

Proposal 2

Best way for the Synod in Session to Meet

That the Synod:

- pursuant to Regulation 3.5.6(a) determines that the Queensland Synod be held annually
- determines that annual Synod meetings be commenced after the 35th Synod (October 2020)
- pursuant to regulation 3.5.5(c) agrees the dates of the annual Synod will be fixed by the Synod Standing Committee

The Scope

The Uniting Church in Australia calls for a Synod to gather so that the people of God may share together in the successes and struggles of the ministry of the church, be accountable to one another and encourage one another. At the Synod in Session we also worship and delve into the Scriptures and the Christian tradition.

We gather so that out of sacred story and contemporary experience we may discern how we might grow in fulfilling our calling as the people of God in this Synod, in all the variety of our ministry contexts.

From a governing document perspective, the following paragraphs specify various responsibilities of the Synod:

- (a) The BOU (paragraph 15) outlines that the Synod (the regional council) has responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the church's worship, witness and service in the region allotted to it, with such powers and authorities as may from time to time be determined by the Assembly.
- (b) The Constitution (paragraph 32) outlines that, subject to the direction of the Assembly, the Synod shall have general oversight, direction and administration of the church's worship, witness and service within its bounds. It shall exercise executive, administrative, pastoral and disciplinary functions over the presbyteries within its bounds, shall be the council to hear and deal with appeals and requests from presbyteries and shall establish and maintain such boards, institutions, committees and agencies as are appropriate to the furtherance of its responsibilities. A Synod may do other things as are consistent with the purposes of the church and not the exclusive responsibility of any other council or body within the church.
- (c) Paragraph 63 of the Constitution enables a Synod to make by-laws not inconsistent with this Constitution or with regulations made by the Assembly prescribing all matters which by this Constitution are required or permitted to be prescribed in connection with a Synod or which are necessary or convenient to be prescribed for the carrying out or giving effect to this Constitution or for the life of the church within that Synod.

The Queensland Synod by-laws afford various powers and responsibilities to governing bodies of the Queensland Synod to ensure the effective operation of the church in Queensland. This recognises that

operational decisions are required at more regular intervals than the Synod meets. Paragraph 36 of the Constitution supports this where it states that the Synod shall appoint from among its members a Standing Committee which shall be empowered to act on behalf of the Synod between meetings of the Synod in respect of any of the responsibilities of the Synod except such as the Synod may determine.

Regulation 3.7.4.1(d) reiterates this by stating that the Standing Committee is empowered to act on behalf of the Synod between meetings of the Synod in respect of any of the responsibilities of the Synod except such as the Synod may determine.

Paragraph 37 of the Constitution stipulates that the Synod shall meet at least once every three years between normal meetings of the Assembly, and at such other times as are determined in such manner as may be prescribed. Regulation 3.5.6(a) reiterates this position by stating that each Synod shall hold an ordinary meeting at a frequency determined by the Synod and at least once every three years between ordinary meetings of the Assembly.

The Queensland Synod, via its by-laws, has stipulated that ordinary meetings of the Synod shall be held at intervals of approximately 18 months.

Regulation 3.5.6(c) states that the Synod or its Standing Committee shall fix the time and place for the commencement of the next ordinary meeting of the Synod. The meeting is generally held from Friday to Tuesday and has historically been held at Alexandra Park Conference Centre.

Rationale

The last few Synods have included the traditional elements of worship and Bible study, reporting, deliberating on proposals and celebrating ministry. They have also included training and development opportunities, priority-setting processes, and significant opportunities for informal engagement. The agenda has struggled with the breadth of possibilities and opportunities.

In June 2018 a consultation paper was circulated on Queensland Synod Governance Structures, inviting comment on a number of governance areas within the Synod, including the best way for the Synod in Session to meet. The paper was circulated broadly with several reminders issued via Uniting News.

The consultation paper proposed three options:

1. Annual meetings, held over a weekend of two to three days. Shorter and more regular meetings may encourage more diverse representation to attend, and more current and topical matters could be discussed with more regular reporting.
2. A full Synod meeting every two years, with an annual gathering in between which has no formality (e.g. voting). A gathering every two years to focus on feeding and energising the church may reimagine what the Synod meetings can be.
3. Maintain the status quo and redesign the business of the Synod to meet current expectations and needs.

