group of sessions.

Statement of Business Done and Report of Proceedings

39. The 'Business Done' is made available on the Synod website as soon as possible after the group of sessions has closed. It includes a record of motions and amendments carried or lost during a sitting and, if read together with the Agenda and Notice and Order Papers, provides a useful summary of decisions. It normally refers only to the item numbers of amendments without quoting the full text but, where a motion is carried in an amended form, it contains the text of the motion as finally carried.
40. The Report of Proceedings, which is a verbatim account of the proceedings, is published on the Synod website, but this takes longer - a couple of months after each group of sessions is usual.

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