

## 9/01 Weekend Synod meetings Feedback from Synod Members

(A report from the Standing Committee.)

### Introduction

1. Traditionally, each ordinary session of the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney has met on 5 days. A common model has been for the Synod to meet on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons and evenings in one week and then on Monday and Tuesday afternoons and evenings in the following week.
2. By resolution 40/99 the Synod requested that the following format be trialled for the meetings of the 3rd session of the 45th Synod in 2001 -
  - (a) meeting on a Friday afternoon and evening, and all day on the next day (Saturday), and
  - (b) repeating this a week later, and
  - (c) total meeting time, exclusive of meal breaks, to be 25 hours.
3. In accordance with resolution 40/99, the 3rd session of the 45th Synod was held on Friday 26 and Saturday 27 October 2001, and Friday 2 and Saturday 3 November 2001 in the Wesley Centre. The following meeting times were adopted -

*Friday 26 October and 2 November*

3:00 pm to 5:45 pm

*5:45 pm to 7:00 pm - meal break*

7:00 pm to 9:30 pm

*Saturday 27 October and 3 November*

9:30 am to 10:30 am

*10:30 am to 11:00 am - rest Break*

11:00 am to 12:30 pm

*12.30 pm to 1.45 pm - meal break*

1.45 pm to 3.45 pm

*3.45 pm to 4.15 pm - rest break*

4.15 pm to 6.30 pm

4. There were a number of other innovations at the session, including -
  - (a) the Synod service was held in the Wesley Centre immediately before the first meeting on Friday 26 October, rather than in the Cathedral as traditionally had been the case, and
  - (b) new business rules, adopted in 2000, were used for the first time.
5. On Friday 26 October 2001 the Synod resolved as follows (resolution 9/01) -
 

"Synod appreciates the opportunity to trial a weekend Synod in 2001, acknowledges that Synod in 2002 will be a weekday Synod, and requests that a debate on when Synod should normally meet (weekdays or weekends) be scheduled for the second day of the 2nd Session of the 46th Synod in 2003 so that appropriate notice and arrangements may be made for the 1st Session of the 47th Synod in 2005."
6. On Saturday 3 November 2001, Synod members were asked to provide feedback in response to 8 substantive questions about weekend meetings. One of the reasons for obtaining this feedback is to assist Synod members in 2003 who, by reasons of resolution 9/01, will reconsider the issue of weekend Synod meetings.

### Questions and Feedback

7. This section sets out the questions asked of Synod members, and summarises the feedback received.

#### ***From your experience at the session, what do you see are the relative benefits (if any) of the Synod meeting on weekends?***

8. The following relative benefits of the Synod meeting on weekends were identified by many Synod members -
  - There was more continuity in the business of Synod since the longer meeting times on Saturdays allowed more time for debates and allowed conclusions to be reached.
  - Reducing the number of days of meeting from 5 to 4 appeared to give added impetus to getting the business done.
  - The Saturday meetings were thought to be less formal, and conducted in a more relaxed atmosphere. Many thought that this contributed to a more friendlier "feel" to the session.

- As the Synod met for only 4 days, the cost to many members of attending Synod was reduced. There were reduced costs in travelling, meals and parking (especially on Saturdays when parking is cheaper).
- As the number of meeting days was reduced to 4 from 5, members were required to make fewer trips to and from the CBD. This was considered to be beneficial for those who catch public transport.
- Fewer evening sessions, and earlier starts on Saturdays, meant many members felt more refreshed during the session. They did not find the session as tiring as the usual meeting model.
- Many members found the Saturday sessions less invasive on work, home and ministry time. In particular, some lay people spoke of the how Saturday meetings relieved the stress of having to leave work early, and back up for work the next day. Some parents indicated that it was easier to find child minding on weekends rather than on evenings.
- The 3 breaks between the Saturday meetings allowed for more time for fellowship.

9. However, to balance the above, many other Synod members did not think that there were any relative benefits in the Synod meeting on weekends.

***From your experience at the session, what do you see are the relative benefits (if any) of the Synod meeting on weekday evenings as it has traditionally done?***

10. The following relative benefits of the Synod meeting on weekday evenings were identified by many Synod members -

- There is no impact on weekends, which many regard as mainly for family, sporting and ministries activities. Many members considered that weekend sessions had a greater impact on families and were more intrusive, especially when there were 2 consecutive Saturdays of meeting.
- There is more time available between the meeting to enable members to recover and reflect on issues. In addition, the staff have more time to prepare papers and answer questions etc.
- There is less interference with ministry, in particular wedding ministries on Saturdays.
- The meeting days are not as long. Some found meeting for 9 hours on Saturday too long, especially if they then had ministry responsibilities on Sundays. The early start on Saturday morning after the late finish on Friday night was said to have contributed to fatigue among some members.
- Weekend Synod meetings were more expensive for some members, particularly those members from distant parishes who had to pay for accommodation in Sydney on Friday night, given the early start on Saturday morning.
- Weekday afternoon and evening meetings allow many lay people to come straight from work to Synod meetings.
- Weekday meetings were being more business-like, and this was important to some members.

***On balance, do you prefer weekend Synod meetings to the usual pattern of evening weekday meetings?***

11. The following table summaries the responses to this question -

	<b>Number of Members</b>
Prefer weekend Synod meetings	85
Prefer usual pattern of evening weekday meetings	146
No preference expressed	24
<b>Total number of responses</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>Total number of members of the 45th Synod</b>	<b>761</b>

12. The survey did not require that members specify the main reason for a particular preference. However, from comments, the desire to keep Saturdays free for family, social and ministry activities was of particular importance.

