



Diocese of Toronto  
Anglican Church of Canada

# 162<sup>nd</sup> Regular Session of Synod

November 17 – 18, 2023

**CONVENING CIRCULAR**

**SECTION F**

**GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

## **Memorandum**

To: Synod Council  
From: Joy Packham and Robert Hart  
Date: May 12, 2023  
Re: Governance Review – New Synod Council Structure

### **Executive Summary**

- Our review found, in general, there is strong support for the new structure of Synod Council. The new structure is typically perceived as being more effective and timesaving than the previous structure.
- There is little or no concern regarding the number of committees and their titles. There was however considerable concern that the mandate of each committee was poorly understood by the other committees and by the Diocese in general.
- Some strong communication, to all, about the above point is recommended. This would include information about the mandate of each committee, projects it typically reviews, and the hierarchy of the committees, as is appropriate. There was no consensus re: the form that communication would take. Videos, web pages and emails were all recommended.
- There was agreement that moving to fewer meetings was appealing - however, this was offset by the concern that fewer meetings might lead to extremely lengthy meetings. It was noted that people who do not need to speak at meetings should not have to be there. This would also save time and effort.
- People who made submissions to a committee said that often they heard nothing back from the committee and were left confused about where things stood. Acknowledgement of their submission and an estimation about when they might know when a response would be forthcoming would help greatly. If there was to be a delay, letting the Parish know would also help.
- Chairs of committees need to meet in some capacity, to eliminate duplication and to share heads-up info.
- One major criticism we heard was not specific to Synod Council. It was about the poor quality of communication in general. To use plain language - everyone, answer your emails.

In summary, it is recommended that the pilot Synod Council be made permanent, pending fulsome, directed communication to the Diocese, about its structure and the structure/mandate of each sub-committee.

## **Introduction**

In May 2022 senior Diocesan staff asked us to look at the perceptions of effectiveness of the changes made to a Governance Policy that took place at Synod 2021 (Synod Council's Decision-Making Authority and Delegation of Authority Policy). Through electronically distributed surveys and in-person interviews we collected feedback that gave us a sense of how people were finding the new model (Synod Council) and if they felt the changes resulted in a more effective and efficient process for doing business.

A Diocesan email account dedicated to this project was created for our use. We then conducted confidential interviews and gathered feedback and comments. We prepared a report in September 2022; this report went to Synod and was accepted. Since then, we have, via Zoom:

- Met, individually, with the chairs of the sub-committees of Synod Council (Risk and Governance, Property, Finance and HR)
- Met with people who have taken proposals forward to Synod since our last review
- Met via an open invitation posted to Bulletin Board, with any others wishing to come forward and share their experiences/perceptions of the new Synod Council. The content of one of these conversations did not fall within the mandate of our review and has not been reported upon; one was further directed to the Cast the Net team, as the comments offered fell equally within the scope of that review.

We have divided our reporting of methodology and findings into two phases:

1. Phase One, May 22 to September 22 (ending with report to Synod)
2. Phase Two, Synod 2022 to present

## **Methodology**

### **Phase One**

Beginning June 2022, we met via Zoom to discuss how best to obtain the data which would demonstrate people's early perceptions of the new Synod Council. During that time, we were also interviewed by Stuart Mann of The Anglican, and had an engaging conversation with Peter Elliott and Ian Alexander who are working on the 'Cast the Net' project. After several meetings we concluded that there were 3 distinct groups within the Diocese whose early impressions we wanted to hear:

1. Members of Synod Council
2. Chairs of Committees and through them, their members
3. Any groups who have done business with Synod Council or any of its committees

We developed 3 questionnaires which were shared electronically; we also offered the opportunity to engage in person or by Zoom – one person chose this option. Samples of each questionnaire follow.

#### A. Questionnaire for Members of Synod Council

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did you become a member of Synod Council? (Elected, volunteered, approached)
2. Is the mandate/role of Synod Council clear? Is the size/composition of Synod Council appropriate for its work?
3. How have you found the new Synod Council structure? Did you have previous experience with the former structure?
  - Does it save time?
  - Is it more efficient?
  - Can you identify roadblocks in the new structure that impede its success?
4. Do you believe that others in the Diocese understand the new structure of Synod Council? -What should be done to inform members of the Diocese of the new structure?
5. Is the structure of Synod Council fair and equitable to all in the Diocese?
6. Suggestions to improve the structure? Is there additional tweaking that should be done?

#### B. Questionnaire for Synod Council Committee Chairs

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did you become a member of this committee? (Elected, volunteered, approached)
2. Is the mandate/role of your committee clear? Is the size/composition of your committee appropriate for its work?
3. Do you have any comments regarding the efficiency of Synod Council or how your committee work intersects with Synod Council?

