

The Church of England: 'Episcopally led and synodically governed'

The Church of England is often described as 'episcopally led and synodically governed'. The canons or laws of the Church of England state that the diocesan (episcopal) bishop is 'the chief pastor of all that are within the diocese; laity and clergy, and their father/ mother in God'. Bishops have a particular responsibility for apostolic teaching and doctrinal orthodoxy and are to be themselves 'an example of righteous and godly living'. They also have responsibility for worship, with the right 'of conducting, ordering, controlling and authorising all services'. They are ministers of unity, charged 'to set forward and maintain quietness, love and peace among all people' and 'to promote peace and reconciliation in the Church and in the world and... to strive for the visible unity of Christ's Church'.

Both the 1662 Ordinal and the Common Worship Ordination Services understand bishops to be the successors of the Apostles as pastors of Christ's flock. As such, each bishop is not only a guardian of the apostolic faith but also a leader in mission (an apostle being one who is sent out), charged with 'proclaiming the gospel of God's kingdom and leading his people in mission.'

The dioceses of the Church of England are accordingly governed by their bishops. However, bishops have never enjoyed absolute power. They are subject to the laws of the Church of England, and since 1969 they have been required to govern their dioceses synodically – that is to consult the representatives of the clergy and laity in the diocesan synod on matters of policy. The Synodical Government Measure 1969 stipulates that 'It shall be the duty of the bishop to consult with the diocesan synod on matters of general concern and importance to the diocese'.

Democratic election is the means by which the representatives of the clergy and laity in the diocesan synod are chosen, but that does not mean that the Church is a democracy. The role of a diocesan synod is primarily *advisory* and *consultative*, but it is not an executive body with powers of 'government'. The General Synod's legislative role contrasts with the mainly advisory and consultative role of diocesan synods, but it is a parliament, not a government or a body with executive powers. It legislates by measure and canon. Measures need approval by both Houses of Parliament and, when they receive the royal assent, become part of the statute law of the realm. Canons do not require parliamentary approval.

Synodical government starts locally, firstly within the parish setting with the PCC or Parochial Church Council. This is made up of licensed clergy, authorised lay ministers (eg Readers), and members of the church elected to represent the people. The general functions of the PCC are:

- to consult together on matters of general concern and importance to the parish;
- to promote in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical;
- to consider and discuss matters concerning the Church of England or any other matters of religious or public interest;
- to give advice to the diocesan synod and the deanery synod on any matter referred to the council.

The PCC also consists of members of the church who have been elected to serve on the Deanery Synod, with clergy and representatives from other local churches. The Godalming Deanery consists of Anglican Churches in Busbridge, Chiddingfold, Compton, Elstead, Farncombe, Godalming, Grayswood, Hambledon,

Haslemere, Milford, Seale, Puttenham & Wanborough. Shackleford & Peper Harrow, Shottermill, Thursley and Witley. It is led by the Rural Dean – presently Clive Potter, vicar of St John's Milford. The deanery synod acts as an intermediary between the PCCs of each parish in the deanery and the diocesan synod. Its lay members also elect the deanery's lay representatives to the diocesan synod and its diocese's members of the House of Laity in the General Synod.

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