13. The survey did not require that the respondent specify whether they were a member of the clergy or a lay person. However, from some of the comments made in the answers, a tentative conclusion may be that weekend meetings created more difficulties for clergy, especially those who had to minister on Sundays.

**Have you attended each day of the meeting of the session? If not, please give a brief explanation of what has prevented you from attending.**

14. The attendances at sessions of the Synod from 1997 to 2001 were as follows -

	1997 2nd Session 44th Synod	1998 3rd Session 44th Synod	1999 1st Session 45th Synod	2000 2nd Session 45th Synod	2001 3rd Session 46th Synod
Day 1					
Afternoon	491	475	489	498	524
Evening	546	515	542	528	518
Day 2					
Morning	-	-	-	-	484
Afternoon	441	423	-	399	454
Late afternoon/evening	494	492	495	520	411
Day 3					
Afternoon	402	389	461	380	455
Evening	533	467	508	495	485
Day 4					
Morning	-	-	-	-	366
Afternoon	458	389	429	355	427
Late afternoon/evening	490	448	521	456	336
Day 5					
Afternoon	351	401	378	356	-
Evening	378	528	525	441	-
Day 6					
Afternoon	-	266	-	-	-
Evening	-	270	-	-	-

15. The above figures indicate that afternoon attendances at weekend meetings were generally better but that attendances in the late afternoons dropped substantially.

16. The main reasons why some Synod members did not attend all the sessions were –

- An unwillingness to give up 2 entire Saturdays for the Synod.
- Ministry commitments, particularly on Saturdays (weddings, youth groups, CEBS, sermon preparation).
- Personal and domestic commitments.
- Work obligations, especially for the Friday meetings.
- Illness and tiredness.
- Need to leave meetings early to catch transport links.
- The early start on Saturdays, particularly for those who had to travel.

***If the Synod were to agree to continue to meet on weekends, should the times and days of meetings be changed? If so, how?***

17. This question contained an assumption, namely that the Synod would continue to meet on weekends. A number of members indicated that they didn't see how the meetings days and times could be changed if the number of meeting hours was to remain fixed. However, commonly suggested changes were -

- The Synod should not meet on consecutive weekends. There needs to be a break of at least one weekend between the meetings.
- Some members would prefer that the Synod meet on a Thursday night (rather than a Friday night) and Saturday, and repeat this in a later week. The break between Thursday night and Saturday

mornings would overcome the difficulties of finishing late finish on Friday nights and starting early on Saturday morning.

- A 9.00am start on Saturday is too early.
- Session times of more than 1.5 hours are too long. There needs to be more frequent (although not necessarily long) rest breaks.
- Rest and meal breaks should be shortened.
- The Synod should meet all weekend, say on a Saturday, Sunday and Monday of a long weekend.
- Some suggested we start earlier on Fridays, while others wanted to start later. Some wanted to finish earlier on Saturdays, while some wanted to meet longer.

***Do you think the business rules could be improved to help facilitate weekend Synod meetings? If so, how?***

18. The majority of members either indicated their support for the new business rules, or did not answer this question.

19. However, there were a number of interesting responses. Some members thought that the new business rules were a great deal better than the old rules, allowing more time for debate. Nevertheless, the following changes were suggested by some members -

- Questions - Answers to questions need to be given each day. The rules should require that questions be presented in writing before the Synod so that they can be answered at the session.
- Shorter speeches (especially in committee).
- Amendments to be given before the session.
- Motions without notice should be discouraged.
- The business rules should provide for a greater focus on issues of principle in debate (especially on ordinances) with reference back to a drafting committee to do any necessary drafting.
- Motions should have precedence over ordinances.
- Notices of motions should be read out (not merely handed up as under the new business rules).

20. These issues should be reconsidered if the Synod agrees in future to meet on weekends. Some of the suggestions may also be relevant to weekday meetings of the Synod, although there was not sufficiently widespread comment to indicate that any of these issues was of particular concern.

***Do you think the Wesley Centre is a suitable venue for weekend Synod meetings?***

21. Of those who responded to this question, the overwhelming majority found the Wesley Centre a suitable venue for Synod meetings.

***Do you have any other comments about weekend meetings of the Synod?***

22. In answering this question, some members raised issues which have already been referred to in the feedback to earlier questions. But other comments were also made -

- Some members appreciated how the Synod service flowed into the business meeting.
- The more relaxed atmosphere on Saturdays was the subject of positive comment.
- Assistance needs to be given to country Synod members to find accommodation.
- The discussion group session on second Saturday was the subject of positive comment.
- The missionary hour was the subject of positive comment.

**Conclusions**

23. It is only possible to make general conclusions about weekend Synod meetings based on the responses to the feedback from. The following general conclusions can be made-

- (a) Most members have quite firm views about whether weekend Synod meetings should be repeated.
- (b) The main reason that members do not like the meetings is because of their intrusion, particularly on Saturdays, on family, social and ministry time.
- (c) There were no greater numbers at the 2001 session than at other sessions of the Synod.

For and on behalf of the Standing Committee

MARK PAYNE  
*Diocesan Secretary*

13 August 2002