4. Do you believe that others in the Diocese understand the new structure of Synod Council? What should be done to inform members of the Diocese of the new structure?
5. Is the makeup of your committee fair and equitable to all in the Diocese?
6. Suggestions to improve the structure?  
-Is there additional tweaking that should be done?

C. Questionnaire for Parishes or other groups who have brought an issue before Synod Council or one of its sub-committees:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you previously had occasion to come before Synod Council to make a presentation?  
  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
2. If you answered yes, how did your most recent interaction with Council or its Subcommittee compare to previous interactions? (Was it more efficient? Is the new structure more effective?)
3. How long did you wait from the time you submitted your request to Synod Council until the time you received a final decision? Was this an appropriate time period?
4. How effective/efficient is the new model of governance in your opinion based on your most recent interaction with Council or its Subcommittee?
5. Do you feel the new model of governance is transparent and fair? Please explain.
6. Did the composition of the committee you met with represent the diverse nature of our Diocese?
7. Do you have suggestions about ways to effectively communicate the changes to the structure of Synod Council and/or its decisions to parishes? How important is this?
8. Do you have suggestions for changes that would streamline or improve the current model of governance?

## **Methodology**

### **Phase Two**

At the beginning of Phase Two, we met with senior Diocesan staff; they provided us with some questions/observations about the efficiency of the new Synod Council structure, that they had collected in the course of their daily work. These 'talking points' were largely related to the work done at the Committee Chair level. Accordingly, we met with each of the five chairs and worked through these talking points with them.

These talking points are:

1. There needs to be more collaboration between Committee Chairs and the supporting Diocesan Staff resource on items coming forward that have cross functional touchpoints.
2. Further streamlining is required as there are situations where items still require decision from multiple committees.
3. Clarity around the role of Property Committee and Finance Committee and its relationship with Risk and Governance Committee.
4. Reduce the number of Synod Council meetings so that Synod Council meets quarterly (February, April, June and September)
5. A standing item at the first DCLT meeting of the month to review each Committee's workplan (short-term and long-term) and prioritize timing.
6. The Bishop, Chancellor, Executive Director, and Secretary of Synod to meet quarterly with Committee Chairs to review the next three months of the Annual Workplans before they are submitted to Synod Council.

We also met with Diocesan communications staff who provided updates to the Diocese at large through the Bulletin Board and the Anglican (upcoming). The article in the Bulletin Board invited anyone who had observations/comments about Synod Council to contact us directly, for an opportunity to discuss their thoughts. These conversations were not built around the talking points. We chose rather to simply hear their stories and discern the relevant messages.

We also met, again via Zoom, with those who had taken projects or requests before Synod Council since our last review.

The collective observations of these three groups (chairs, project presenters, other interested parties) are presented, in no order, below in Key Findings, Phase Two.

## **Key Findings**

### **Phase One**

Eighteen surveys were sent out and 15 responses received; we are very encouraged by this response rate and think our findings accurately reflect the current opinion. Because our data set is small, we are not reporting percentages, so as not to give inappropriate weight to any one finding.

One person requested an interview; we did this by Zoom - it was very worthwhile. Two people replied but did not complete the survey as they did not think they had enough relevant experience to provide a meaningful answer. There was only one non-response.

Most answers were brief and to the point. Not everyone answered all questions; some comments are standalone reflections. These are included at the end of the response summary.

In conclusion, the majority of responses were positive and showed support for the new Synod Council structure, which is considered timely and efficient, fair and transparent, and representative of the overall Diocese. A few responses indicated it is too soon to tell – our further work will honour this comment with continued review.

<b>Total responses (combined, all 3 surveys)</b>	15
<b>Committees/Positions Responding</b>	
• Human Resources	2
• Steering Committee	2
• Synod Council	8
• Parish	4
<b>Questions</b>	
1. How did you become a member	
• Approached and then elected	1
• Elected	10
• N/A	4
2. Clear Mandate? Is size/composition of committee appropriate	
• Yes	7
• No – too large	1
• Too soon to tell - a full year is needed; some sub-committees are not yet ready	3
• N/A	4
3. Comments re efficiency of Synod Council interaction	
• works well	6
• timely	11
• no difference	2
<b>Roadblocks?</b>	
• Unsure of how committees are monitored	1
4. Do others know about this new structure? What could be done to better inform?	
• Many are unquestioning; would only be concerned if there were negatives	4
• Communication could be improved	2
○ an article in the Anglican	2
○ regular communication about decisions made at Synod Council	1
○ An information video	2

