

Scottish Episcopal Church

A Guide to

The General Synod 2014

Contents

Preface	1
What is the General Synod?	2
Who are the members?	3
The General Synod meeting	4
How to get matters on the Synod agenda	5
The rest of the year	6
Boards and Committees	7
Parking at General Synod 2014	8
General Synod & TISEC Officers	9

Preface

Welcome to this brief introduction to the General Synod – the central governing body of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Inside, you will find an outline of the General Synod's structure and inner workings.

This booklet is not meant to be an official Synod rulebook. You can find that sort of information in the *Code of Canons, the Digest of Resolutions* and the *Synod's Rules of Order*.

Its aim is to lay out some of the thinking behind the organisation and to describe, as simply as possible, how it works.

The General Synod met for the first time on Saturday, 4 December 1982, in St Ninian's Cathedral, Perth. It replaced a longstanding structure which split church government between two bodies – the Provincial Synod and the Representative Church Council.

Under the old structure, the Provincial Synod dealt with doctrine and discipline while the Representative Church Council concentrated on finance, administration and general church policy.

In the early 1980s, the Church decided that it needed a much simpler and smaller body to oversee all areas of church governance. The General Synod was born and brought with it a complete overhaul of church decision-making and structure.

From its first meeting to the present day, its aim has remained the same – to unite the Church in the life and mission entrusted to us by God.

What is the General Synod?

The General Synod acts as the Parliament of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

It is the Church's legislative and deliberative body. Members oversee and direct the work of the Church's boards and committees.

The General Synod meets once a year to vote on two broad types of motion: firstly on formal changes to Canon Law or internal church policy; and secondly on wider issues of national and international concern.

Under the first category, the General Synod could authorise a new baptism service or change the rite for the burial of the dead, or change clergy disciplinary procedure.

Subjects covered by the second, broader type of motion have in the past ranged from the situation in the Middle East to nuclear power stations and the loss of rural post offices.

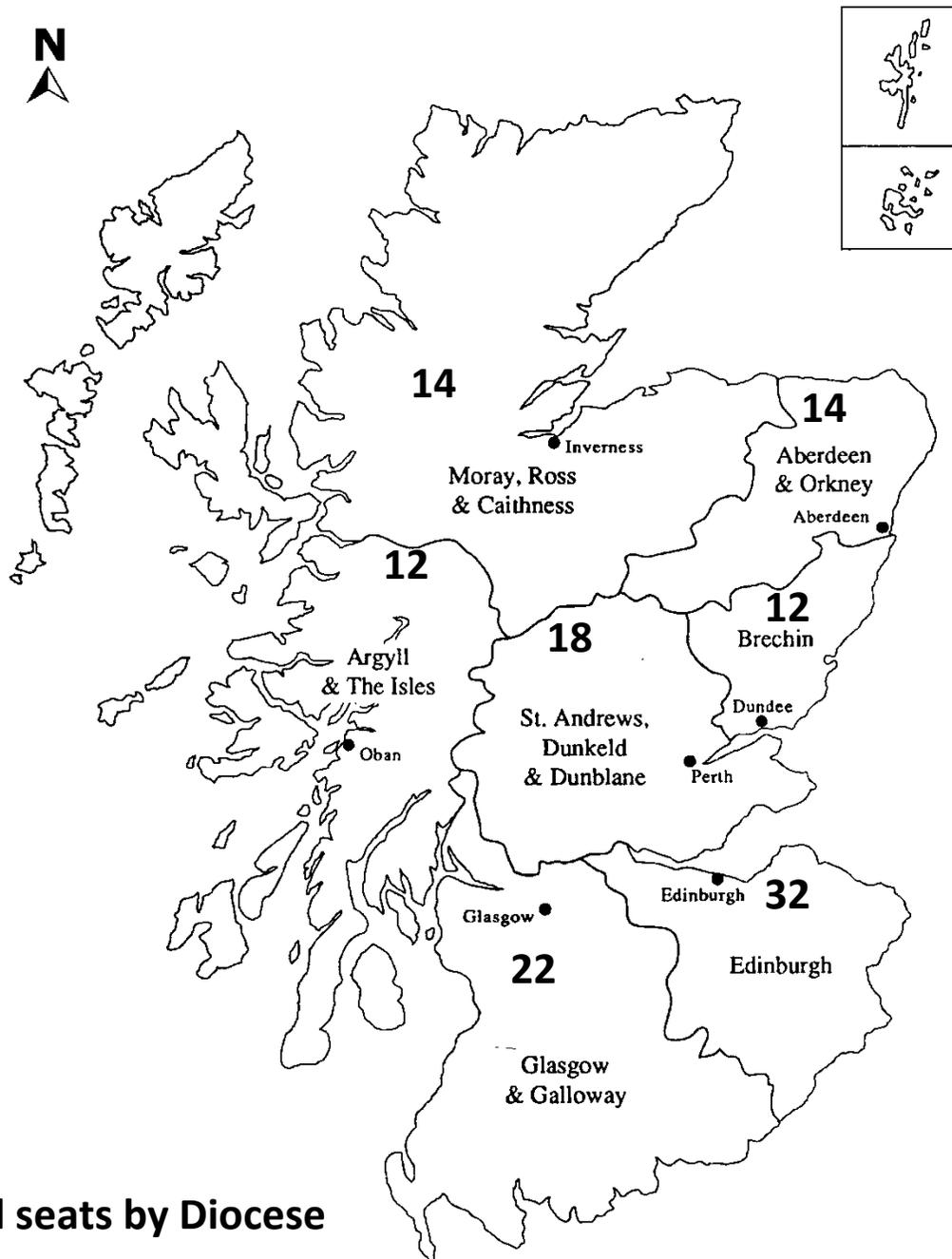
In these cases, the General Synod has the power to speak out and call for action on behalf of the whole Church.

