

## **General Synod Members' Code of Conduct – revised December 2017**

### **Introduction**

1. The General Synod recognises that as an organisation occupying a high profile and utilising Church funds, it is essential that the conduct of its members is to the highest professional standards of integrity in order to maintain public trust and confidence.
2. This Code of Conduct sets out the standards of behaviour the Business Committee hopes members would expect of themselves and their colleagues in carrying out their role in the General Synod or its committees/ commissions and proposes some of the rules to be followed in specific circumstances.
3. Members are asked to ensure that they are familiar with the Code of Conduct and that they seek guidance from the Business Committee at an early stage if they are uncertain as to what is asked of them.
4. This is a voluntary code, but all members of the General Synod and members of its committees and commissions are encouraged to make themselves aware of this Code and to make every effort to follow it.
5. In forming this Code of Conduct the Business Committee has drawn on guidance produced by the UK and Scottish Parliaments as well as the Equality Framework endorsed by the Local Government Association.

### **Values**

6. The Business Committee has given much consideration to the values which should underpin our work as the General Synod of the Church of England. In doing so, we looked at a number of sources to help shape these values. In particular, we looked at the Charity Commission's six principles of good governance for a Board<sup>1</sup>, and the Nolan Principles on Standards in Public Life as well as the values statements of some of the Church of England's dioceses.<sup>2</sup>
7. Adapted for the purposes of the Church, the Nolan Principles are as follows:

#### **Christian Values**

Synod members will be prayerful and seek to model and espouse Christlikeness and servanthood, with a commitment to support the Church of England.

#### **Selflessness**

Synod members should take decisions solely in the interest of the Church, as the body of Christ and the wider public. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

#### **Integrity**

Synod members should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

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<sup>1</sup> *Good Governance*, Charity Commission/NCVO (2010)

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.sharedconversations.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SMH-Protocols.pdf>

## **Objectivity**

In carrying out their Synodical role, including making public appointments, , or recommending individuals for Boards or Committees, Synod members should make choices on merit.

## **Accountability**

Synod members are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their role.

## **Openness**

Synod members should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

## **Honesty**

Synod members have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their charitable and other church duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the General Synod and the Church of England.

## **Leadership**

Synod members should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

## **Declarations of Interest**

8. The Sixth Nolan Principle requires holders of public office to declare any private interests relating to their public duties.
9. Declarations of interest are important because they disclose context which may be relevant to the way in which the member's arguments may be heard and evaluated by other members. As the House of Lords Code of Conduct puts it, the practice of declaring a relevant interest '*is necessary in order that [the] audience may form a balanced judgement of the arguments.*'
10. The Committee recognises that the specific rules applicable to a conflict of interest on the part of trustees of charities do not apply to the members of the General Synod, as it is not a charity. However, the Business Committee takes the view, in the light of the factors set out above, that members who contribute to debates or other Synod business should declare any interest which could reveal a conflict of loyalty, or which could otherwise affect other members' ability to form a balanced judgement of their arguments.
11. It therefore requests that Synod members declare relevant interests orally at the beginning of their contribution to any item of business on the Synod's agenda.
12. In particular, members should consider the need to make an oral declaration of the following, when contributing to the Synod's debates:
  - Financial interests, whether direct or indirect, in any matter which is under consideration by the Synod (for example, shareholdings or other financial interests in organisations which may be materially affected by the decisions of the Synod);
  - Personal non-financial interests, including those which arise from membership of, or holding office in Church and other bodies (such as acting as a trustee or office-

holder of any organisation whose affairs are likely to be affected by the decisions that the Synod takes).

13. Members are requested to declare any interest which might reasonably be thought to influence what they say and do and which is relevant to the issue under debate.
14. Members may also consider the need to declare the financial, or personal non-financial, interests of close family members.

### **Speaking at General Synod Meetings**

15. The General Synod is a public debating chamber, and views may be expressed with which others disagree or by which they may be offended. However, in speaking on controversial matters, members are urged to express themselves responsibly, being aware of how their views may be received by others.
16. In particular, members are reminded that they should not use abusive or insulting language, or make personal remarks about other members. Standing Order 18(d) requires the Chair to call a member to order – and empowers them to prevent them from speaking – should they use ‘unbecoming language’.
17. Members are asked to notify fellow members whenever they intend to refer to them in a debate or presentation, other than making passing reference to what they have said on the public record, possibly elsewhere in the debate. All reasonable efforts should be taken to notify the other member as failure to do is discourteous.
18. The Business Committee urges members to use the same level of consideration when commenting on social media on Synod business or on members or their speeches. In general, our advice to members is:

***“If you wouldn’t say it to their face, please do not say it on social media”.***

### **Conduct in the Chamber and Use of Electronic Devices**

19. General Synod papers are now available electronically and may be accessed on a range of devices. For this reason, members may use hand-held electronic devices in the chamber, provided that they cause no disturbance and are not used in such a way as to disrupt proceedings. Similarly, members may choose to use electronic devices in place of paper notes as an aide memoire in debate.
20. All such devices must be in silent mode. The taking of telephone calls or listening to voicemails in the chamber during sessions is prohibited. Electronic devices may not be used to film, take photographs or make audio recordings in or around the chamber during votes.
21. Members are encouraged to give their full attention to a debate and to minimise their use of electronic devices for non-Synod-related business when in the chamber.
22. Food and drink may not be consumed in the Assembly Hall or Synod Chamber, though water is permitted. For more information on what items you are able to bring into the chamber, please refer to the Security Policy.