○ A page on the Diocesan website	1
5. Fair and equitable?	
• Yes	8
• No	1
• N/A	4
6. Suggestions to improve	
• Parish clergy could reach out to parishioners when we are seeking new members	1
• Too soon to say - time will point out flaws if there are any	1
• Could members of Council be on sub-committees?	1
• Meet each other informally to better understand context	1
• Breakout groups of the members might come up with further suggestions	1
• Continue with Bishop's appointments - provides adequate expertise	1
• Prepare a procedure manual on governance and how it links to the overall strategic plan of the diocese; review this annually or when there are significant changes	1
• Ensure that groups/parishes coming before committees are prepared for a potentially lengthy process involving requests for further information and documentation	1
• Provide documentation for Synod reps to share with their parishes/advisory boards	1

#### Other comments

• It was not necessary to be a previous member of Diocesan Council to be on Synod Council (positive comment)	2
• Sizes of committees are good - could not be larger, would impact efficiency and timeliness	2
• Certain constituents (youth) may not be representative of membership; but identifying prospective candidates is difficult	1
• New structure facilitates big picture thinking, keeps out of the weeds; struggle to keep some longtime members out of the weeds though	3
• Diversity and broad range of voices	4
• Some danger of people pulling in 'their people' - but Bishop Andrew is good at managing that situation	1
• Mostly old and white people	1
• Lots of pre-reading necessary but that saves time; new members in the future need to be informed of this	1
• What is the impact on high level staff? Is attending meetings a good use of their time?	1
• New agendas allow more appropriate time for discussion of important issues – what is still needed though is a way to understand areas where action is not happening but is needful. We want to challenge areas that are neglected. Both roles are critical to thriving churches and a thriving Diocese	2
• Difficulties arise because church governance is a different kind of animal; complexity; Council needs to serve the churches, not just the bureaucracy	1
• Much less 'rubber stamping'	1



- Thriving churches have more influence. Is this good? How can we support and build value into the local church? 1
- Establishing dates for parishes submitting proposal up front works well – gives applicants a time frame to work around 1
- Parishes need to understand that email correspondence will go to the churchwarden email account; this needs to be checked regularly 1
- Diocesan staff are a good source of assistance 1

## Key Findings

### Phase 2

- A group should be able, in many cases, to make their pitch before their specific subcommittee, who should be able to approve. People should not have to go to both Committee and Synod Council. However, we do not want to load up Synod Council with rubber stamping – if we do, we are not allowing the key decision makers adequate time to thoughtfully consider things at a strategic level. This runs the risk of efficiency damaging relationships, with a loss of trust. Synod Council should always have the time to ask 3 things: does this work as an agenda, as a relationship builder, what about inherent differences between churches (big/small, rural/urban)?
- Should Synod Council be supervising committees? Would that not be time consuming?
- Sometimes it is unavoidable that some projects go before both a Committee and Synod Council, because of the \$25K threshold. Is the \$25K threshold perhaps too low? Sometimes also multiple meetings are requirements of canons, in particular with complex projects where scope creep occurs; the majority of projects however are not this complex, perhaps 2 or 3 a year.
- Increased interactions between DCLT and other chairs and committees would be beneficial.
- Property/Finance vs R&G – mandate of R&G is very expansive and has decision rights that should perhaps be with property or finance, to eliminate unnecessary overlap. A joint strategy developed between Property & Finance, for the longer term, would provide clarity and direction. It needs to be understood, in any case, where DO responsibilities lie?
- Synod Council meeting 4 times a year is good. Unnecessary meetings are a drain on time. However, meetings cannot be too long, or agendas get too packed and may adversely impact staff workload (there was a consistent concern for staff workload). This would also allow more time for committees to do their work between meetings, and would allow more meetings of chairs and chairs with DCLT.
- Committees could continue to meet monthly and Synod Council meet quarterly. Chairs could attend Synod quarterly meetings and provide high level updates (perhaps also to College). Chairs could be invited to sit at other committees to observe and comment.