The annual meeting also receives reports from its various boards and committees and elects new conveners and members. The Annual Report, which includes the Synod's accounts, also includes written reports from the convenors of the Boards and Committees. These reports are normally "taken as read" and are not specifically debated but there is opportunity for questions to be asked of the respective convenors.

Who are the members?

The General Synod has 124 elected members – 62 of them clergy and 62 lay people. Each diocese elects a set number of members, according to its size.

In addition, the Church’s seven bishops, the conveners of the provincial Standing Committee and boards and the Church’s representative on the Anglican Consultative Council are automatically Synod members.



Synod seats by Diocese

The General Synod meeting

The Primus, or another member appointed by the Standing Committee, chairs the annual meeting of the three houses of the Synod – Bishops, Clergy and Laity.

The General Synod reaches decisions through a number of procedures. General policy matters can be settled by a simple vote.

In matters of greater complexity, the Synod can break into its separate houses, although this is very unusual. When it does divide, the houses of Clergy and Laity are chaired by elected prolocutors.

There is a separate, set procedure for matters that affect Canon Law.

First, the motion has to be passed by a simple majority of each of the three houses of the Synod;

Second, it is referred to each diocese for consultation and comment;

Third, it returns to Synod the following year when it will need to be passed by a two-thirds majority, with each house voting separately

Voting

Most voting is carried out by a show of hands. Coloured cards are issued to members to assist in the counting of votes.

Procedure

Clergy, laity and bishops all sit together throughout the sessions. The Chair sits facing them, alongside the legal assessor and the Secretary General. The assessor advises the Chair on points of procedure.

Members who want to speak during a debate should raise their hand or stand up and wait to be called by the Chair. All remarks should be addressed to the Chair, with the usual preface: “Primus (or Chair), Members of Synod”.

Speakers should identify themselves and their diocese. Movers of motions are generally allowed to speak for 10 minutes, while other speakers are limited to five minutes. No one other than the proposer of a motion, who may speak in response to points made, is allowed to speak twice in the same debate, except to raise a point of order.

