



Synods in the Church of England – how they relate

A Synod is a formal meeting by which the Church is governed. There are three tiers:

The General Synod

The General Synod consists of bishops, clergy and laity who meet two or three times a year to make decisions on the doctrine and practice of the Church of England and to make ecclesiastical law. As well as matters of worship and discipline, it also addresses wider concerns, national and international. Elected members serve for five years.

Diocesan Synods

The Diocesan Synod considers matters sent to it from General Synod and from deaneries, formulates diocesan policy, advises the Bishop as appropriate, and votes on the funding of stipends and administration. Elected members serve for three years.

Deanery Synods

Each Deanery has its own Synod which reflects on issues of concern to the local church and community. Matters can be sent to them from PCCs or Diocesan or General Synods. Resolutions passed by a Deanery Synod can be sent for discussion at higher levels. Elected members serve for three years and are the voters in elections for Diocesan and General Synods.

Other facts about Synods

- i) Members on Synods automatically have a seat on the tier below them. A simplified diagram showing how Synods relate to each other is shown on the next page.
- ii) All Synod meetings are open and public (unless meeting in closed session for a specific item), but only members are entitled to speak or vote in debates.

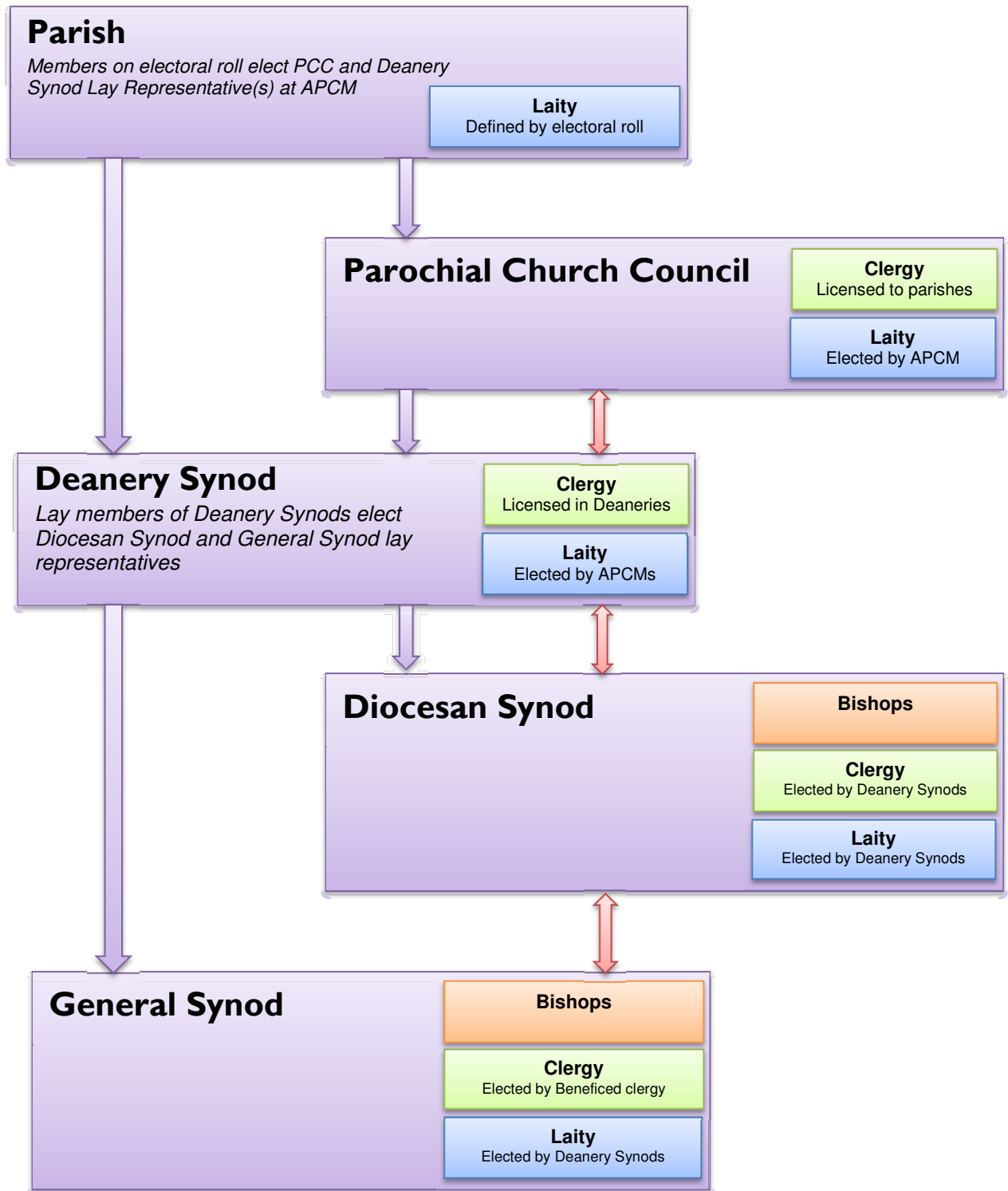
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Synods and how they relate to each other



Questions about processes at Diocesan Synod

i) ***How are Synod Agendas drawn up?***

The Agenda is the responsibility of the Bishop's Council as Standing Committee to the Synod to approve and agree, although the drafting and preparation is delegated to the Agenda Committee. All potential new items of business should be submitted to the Diocesan Secretary, for consideration by the Agenda Committee, at least six weeks before the Synod meeting.

