

lution to pass. In the case of this resolution the necessary majority was achieved among the clergy but not among the laity. Accordingly the resolution failed.

Two other unusual events occurred this year. A petition signed by a number of members was presented to the Synod. This was referred, in accordance with Standing Orders, to the Petitions Committee. Upon that Committee reporting that the petition was in order, the Synod accepted that, as the petition had called for further discussion of a particular matter, and as that matter was to be the subject of debate at the Synod, no further action need be taken. An individual member also brought an appeal to the Synod claiming to be aggrieved by an act of a Diocesan Synod. After hearing an outline of the circumstances the Synod agreed that the question should be referred to the Court of the General Synod for determination.

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2000

IVOR GUILD
Writer to the Signet

For the first time the General Synod was a residential one and held in Aberdeen. It lasted, as before, for two and a half days. A gathering at which no strong views were expressed, it dealt expeditiously and courteously with all matters on the agenda.

Two years ago a Working Party was set up to study human sexuality. A report was produced this year for the Synod in the form of a study guide of seventy-four pages. Each member contributed a chapter on one area. It raised questions rather than provided answers. The one-page introduction attracted some criticism and was sent back to the Working Party to modify. The report was, however, received by the Synod and commended by them, not to the Church, but to those congregations which wished to use it.

Another item which could have roused contention was the ordination of women to the episcopate. This took the form of a Green Paper which the Faith and Order Board requested should be sent down to dioceses for comment, with the possibility of later canonical alteration, if thought desirable. This proposal was accepted and the necessary resolution passed for the Green Paper to be circulated.

The only canonical change being voted on for the second time added to the membership of the Synod any person elected to represent the Scottish Church on the Anglican Consultative Council. It was unopposed.

A more important canonical change, which was being considered for the first time, was a new canon 'Of Clergy who become incapacitated'. Under its terms, if in the opinion of the diocesan Bishop or Dean (or, in the case of a bishop, the Episcopal Synod) a clergyman is thought to have become unfit to fulfil the responsibilities of ministry through either physical or mental incapacity, he may be referred to a Medical Review Panel. Such a step can be triggered by a request from the Vestry of the charge in which the clergyman exercises ministerial duties, or by a request from the clergyman himself, or the initiative may come from the Bishop or Dean. The panel is to consist of ten practitioners medically or otherwise appropriately qualified, of whom one is to be appointed as the Selector. On a referral being made the Selector

nominates three practitioners to form an assessment panel. Times are laid down for their deliberations, and within five weeks the panel must meet with the clergyman and reach a decision. The clergyman may bring two supporters to the meeting, but legal representation will not be entertained. Further independent medical reports can be instructed before a decision is reached, if the panel wishes, and a decision in writing with reasons must be given to all parties.

Possible decisions of the assessment panel may be (1) that the fitness of the clergyman is satisfactory; (2) that his ministerial duties should be reduced; (3) that the clergyman should be required to undertake a period of leave from ministerial duties, paid or unpaid, and with or without recommended treatment; (4) that he is unfit to continue in his current ministerial position. The decision falls to be relayed to the Bishop who, if the decision is unfitness under (4), shall declare the office vacant. Provision is then made for appropriate pastoral and financial support to be given. Care will have to be taken that procedures comply with all the requirements of human rights and European legislation.

The canon was duly passed for the first time; the majority required at that stage is a bare majority of those present and voting in each house. Next year, when the canon comes before the Synod for the second time, a two-thirds majority of each house is needed. Despite the considerable consequences of the canon, the debate was slight and no strong opposition was voiced.

Most of the other business was of a routine nature. Last year a long list of recommendations for administrative action was presented to Synod under the title of 'The Pastoral and Practical Care of the Clergy'. An equally lengthy report on the actions taken to implement the recommendations was presented this year, but evoked little debate. A canonical alteration reducing the length of time during which a cleric may absent himself from his charge without the written consent of his Bishop from nine weeks to six weeks was passed on the nod; and a change of description from 'minimum stipend' to 'standard stipend' was equally quietly passed. The Working Party on Church Membership had found the difficulty of defining membership such that it deferred reporting till next year; as it stated, its first priority was to disentangle the confusion of theological and legal implications in the current definition of membership. Under the present system there were so many hidden implications in terms of secular law which required to be explored before formal proposals could be brought to the Synod that further time was needed. Membership of the Church's pensions fund was a simpler task, and guide lines for membership were put forward and formally approved.

The Child Protection Committee reported on steps taken to comply with the law's requirements and for ensuring the protection of children. Those congregations which had not appointed a child protecting co-ordinator were exhorted to do so without loss of time.

Guidelines were also approved for minimum standards for clergy housing and for the best means of its maintenance. At the end of meeting the accounts for the past year were approved and the budget for 2001 was put forward and accepted with Parkinsonian acquiescence. Mutterings will doubtless break out as quota figures are allocated down to dioceses and charges.

In short, it was a Synod where passion was postponed till the following year. It was reported on the sexuality issue that views of individual members of the Working Party had not changed during their deliberations; if so, what will happen to the study

guide if a formal Church statement is sought, or will it be sidelined as merely a balanced record of contemporary beliefs? Again, on the incapacity canon, will further thought by clergy, before it is up for a second reading, frighten the vulnerable into opposing the underlying concept? Next year the Synod should be more exciting.

DAY CONFERENCE LONDON 2002

Our biennial day conference next year will be held on **Saturday, 9 March 2002** from 10 am to 4 pm in **Vaughan House, 46 Francis Street** (behind Westminster Cathedral). Distinguished speakers will deal with various topics, to include the review of the Pastoral Measure, the Team and Group Ministries Measure and the Dioceses Measure.

Coffee will be provided on arrival, and an excellent buffet lunch, with wine, is included in the overall conference fee of £20.

Book the date now: registration forms and fuller details of the programme will be circulated later.