



Thames North Synod Consensus Decision Making

Standing Orders Appendix B

adopted 14 March 2009

1. The process of consensus:

Consensus means a decision of Synod reached unanimously or where a small minority of voting members of the Synod is willing to accept a proposal that is not their first preference

Agreement mean a decision of the Synod where, after careful consideration of the options, a small number is unable to accept the majority opinion but agree to stand aside so that the matter may be resolved.

(1) At each stage of the process, the Moderator will clarify the nature of the session, that is whether it is for information, discussion or decision making.

(2) The Information Session

This session aims to inform the Synod on the issue to be considered. A range of options may be presented by different people who shall speak in favour of their option. Those presenting issues, reports or proposals may speak for no more than five minutes unless the Synod agrees to an extension of time. Members of Synod are then free to ask questions on the issue or seek clarification or further information

(3) The Discussion Session

This is the opportunity for discussion of various viewpoints and vigorous debate on different opinions. Speakers may speak for no more than three minutes, unless Synod agrees to an extension of time

(3a) All those present may contribute.

(3b) The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole Synod, time for thinking during a break etc. The Moderator may invite Synod to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage.

(3c) The Moderator shall ensure that those who have different backgrounds or who disagree or who are unsure are given space to contribute to the debate, as well as those who are enthusiastic.

(3d) As the discussion session proceeds possible ways forward for the Church are developed until a specific proposal is reached.

(4) The Decision session:

Only those Synod members present may contribute to this session, each person may speak for no more than three minutes, unless Synod agrees to an extension of time

(4a) Discussion continues with speakers outlining the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. At all times, speakers are encouraged to suggest a way forward for the Synod, rather than merely speaking with passion for a predetermined view.

- (4b) Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. It is important to hear from those indicating disquiet or disapproval as well as those who are enthusiastic.
- (4c) The proposal shall be displayed throughout the discussion in such a way that all can see the text and any progressively agreed changes to it.
- (4d) If there is a major new insight expressed, the Moderator may determine that it is appropriate to move back into a discussion session.
- (5a) After summing up where the Synod seems to be heading, the Moderator checks whether the Synod is nearing consensus using one or more questions such as the following:
- i) What is your response to this proposal? (inviting a show of indicator cards)
 - ii) Do you believe we have **consensus** in support of this proposal?
 - iii) Do you believe we have **consensus** not to support this proposal?
- (5b) If there is strong but not unanimous support:
- i) Who supports the proposal?
 - ii) Who does not support the proposal as your first option, but is prepared to accept it? Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by **consensus**?
 - iii) Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?
- (6) Where some members of Synod indicate an unwillingness to accept a proposal there shall be further discussion and then the Moderator shall seek to ascertain that they accept that they have been heard and agree to live with the outcome.
- (7) The Moderator shall ask:
- (7a) are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by **agreement**?
If so they may choose to record their dissent.
- (8) Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?

(9) Continuing disagreement

Synod may, at the discretion of the Moderator, look for further possibilities including:

- i) adjourning the discussion to another time or place perhaps with more work before reconsideration;
- ii) asking the Moderator to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Synod;
- iii) referring the issue to a Group/Committee to deal with;
- iv) deciding the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with;
- v) declaring that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity;
- vi) if the issue is urgent moving to **majority decision**.
- vii) pausing for prayer

2. The Moderator

(a) The role of the Moderator is very important.

The Moderator:

- assists the Synod to discern the will of God as far as possible
- is alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as members contribute
- pauses for prayer or buzz group reflection as appropriate
- encourages trust and integrity in contributions
- ensures care and support for those whose honesty or minority voice makes them vulnerable
- invites members to respond to speeches showing indicator cards, and reflects the mood of the meeting as it becomes apparent
- suggests or encourages creative modifications of a proposal, picking up
- insights expressed
- summarises discussion from time to time to assist in focusing the discussion.

(b) The Synod and Moderator may be assisted by a facilitation group. This will be appointed annually by the Synod on the recommendation of the Nominations Committee. It will:

- enable group work, collate responses from groups and report back to the Synod
- help and support the Moderator and be responsible for the display of the text under discussion.

3. Coloured cards

(1) Coloured cards are not essential in consensus decision making but they are helpful.

Each voting member of Synod receives two cards:

- i) Orange - held at the end of a speech, so that the Moderator can see, indicates warmth towards a point of view or approval of a proposal.
- ii) Blue - held at the end of a speech, so that the Moderator can see, indicates coolness about what has been heard or disapproval of a proposal.

(2a) Cards held crossed indicate to the Moderator it's time to move on to the next subject.

(2b) Cards should be shown only at the invitation of the Moderator and held so that the Moderator can see them. They indicate response to what has just been said.

They help the Moderator to gauge the strength of feeling for various ideas, and to invite speeches from those who are unsure or cool towards the proposal.

Consensus Decision Making Flow Chart