Regular Agenda items include the Bishop's Address, a report on the preceding General Synod Group of Sessions, Bishop's Council report and the budget of the DBF (for which the Synod approves the expenditure). There is ordinarily an annual item on education/church schools and on safeguarding and major areas of the life of the Diocese will be scheduled at least once through the triennium. Importance is also given to items from General Synod or a Deanery Synod.

ii) ***Who chairs the meetings?***

The meetings are chaired alternately by the Chair of the House of Clergy and the Chair of the House of Laity.

iii) ***How can I bring a proposition or motion to Synod?***

Ways that members of Synod can have an item of business included on the Agenda include:

- a) Raise the issue at your Deanery Synod; if colleagues agree, then a Deanery Motion can be submitted for discussion at a meeting of the full Diocesan Synod. (The issue can originate at your PCC, with a motion being passed to debate at your Deanery Synod). Ultimately, the Diocesan Synod has the ability to pass such a motion to General Synod for discussion at a national level as a Diocesan Synod Motion (DSM).
- b) Please contact the Diocesan Secretary as soon as possible for advice on preparing and wording the motion to ensure it does not contradict Standing Orders, overrule existing legislation, or other technical issues. Deanery Synods should authorise their Standing Committee to agree the final wording of any motion to ensure minor amendments can be properly approved before the matter is taken to Diocesan Synod via a DSM.
- c) Suggest a motion to the Diocesan Secretary and Bishop's Council will consider whether to bring the motion in its name.
- d) Once passed, a Diocesan Synod Motion is referred to the General Synod. Once a DSM has been referred to the General Synod it will not come off the Agenda until it is either debated or withdrawn by the proposing diocese.
- e) Submit a question in advance (see FAQ v). Although questions are not formal propositions, they can bring important matters to the attention of Synod.

iv) **What is the normal format for a debate to follow?**

There are normally five steps:

- a) The motion is put by a member of Synod;
- b) The Synod will discuss and debate the motion;
- c) Any amendments to the motion (duly notified in advance) are proposed and voted on;
- d) The final motion, with any successful amendments, is formally proposed;
- e) The Synod votes.

v) **How can I submit a question in advance?**

Any member can request to speak on any item of business, but they can only speak once per item.

Any member may ask a question of any officer or office holder of Synod, provided that it is relevant to their duties and does not request an opinion. A written answer will be provided at the Synod meeting. The deadline for asking questions is included in the agenda notes. Once a question has been submitted and the answer given, the questioner is entitled to ask a supplementary question on the same subject.

vi) **How are Synod members elected?**

Members of the House of Clergy and House of Laity are elected for a term of three years by the Deanery Synods. Numbers are determined by total clergy numbers and electoral rolls numbers in each Deanery.

vii) **What is the procedure for filling a casual vacancy on Diocesan Synod?**

As soon as a vacancy occurs on Diocesan Synod, the diocesan office should be informed. Casual vacancies can be filled by holding an election at a meeting of the relevant House of the Deanery Synod. The conduct of the election will be for the Area Dean and Lay Chair to decide.

viii) **What is the procedure for voting at Synod meetings?**

Depending on the issue, voting will usually be by a show of hands. However, if voting is required by Houses, voting cards will be distributed before the meeting.

ix) **What is the quorum for a meeting?**

At least one third of each of the Houses of Clergy, Laity and Bishops must be present. However, the quorum is only really relevant when there is a need to take a vote.

How to prepare for meetings

Read the papers in advance

Items are presented at Synod meetings on the assumption that members will have read the background material beforehand.

Consult colleagues

Elected members provide views and raise concerns from their deaneries and parishes. Ask colleagues on Deanery Synod or from other contexts in the Diocese if they have any issues they would like you to raise in meetings – this should be done well in advance so you have time to submit questions which allow for answers to be prepared.

Pray

Although Synod is a formal business meeting, its ultimate task is assisting in the sharing of the Gospel and furthering the Kingdom of God. All meetings should therefore be founded on prayer.

After Synod meetings

Members are warmly encouraged to report actively and positively back to their PCCs and Deanery Synods, strengthening communication within the Diocese. A Diocesan Synod report is prepared within a week and circulated to all members, licensed clergy and PCC Secretaries.

If in doubt, you need assistance or would like to offer any feedback, please don't hesitate to contact the Diocesan Secretary: oliver.home@bristoldiocese.org

With thank to the Diocese of Sheffield for the outline of this material.