How to get matters on the Synod agenda

The formal agenda for the Synod is prepared by the Standing Committee.

Any member of Synod can propose a motion by notifying the Standing Committee by a set date before the Synod meeting. The deadline for these notifications is given in the papers sent out in late March or early April to convene the Synod. The Standing Committee then decides whether to include the proposed motion.

Members can also use Rule 10 of the Synod's Rules of Order to propose a motion. Proposers need to give the Secretary General written notice of such a motion, normally before the start of the Synod meeting. The written notice should be signed by the motion's mover and seconder and by 12 other members of Synod who are present at the meeting. Motions are presented in the form "That this Synod..." It is important that the motion sets out clearly what the proposer intends. Assistance in this is normally available.

The mover is then allowed two minutes to address Synod on why it should consider the motion. If two thirds of those present vote in favour of hearing the motion, it can proceed to be debated.

Motions involving financial expenditure cannot be heard unless they are printed in the Synod agenda, alongside the observations of the board or committee within whose budget the expenditure would fall.

Proposers are encouraged to build support for their motions before bringing them to the General Synod. They can do this by bringing them to their diocesan synod or by discussing them with the convener of the relevant board or committee.

Another way of getting the General Synod to consider a matter is to put a question to a board convener during the proceedings. This is a good way of raising an issue without the formality and precision of a specific motion. Where possible, questions should be written and submitted to the Secretary General well in advance of Synod.

Anyone with further queries about General Synod procedure can always call one of the General Synod Office staff. All the contact details are inside the back cover of this guide. *The Rules of Order of the General Synod* contains more detailed guidance.

The rest of the year

During the rest of the year, the General Synod's work is carried out by its boards and committees, and by its officers who work in the General Synod Office.

The Standing Committee represents the General Synod in the day-to-day running of the Church. It draws up the agenda and sets the timetable for General Synod meetings. It is also responsible for the oversight of the General Synod Office.

Its members include the conveners of the boards of the Church, the Primus, another Bishop, and two lay members elected by Synod (one of whom is elected as the Committee Convener) and two clerical members elected by Synod.

There are four Boards: Administration, Faith & Order, Information & Communication and Mission & Ministry

The Boards' main role is to interpret and carry out the broad policy guidelines laid out by the General Synod. Each oversees a specific area of the Church's work.

Board conveners are elected by the General Synod while members are appointed by dioceses to represent them.

The Boards are served by Committees that form working groups, focused on specific areas. Members are chosen for their expertise in these specific areas – from information technology to overseas mission and youth work. They also try to keep in touch with any parallel committees operating in the dioceses.

Every Board and Committee receives administrative and other support from the officers and staff of the General Synod Office/TISEC.

The Church's seven bishops also meet regularly as the College of Bishops. This body is not a formal part of the General Synod structure.

Boards and Committees

The Administration Board

The Administration Board is responsible for general administrative matters affecting the Church.

Its **Investment Committee** handles Church investments, mainly the Unit Trust Pool.

The **Finance Committee** administers grants in support of ministry and mission and for fabric repair and capital projects.

The Board's **Retirement Welfare Committee** oversees clergy retirement issues, especially housing. Pension matters are generally the responsibility of the **Pension Fund Trustees**.

The **Buildings Committee** promotes good practice in relation to the care and maintenance of church buildings. It also handles appeals under Canon 35.

The **Personnel Committee** addresses general, rather than specific, personnel issues relating to clerical or lay church appointments.

The Faith & Order Board

The Faith & Order Board considers questions of Church government and organisation, as well as relations with the Anglican Communion and other churches.

Its **Doctrine Committee** looks at the interpretation and expression of Church doctrine. It has three other Committees, responsible for **Inter-Church Relations**, **Liturgy** and the Church's laws or **Canons**.

The Information & Communication Board

The Information & Communication Board seeks to improve the flow of information and communication within the Church and between the Church and society.

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