Following the consultation process, there was mixed feedback on the best way for the Synod in Session to meet, however a majority were in favour of shorter annual meetings.

1. Annual meetings focussed on:
 - deep listening and discernment across the councils of the church
 - inspiration, prayer, theology and relationship
 - matters of strategic planning, evaluation, risk as determined by the Synod Standing Committee (SSC) and dependent on issues which have arisen within the Church during the year

Meetings will require a more intentional commitment by members to attend and participate in the work of the Synod.

The 35th Synod would be held in October 2020, with annual Synod meetings thereafter.

It is acknowledged that annual meetings may impact upon the workload of Synod office staff and those preparing reports for Synod meetings.

2. Meeting held at the same time each year (i.e. October) which allows attendees to forward plan flights and accommodation. Meeting in October separates the Synod meeting from the post-Christmas period which is often busy and therefore problematic to plan sufficiently for a Synod meeting in the first half of the calendar year.
3. Shorter meeting held from Friday – Sunday to enable attendance by the broadest and most diverse range of people possible. It is acknowledged that this may exclude some people, who have long periods of travel, from participating.
4. Remain at Alexandra Park for at least the 35th Synod, but explore other venues for future Synods. Considerations for venues to include, but not be limited to: cost of venue, accommodation and meals; accessibility; AV/tech capacity.
5. With annual meetings there would be no expectation that people attend every Synod in person, particularly since technological progress means we now have capacity to livestream sessions and circulate paperwork in the lead up to the meeting. There will be an impact on the rhythm of presbytery life for rural presbyteries and remote congregations. There is increased capacity for more people in the broader church to participate in discussing the matters to be considered by the Synod in Session without being members. Voting members would however still need to be on the floor of the Synod in Session. It is acknowledged that rural Presbyteries may have to be more targeted in their decisions around Synod attendance, however annual meetings may also present an opportunity to arrange add-on or elective sessions to ensure more value for money in attending the Synod in Session meeting (e.g. Safe Ministry training).
6. Review in 5 years to assess how the meeting model it is working for the broader church.

As is currently the case, any business that was not dealt with at the Synod in Session meeting would be delegated to the SSC or deferred to the following year. The meeting would determine how unfinished business would be dealt with. The regularity of the meeting schedule would assist in ensuring that important matters requiring whole of Synod discernment were properly resourced in a timely way.

An indicative timeframe of how an annual Synod in Session meeting would look is below:

Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	8:00 Registration (<i>continues</i>) 8:30 Worship and Bible Study 9:30 Reports/Info: Mod, General Secretary, etc 9:45 Decision making session 10:00 Introduction and Community Building	8.30 Worship and Bible study 9:05 Discernment Session 10:00 Small Groups
	10:30 Morning Tea	10:30 Morning Tea
	11:00 Small Groups Briefing 11:30 Reports/Info: Work of the whole church Ballot distribution (as required)	11:00 Celebration of Ministries 12:00 Decision making session
	12:30 Lunch (<i>Partners in Ministry lunch</i>)	12:30 Lunch (<i>Moderator and Gen Sec lunch with retired Ministers and spouses</i>)
2:00 Registration opens	1:30 Discernment Session 2:30 Small Groups	1:30 Decision making session 3:00 Courtesies
	3:30 Afternoon Tea	3:30 Afternoon Tea
4:00 <i>Orientation for Small Group leaders</i> 4:00 <i>Orientation for new members</i> 5:20 Synod Opens 5:30 Moderator's Address	4:00 Reports/Info: Work of the whole church 4:15 Reports/Info: Delegated bodies 4:25 Award/celebrations etc. 4:40 General Business Close of Ballots	4:30 Closing Worship 5:00 Close of Day
6:00 Dinner	6:00 Dinner	
7:30 Opening Worship (and Welcome to Country) 8:30 Close of Day	7:30 Reports/Info: Work of the whole church 8:00 Decision making session 8:30 Close of Day	

Proposers

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