

CONFIDENTIAL BRIEFING NOTE FOR EGGS

Re Canterbury Diocesan Synod Motion

REVIEW OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR PCC MEMBERSHIP AND ENTRY ON THE CHURCH ELECTORAL ROLL GS 2254A

(Please also refer to GS 2254B Background Note from the Secretary General)

In this group of sessions we shall be asked to support a motion calling for the Archbishop's Council to conduct a review of qualifications for PCC Membership and entry on the church Electoral Roll. The presenting issues as outlined by those who have put together the motion are that several people who regularly attend non-Eucharistic Fresh Expressions are currently barred from PCC membership by virtue of being non-communicants, and that qualifications for being entered on the Electoral Roll are confusing. Both are seen as excluding people of goodwill.

I have contacted the Archdeacon of Ashford, who will be proposing the motion, to see if I can work with him to draw up a friendly amendment, because I have some concerns about potential unforeseen/unintended consequences were the proposals to be adopted as they currently stand. My amendment would be along the general lines of keeping in mind the need for some requirement for church attendance/Christian faith – however defined – for PCC members, as they have responsibilities for spiritual leadership in the church and parish as well as practical responsibilities.

Opening up PCC membership to those who don't even profess Christian faith, never mind practise it, is something I am exercised about, not least because that will logically open up membership of the Houses of Laity in Deanery, Diocesan, and General Synods to those who don't even profess Christian faith - a point William Nye makes well in his briefing notes.

Provision can already be made by PCCs to adopt a scheme that would vary the Model Rules by, e.g., proposing having a number of places for non-communicants - subject to agreement through a diocese's Bishop's Council - so what the motion is trying to achieve in opening up PCC membership to members of non-Eucharistic Fresh Expressions is already possible. Further dilution seems risky to me.

As a rural archdeacon I do accept the need to have people of goodwill in the community involved in helping to run and care for our historic buildings, which are both a precious resource, and also take a lot of time, care, and money! But I'd prefer us to work on other ways of achieving that and not just use the rather blunt instrument of changing rules on PCC membership to do that, when Christian spiritual leadership is a statutory responsibility of the PCC.

It's worth bearing in mind as we ponder how we might respond that the motion just calls on Synod to invite the Archbishop's Council to conduct a review and report back. It's not, at this stage, a proposal to change anything. However, I do think it's worth getting (or trying to get) a marker down in this motion that some requirement for church attendance and/or Christian faith needs to be maintained. It's easier to get that in at this stage as part of the proposed review than have to respond later on if there are actual concrete proposals on the table.

Given that this motion is due to be debated in the evening slot of 8.00-10.00pm on the Monday, when several people will have gone home, I feel that the more I can alert both EGGS and RIGGS members the better, not least because this isn't only an evangelical issue, or at least it shouldn't be.

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