

# SYNOD NEWS

## THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

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The dates of Governing Body meetings are fixed roughly two years in advance and, therefore, when it was decided to hold this year's September meeting on Wednesday and Thursday, 17 and 18 September, there was no knowing that Thursday, 18 September was to be the date chosen by Her Majesty's Government on which to hold the referendum in Wales regarding the creation of a Welsh Assembly. The coincidence of date could not but influence the Governing Body meeting if only in that it became important to finish business by lunch on the second day to enable members to return home in good time to exercise their civic rights. However, the devolution question—and its answer in Wales—can be seen as having a deeper significance from the perspective of the Welsh Church. To some, the nation appeared to be being asked whether it wished to follow the path along which the Church had been forced to walk at disestablishment, and which many see as having been of great benefit to the religious and spiritual life of the country. Once more, nations follow where the Church has led: devolution succeeding disestablishment much as European Union is travelling in the wake of Ecumenism.

The Governing Body meeting was, however, well-attended, which is more than can be said for the polling booths on devolution day with a turn out of only roughly fifty per cent. Did this mean that people in Wales did not care about the result or merely that, even though the outcome had important consequences for them, they nevertheless could not be bothered to participate? The question has relevance for those who lose heart at the sight of empty pews in our parish churches, but perhaps fail to make the connection with the empty seats in our declining number of cinemas and the wide-open spaces left unoccupied on the terraces at football matches. No one really believes on that basis that as a nation we no longer enjoy watching a film or have no interest in Association Football. Neither is it true that church attendance mirrors the state of the people's faith. Very interestingly, the Welsh referendum result was reported across Europe because of the cliff-hanging nature of the outcome. Again, those who have followed recent legislative developments in the Church in Wales, select few though they may be, will not have been surprised. There has hardly been a vote on a major issue at the Governing Body in recent years that has not been 'too close to call' or subjected to a recount. The Church and the nation do indeed appear to reflect one another in terms of uncertainty of direction and limited commitment.

Given that the September meeting was constrained by time, it is perhaps not surprising that the agenda was again, as in April, short of major items, although this time a number of small legal changes were agreed. In the main, these were matters of local significance, in the sense that they will not concern most of the people for much, if any, of the time. Yet here again there is perhaps a lesson to be learned about the benefits of subsidiarity in the context of disestablishment. Decisions of significance to Wales were being taken in a Welsh forum which had the time, even when time was short, to discuss matters which on the whole affected the ordinary people rather than great institutions or 'the Establishment'.

Take for instance the most recent changes, agreed in September, to the much-amended *Churchyard Rules*. Until now, the use of white marble has been prohibited in churchyards vested in the Representative Body, photographs have not been allowed on gravestones and the placing of artificial flowers on graves has also been banned. From

the parish to the province, there can scarcely be a priest or an ecclesiastical lawyer who is unaware of how painful such regulations are to apply in pastorally sensitive situations. The Governing Body has now decided that, for the future, the use of natural stone including white marble shall no longer be prohibited, that archdeacons shall have the authority to approve the application of a simple and appropriate engraving or photograph of the deceased to a headstone or other gravestone, and that silk flowers may in future be placed on graves, although plastic flowers and other artificial wreaths (other than Remembrance Day poppies) are still to be banned. The Drafting Sub-Committee is now charged with producing the necessary amendments to the *Churchyards Rules* to effect these changes.

The Governing Body also considered the impact of its own membership requirements on a small class of persons, namely those who do not live in Wales, and have never lived there, but who worship in Welsh parishes and are on the electoral rolls of those parishes as habitually attending worship. Under the current membership rules of the Governing Body, such persons are ineligible. It has now been agreed that section 11(1) of chapter II of the Constitution dealing with this issue shall be amended to allow such persons to be eligible for Governing Body membership, and the Drafting Sub-Committee is to bring forward the necessary amendment.

The affairs of the Welsh cathedrals also engaged the attention of the Governing Body at this meeting. When the new faculty procedure was introduced by Canon in April 1996, cathedrals were expressly excluded from it. The wisdom of that exclusion has since been questioned, and a Bill to amend chapter XI of the Constitution, removing the exclusion and thereby extending faculty jurisdiction to cathedrals, received its second reading, committee stage, report and vote. The Bill was duly passed and promulgated as a Canon of the Church in Wales, the Chapter XI (Amendment) Canon 1997. In due course amended Rules of Court will be produced to reflect the inclusion of cathedrals within faculty jurisdiction and Care of Churches Regulations are also expected next year, after a government appraisal of the working of the ecclesiastical exemption is published late in 1997.

