

GENERAL SYNOD

DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION: VACANCY IN SEE COMMITTEES

Background Paper from the Bradford Diocesan Synod

“That the Vacancy in See Committees Regulation 1993 (as amended in 2003, 2007 and 2008) be amended so as to ensure that Vacancy in See Committees have at least 21 members”

1. The Diocese of Bradford apologises for using the sledgehammer of a GS debate to crack this very small nut: if there had been more moderate tool we would gladly have used it! This motion arises because of difficulties that the Bradford Diocesan Vacancy in See Committee had in appointing six of its number to serve on the Crown Nominations Commission to choose its next bishop in 2010. Essentially it is an attempt to correct a fault that emerged following the decision, several years ago, that the number of CNC representatives of the diocese should be six and not four.

What’s the problem?

2. The regulations currently say that the Committee must consist of: various bishops, the dean, two archdeacons, the General Synod members, the chairs of the two houses of the Diocesan Synod, and at least two other clergy and two other laity elected by their members. The numbers of clergy and laity to be elected are to be such that: (a) each archdeaconry is adequately represented, and (b) the resulting total numbers of clergy and laity are equal as far as possible. Unless required by these two considerations, the numbers elected should not be more than two. (The Bishop’s Council may also nominate up to four additional representatives to reflect a special interest or secure a better representation of the diocese, but it may not nominate simply to increase the numbers.)
3. Unfortunately the precise wording of the regulations about these numbers is more than a little contorted – this reflects the fact that the regulations have gone through a number of amendments, and, like computer programs which are “upgraded”, the “coding” has suffered from the minor tinkering. It has to be admitted that part of Bradford’s problem was that the Bishops’ Council members did not read the regulations with quite the attention to detail which a certain former member of this Synod would have given them, and as a result the Synod failed to elect as many lay people as it should have done. Unhappily, a diocese which makes this mistake and only discovers it when a vacancy is announced is unable to correct the mistake, as any vacancies cannot then be filled. So Bradford Diocese would make a plea that, should this motion be approved by General Synod, the new regulations be drawn up to say what they say in as clear and unambiguous language as possible!
4. However, the essential problem is this. In a small diocese like Bradford, with no suffragan, one dean, two archdeacons, and three Proctors who do represent the spread of the diocese, it is quite possible that one archdeacon may be a Proctor and that the chair of the House of Clergy may also be a Proctor, in which case the formula specifies only 7 clergy on the Vacancy-in-See Committee (these five plus two elected), in which case the whole committee will number only 14. And then, how do you elect 6 from 14?

5. The problem comes at the nomination stage. If everyone is allowed to throw their hat into the ring (and let's face it, which of us does not want to choose our next bishop?), there could be 14 candidates. By STV everyone can vote first for himself, leading to a dead heat at the first stage, and people eliminated from the election by the drawing of lots (possibly lots drawn by a computer program). The result is literally a lottery, which is not really what the election is supposed to produce. So instead the regulations were amended to say that each candidate had to be proposed and seconded by someone other than the candidate, and no-one could propose or second more than one candidate: so now only 7 candidates can stand for the 6 places, and it is harder to get yourself nominated than it is to be elected once you have secured a nomination. Surely this is not what was intended either! So what should happen?
6. A further difficulty is that in practice, some members of the Vacancy-in-See Committee may unavoidably miss one or more of the meetings. In fact this happened in Bradford's case, where there were 7 candidates for the 6 places, and only 12 people at the meeting to elect the CNC members. It is immediately obvious that the quota for such an election by STV is $12/7 = 1.72$, which means that anyone who has the support of only one person besides himself is guaranteed to be elected to the CNC. Surely that is not the intended result?
7. In the last quinquennium, Sallie Bassham raised this matter in a question: and the Archbishop of Canterbury in his reply admitted that there were problems with the STV system, which had not yet been resolved.

What's the answer?

8. To a mathematician, the answer seems obvious. If we are to use STV, under which all electors have a single vote (albeit transferable), and if we want anyone elected to have the support of at least two people besides himself, then in an election to elect n people there need to be at least $3(n+1)$ electors. And that's why we are requesting that the Vacancy in See Committee, which needs to elect six CNC reps, should number at least 21 people.
9. May I offer my thanks to the Reverend John Hartley, a member of the Bradford Diocesan Synod and a former member of the General Synod, for his work in preparing this paper.

Debbie Child
Secretary to the Bradford Diocesan Synod

**Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
and on sale at the Church House Bookshop**

31 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BN

Copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2012

£1