- If committees had more authority, it would reduce the time it takes for churches to get their answers. It was also suggested that if Property and/or Finance agree with R&G, is there really a need for the project to go to Synod Council? We could make better use of tools like vote by email, allowing chairs involved on the same projects to collaborate.
- The new property committee is pivotal, a place for work to go that would have swamped the former Trust committee, a very good idea (thorny, jurisdictional things)
- There needs to be clear direction on this: At the committee level, if a church has a bona fide expert working on a project (lawyer, architect, engineer, for example) must they legally still hire an outside advisor?
- A monthly Executive (DCLT plus chairs) meeting would catch duplication and eliminate silos. This should reduce workload for staff and would help chairs eliminate overlap. This would mean: keep monthly individual committee meetings, have chairs check in monthly with staff; review high level workplans annually or even once every two years. At the first meeting of this Executive, provide a brief orientation of the role of the chancellor and vice-chancellors. Would be a chance to present key issues to fix and review background; new committee members could use an orientation, especially those coming from outside the church. Clarity is always useful; some committees touch on things (outside legislation for example) that other committees don't but might find valuable. Would provide a way to be share information resources amongst chairs.
- Early collaboration is so useful. Could DCLT up front decide which committees need to be involved before inception? Some projects are big and just inevitably involve more than one committee.
- What about committees only meeting quarterly but calling extra meetings if needed? However, there is always the inherent difficulty in calling last minute meetings.
- Meeting with Bishops would provide a chance to for them to ask, is this on your agenda, maybe it should be? Bishops might need to assign agenda items at this level to Committees. Bishops (or Archdeacons?) could help to plan for more coordination and might mean fewer meetings in the long run. Well-constructed and followed workplans are a good idea and reduce duplication. Duplication and back and forth can set things back months. Big picture oversight is valuable here.
- Staff are an invaluable resource but we don't want to swamp them. If staff can assist chairs, this eliminates some of the need to have chairs meet (but again, not at staff expense). There will always be need for chairs to meet on some issues, and in some cases always (HR almost always needs to talk with Finance for example).
- Relationship with staff impacted responses to questions. Chairs that had very close working relationships with their staff equivalents do not see the need for regular meetings as much as others.
- Duplication is not always bad – sometimes shares information when it might not otherwise be shared.

- Story of poor experience under old system illustrates need for communication and regular updates. Keeping churches in the dark and leaving them waiting just creates BAD feelings. Recommendation – give people feedback even if it's only to say, you haven't been forgotten.
- Staff need to be enabled at an appropriate level, just as with chairs of committees perhaps. This would save time. Staff need to be able to speak at Synod Council as subject matter experts. Staff need to be available to hand hold and provide guidance for churches that do not have in-house expertise.
- Canon 6 – follow it or change it!
- Committees are not necessarily staffed with people who have the right skills. Have someone who is a risk analyst on Risk for example. Otherwise, there are issues of trust.
- More checklists to move through processes are needed. For example, a checklist of things every church needs to do for its property annually is needed. The Diocese being responsible for all properties is huge, e.g., sheer complexity and diversity of properties. Another good example would be a checklist of the things that you MUST check with the Diocese before doing.

## **Summary**

At the end of Phase One, we were left with the impression that most people thought it was 'too soon to tell' about Synod Council. Now, at the end of Phase Two, we are comfortable making the following analysis built around the comments we have received. Generally, people responding were quite specific and had solid details to offer, showing us that it was no longer 'too soon' to assess the efficiency of the new Synod Council.

There was considerable agreement amongst the three groups; much of the commentary shows support for the ideas posed in the talking points, repeated here for reference:

1. There needs to be more collaboration between Committee Chairs and the supporting Diocesan Staff resource on items coming forward that have cross functional touchpoints.
2. Further streamlining is required as there are situations where items still require decision from multiple committees.
3. Clarity around the role of Property Committee and Finance Committee and its relationship with Risk and Governance Committee.
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6. The Bishop, Chancellor, Executive Director, and Secretary of Synod to meet quarterly with Committee Chairs to review the next three months of the Annual Workplans before they are submitted to Synod Council.

The re-occurring themes we heard are:

- Who meets, and when – avoiding duplication without siloing information. Committees meeting monthly or as needed, with SC meeting quarterly? Where would the role of an 'Executive Committee' (DCLT plus chairs?) fit into the schedule?
- How are committees staffed? Do the members have the right skill sets?
- Communicate! Even if just to say what is going on, maybe no recommendation yet, but at least know where things stand. Otherwise, they feel disrespected.
- Educate: What is the function of the various committees? Is Risk and Governance equal to the other committees or are they overseeing the others? Clarify purpose and roles of the committees, and approval limits (who do they report to?) If R&G is more important, this is seen as a criticism, because you have not created efficiency, you have added more roadblocks.
- Do not value efficiency at the risk of trust and relationships (between the 3 groups)
- Not over-working staff or the College of Bishops;
- Staff be well-versed and have the right skill sets to perform their roles
- Staff vs. volunteers – respect time and effort that individuals are putting into their projects. Outside professional advice might be needed, but do respect the internal expertise.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Hart ODT  
Joy Packham ODT  
May 12, 2023