## **Treatment of National Church Institutions Employees and Contractors**

23. The effectiveness of the Synod turns partly on the way that members and National Church Institutions colleagues work together. Members and all staff have a shared responsibility to behave towards each other in a professional and respectful manner.
24. As employers, the National Church Institutions (NCI's) have a legal duty of care to ensure that all of their staff and contractors are safe and are treated with courtesy, dignity and respect.
25. While relations between members and staff have in the past generally been excellent there have just occasionally been incidents which should not have occurred. We very much hope, therefore, that this guidance helps both members and staff in developing an effective working environment.
26. The Business Committee encourages Synod members to lead by example, including by demonstrating respect for others, valuing diversity and avoiding discriminatory conduct. Equally, members should at any time feel at liberty to contact the Clerk to the Synod or the Secretary General if they believe that a member of the staff team has not treated them with courtesy, dignity and respect.
27. Annex 1 contains a relevant extract from the "Dignity at Work" policy that applies within the NCIs. Contractors providing services to the Synod (e.g. security, catering staff and the staff of the Corporation of Church House and York University) will have similar policies in place.

## **Breaches of the Code of Conduct**

28. As stated at the beginning of the Code, this is a voluntary Code of Conduct. If any member believes that another member has acted in a way that conflicts with this Code of Conduct, they are encouraged in the first instance to speak directly to their brother or sister in Christ. If a member continues to act in such a manner, this should be reported to the Business Committee. If circumstances render this inappropriate, members should report the matter to the Clerk to the Synod or the Secretary General.
29. The Chair of the Business Committee may choose to write to members if they consider that they have breached the Code, with a request (which may be made public) that they cease to do so in future.
30. In commending this Code of Conduct to Synod, it is our hope that it will be something that Synod as a whole can endorse and abide by on a voluntary basis, as a means to good disagreement, better Synodical process and furthering the mission of the Church.

General Synod Business Committee  
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## GENERAL SYNOD

### NCIs Dignity at work policy

**Aim of the NCIs dignity at work policy** – to ensure that all employees:

- are treated with dignity and respect
- are able to work and flourish in an environment free from harassment on the grounds of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or belief, political opinion, marital status, disability, or nationality
- are aware that bullying and harassment are not acceptable and will not be tolerated, and
- understand how to raise concerns about bullying and harassment.

### Summary

The Church is required by God to foster relationships of the utmost integrity, truthfulness and trustworthiness. The National Church Institutions (NCIs) therefore promote equality and believe in the dignity and worth of each individual.

- *Bullying* is behaviour which humiliates or demeans the individual involved and includes persistent criticism and personal abuse, either in public or private,
- *Harassment* is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic under the Equality Act<sup>3</sup> that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. This includes third party harassment where an employer is potentially liable for harassment of employees by third parties who are not employees, where the employer fails to take reasonable steps to prevent it. Harassment is from the perspective of the recipient of the treatment, and may vary between persons.
- *Discrimination may take a number of forms:*
  - *Direct discrimination* - treating people less favourably than others because of an applicable protected characteristic;
  - *Indirect discrimination* - applying a provision, criterion or practice which disadvantages or would disadvantage people who share an applicable protected characteristic (and disadvantages the individual complainant), and which is not justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim;
  - *Associative discrimination* – direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses an applicable protected characteristic.
  - *Perceptive discrimination* – discrimination against an individual because they are mistakenly perceived to possess an applicable protected characteristic.

*Victimisation* – subjecting someone to a detriment because they have done (or the perpetrator believes they have done or may do) a "protected act", e.g. made a formal complaint of discrimination or given evidence in a tribunal case.

The NCIs, like any other employer, will not tolerate abuse, harassment and bullying, discrimination or victimisation – however rare. All complaints of abuse, harassment,

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<sup>3</sup> age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, gender, sexual orientation or religion or belief, including church tradition

bullying, discrimination or victimisation will be taken seriously and thoroughly investigated by trained and experienced investigating officers.

Persons affected by such behaviour may complain informally or formally to their line manager or other appropriate person. Informal complaints can be directly to the perpetrator, verbally or in writing, either directly or via an intermediary.