The whole question of faculty jurisdiction and the new procedure introduced in response to State concern was given a thorough airing. In a private member's motion, the Reverend Canon Hilary Collins and the Reverend Patrick Thomas proposed the abolition of the new procedure and the re-instatement of the old, pre-1996 system. Although the motion was overwhelmingly defeated, the issue was debated with a focus and thoroughness which had perhaps been absent from the making of the original decision. The result however was clear: the Church in Wales remained committed to retaining the ecclesiastical exemption and had no wish to fall into the hands of the secular planning authorities with regard to the user of its buildings.

The needs of the Welsh cathedrals also featured in another decision. Currently, each cathedral receives from the Representative Body an annual grant towards its administrative costs, together with stipends for up to two chaplains and a residentiary canon. Some cathedrals do not however have a full complement of chaplains and residentiary canons. It has therefore been decided that the Representative Body shall have the power to pay an additional grant to a cathedral each year, which grant may be as much as the stipend of a chaplain, thus ensuring that those without a full complement of clergy do not lose out financially as a result.

The Representative Body is now also required to provide *pro rata* pensions for clerics in part-time stipendiary service in the Church in Wales. This is subject to the approval of the Representative Body's Maintenance of Ministry Sub-Committee in each case. More significantly, the Representative Body requested and obtained an amendment to the requirement in chapter III, section 26(b) of the Constitution that to have the power to sell, exchange, lease or dispose of any consecrated site, or any church or building erected thereon, or to dispose of ornaments, vessels or instruments used in connection with any of the sacraments, a resolution of three-quarters of the members

of the Representative Body present and voting was needed as well as the written consent of the diocesan bishop concerned. Given that the Representative Body only meets once a year, the need for a resolution of its members was manifestly inconvenient, and accordingly the Governing Body has agreed that for the future a resolution of three-quarters of the members of the Finance and Resources Committee of the Representative Body present and voting shall suffice, subject always to the assent of the diocesan bishop being obtained in writing.

Finally, the Governing Body also received the formal amendments to the Constitution prepared by the Drafting Sub-Committee effecting the changes agreed in April to bring parish accounting practices into line with the requirements of the new legislation on charities. These involved amendments in Volume I to sections 15, 16, 22 and 23 of chapter VI, and the introduction of *Church in Wales Accounting Regulations* into Volume II. The amendments to Volume I basically require parishes to observe the requirements of the charities legislation and the regulations, while the regulations themselves set out the current statutory requirements and rules of good practice.

1997 has not been the most exciting of years in terms of legislative developments in the Church in Wales, and perhaps, after the experiences of the immediately previous period, that is no bad thing. Nevertheless, what developments there have been reflect the capacity of a national body both to govern its own affairs and to respond to the perceived needs of its people at a variety of levels, from the village churchyard to the great cathedrals. Perhaps therein lies the message of the disestablished Church to the nation in the year decisive for devolution.

## THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

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After being held in Edinburgh for a number of years the Synod was held in Oban. The change was welcomed as giving an opportunity for greater socialising—not perhaps the primary purpose of the Synod, but nevertheless an important by-product.

Procedural changes were the first matters considered, including the adoption of new Rules of Order for the meetings and the consolidation of the Digest of Resolutions, the body of rules of less than canonical status. Neither change roused protest or enthusiasm, and both were accepted as good practical steps to ensure the smooth running of the Church machinery. An attempt to re-affirm a resolution was thereby ruled out of order when a group tried to reiterate the desirability of women priests. Those expert in the former familiar Rules, however, may feel aggrieved in having to learn afresh the new numbering and wording.

Canonical changes are what give the greatest scope for debate, and none more so than the reworded Canon 4, which sets out the procedure for the election of a bishop. It has been amended repeatedly over the years, but each election shows up some deficiency. This year the Canon came up for confirmation at a second reading. It was indeed passed, but the procedure at the election of a new bishop of Brechin—an election which was at length achieved after the Synod—gave rise to discontent with the Canon even as now amended. It is difficult to evolve a procedure which will give electors a chance of discovering the opinions and character of candidates without being too intrusive and inquisitorial. From one aspect publicity about those allowing their names to go forward is desirable, but not every candidate wants his parish or employing body to know that he has agreed to stand for another job. The requirement that the successful candidate must obtain a majority of the votes in both the clerical and