

Submission to the Elections Review Group

15 March 2011

Consistent with my election manifesto commitment “I will work for change to ensure that everyone on an electoral roll will have the right to vote for their General Synod representative.”

On 15 March, I wrote to the General Synod’s Elections Review Group to press for this change.

My submission is attached.

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To: The Clerk to the Synod

Comments to the Elections Review Group from Adrian Vincent (Guildford: 320)

Paragraph 2 of the Business Committee report GS 1817 invited comments on matters associated with the 2010 General Synod elections to be sent to the Clerk to the Synod.

I stood for General Synod for the first time in 2010. My election address <http://www.adrianvincent.org.uk/electionaddress.html> included the statement:

“2.) Increasing openness and participation

Before each Synod meeting I will list on my website the items coming up for debate at General Synod and invite you to send me your views. (I will have a mailing list for those without access to the internet). After each meeting I will publish on the website the decisions that were taken, how I voted and why. If I ever claim any expenses I will publish them on my website.

I will work for change to ensure that everyone on an electoral roll will have the right to vote for their General Synod representative.”

It is nearly a hundred years since universal suffrage was introduced in secular elections in the United Kingdom and I think it is wrong to deny the direct vote to Church members of their General Synod members.

I, and three of my fellow candidates in the House of Laity elections in the Guildford Diocese, were in the bizarre situation that we were entitled to stand for election - being on an electoral roll - but could not vote in our own election because we were not Deanery Synod members.

The current synodical structure can be retained, with Deanery and Diocesan Synods and with General Synod members reporting back through those bodies, and motions coming up and down the system. The only change I suggest is to widen the electorate for the General Synod representation.

I have looked at the report “Synodical Government in the Church of England: A Review” GS 1252, and paragraph 10.4 set out the good reasons in favour of universal suffrage. In subsequent paragraphs they stepped back from the idea on the grounds of: cost; difficulty for candidates to be known; and lack of interest. (They therefore proposed an establishment of synodical electors, which I feel was the wrong way forward, it would have set up sort of rotten boroughs and would have undermined the role of Deanery Synods, creating a parallel layer or representation).

The report was published in 1997. We are now in an age of the internet where the first two objections (cost and candidates difficulty in becoming known) can be more easily overcome. The Guildford Diocese paid to circulate one copy of every candidate's election address to Deanery Synod members. It is likely to be prohibitively expensive to do the same for all those on the electoral rolls. However, the Diocese of Bristol has already shown the way in having all election addresses and video presentations from each candidate on their website, and on-line hustings in addition to real hustings.

The third objection, that not many people would be interested in voting. I would argue that it is wrong to refuse to grant rights to people on the grounds that not many people will choose to exercise their rights. Most electoral roll members are unlikely to take much interest in General Synod elections, but it will mean Church members who do take an interest will be able to directly have their say.

Yours sincerely,

Adrian Vincent