

GOVERNANCE

By Jim Boyles

“Having a suitable organizational structure cannot ensure that the Church meets its challenges effectively. Only the people of the Church can do that. But a sound and flexible structure will enable the Church to harness its resources to go about its national work in the best possible way.”

Ted Netton, Price Waterhouse review of General Synod Structures, 1979

Almost from the beginning in 1893 the General Synod has studied and reviewed its structure. There have been task forces, commissions, consultants, reports, proposals and debates. This is a necessary and healthy sign of an organization attempting to respond to changing circumstances in the life of the church and of the world.

In 2004 the General Synod directed the Council of General Synod to undertake another review of governance, and in response, the council appointed a Governance Working Group chaired by retired Archbishop David Crawley.

This group was given a wide-ranging mandate, and made an interim report to the council in November 2005. It will be reporting again to the March meeting of the council with specific recommendations for changes to the structure of General Synod and its council, and also will propose that the General Synod initiate dialogue with provinces and dioceses on more general concerns about governance that involves those bodies.

If the council approves, these motions will go before General Synod in June. Some changes to the structure and composition of General Synod will require approval at two consecutive General Synods, with reference to dioceses and provinces in between for their “consideration.”

What are factors that lead to this review at this time?

- A significant decline in Anglican population.

In 1971, over 30 years ago there were 2,543,000 Anglicans according the Canadian Census. In 2001, there were 2,036,000, a decrease of 20%.

In 1971 there were 1,109,000 members on parish rolls. In 2001 there were 641,845, a decrease of 42%.

In 1969 there were 253,000 identifiable givers. In 1999 there were 227,000, a decrease of 10%.

In the past 35 years the numbers have fallen, but there has been little change in the governing structures of the church, both at the national level and in dioceses. In fact, in many parishes, in dioceses and at General Synod, volunteer and professional time spent in governance tasks means that front-line ministry and mission work is weaker than it could be.

There are more active bishops now than in 1971, and there are more members of General Synod now than in 1971.

- The Covenant signed by Aboriginal Anglicans in 1994, and the recent appointment of a National Indigenous Bishop, and ideas emerging about alternative models of governance arising from these actions.

- Evolving concerns about lay-clergy partnership in governance.
- Development by the House of Bishops of a model for shared episcopal ministry, and parallel developments within the Anglican Communion.
- Actions taken during the residential schools crisis to spin off various church bodies such as the PWRDF and the Anglican Journal.
- Declining finances in the church.
- A concern that the current structure at the General Synod level is too cumbersome and too slow in permitting change.

The Working Group realized from the beginning that although its formal work related to the structures of General Synod, there are lively governance issues at all levels of the church. It is therefore proposing that substantive discussions be initiated with dioceses and provinces to explore possible changes, including changes in diocesan and provincial boundaries, jurisdiction of the various levels, and even a consideration of the number of dioceses in the country.

In 1962 the Primate, Archbishop Howard Clark said, “We can only worry about the constitution if it is a means for Canadian Anglicans to spill out into the streets.”

A debate about organization or structure or governance can only be legitimate if it is carried out in the context of the mission of the church. The church’s Mission Statement, adopted in 1992 and available at

http://www.anglican.ca/handbook/001_mission_statement.pdf provides the setting in which governance discussions take place. The aim is a structure that is more responsive, more efficient and more effective in promoting and carrying out this mission.

In June, General Synod will have an opportunity to register an initial response, and the conversation then will be carried on in the whole church leading up to the next synod in 2010.

Archdeacon Jim Boyles is a member of the Governance Working Group and a retired General Secretary of General Synod.