

SYNOD REVIEW WORKING GROUP

Report – June 2025

BACKGROUND

Synod 2022

In September 2022, Archdeacon Michael Berry (on behalf of the Episcopal Team) and Steph Brook (on behalf of Anglican Youth Ministries), sought to bring motions to Synod to review the shape of the Diocesan Synod.

Motivations included:

- an acknowledgement that statutes in relation to Synod and elections were out of date and in need of refreshment
- an acknowledgement that the Synod had raised questions on numerous occasions around the structures of Synod in the past, but those efforts to present alternatives had not succeeded
- concerns that the timing of Synod restricted the participation of younger and working age lay people

A unified motion was ultimately presented to Synod and on 2 September 2022 it was agreed:

“THAT this Synod requests the Diocesan Council to establish a working group, representative of the diversity of our Diocese, to:

- a. review the structures of Synod to best serve the future governance needs of the Diocese; and*
- b. make an initial report to this Synod for discussion in 2023.”*

Following the agreement of the Motion, Synod entered into Conference, where initial feedback was sought on the following questions:

- The Working Group is to be representative of the diversity of our Diocese. What elements of our diversity do the Diocesan Council need to consider?
- If Synod were to be restructured, what are the essential elements that need to be maintained?
- What barriers/challenges do you see that prevent Synod from being most effective?
- Is there anything else that you would like the working group to consider in its work?

WORKING GROUP

Terms of reference were drawn up by Diocesan Council following Synod 2022. These are available on request.

The terms outlined a three-step process for the working group:

- Review. Addressing the purpose of Synod, reviewing Synod feedback, and gathering further information as required.
- Model Options. Providing Synod with options for new models.
- Legislation. Preparing a Bill to provide for any new structure. This phase may be delegated to, or done in conjunction with, the Legal Business Committee.

The working group was to be mindful of constraints placed on synod structures by the Constitution Te Pouhere and Canons of the church.

Members of the group are currently: The Reverend Matthew Griffiths (convenor), The Venerable Michael Berry, Steph Brook, The Venerable Liz Martin, The Reverend Andrew Beyer, Sonia Maugham, and The Reverend Richard Bonifant. Past members have included: Jessica Hughes, The Reverend Claude Fong Toy, and Valonia Lawrence.

WORK TO DATE

Purposes of Synod

Initial meetings focussed on understanding the Synod landscape, wider requirements and presenting issues. Significant time was given to processing and understanding the feedback from the Synod conferences (see Appendix A)

This led to a discussion around, and then formulation of, proposed 'purposes' of Synod. This would provide a focus and foundation for further work.

The Purpose of Diocesan Synod

- *As a Synod, we are responsible for the vision of the Diocese in partnership with the Bishop.*
- *We exist, and gather, to fulfil the requirements Te Pouhere / The Constitution, and Canons of the Church.*
- *We gather as a place where the mind of the Diocese is formed.*
- *As a Synod, we hold ultimate responsibility for the Diocese.*
- *We gather as a place where laity, clergy and bishops of the Diocese collaborate in making decisions.*

Further description of each point can be found at Appendix B.

Synod 2023

At the 2023 session of Synod, the working group presented the feedback from the previous year's conference, alongside the purpose statements.

Diocesan Survey

In order to further explore key themes, the working group commissioned a survey in May 2024. This survey was sent widely into the diocese with no restrictions as to who was able to respond. 80 responses were received, of whom 83% were current or past Synod representatives. Responses were fairly split between clergy and laity. A summary of responses is at Appendix C.

In general:

- There was a high, and in some cases nearly unanimous, agreement with the purposes provided by the working group. In many cases, however, people did not think that those purposes were being currently met.
- While September was seen as a good month for meeting, there was more resistance to the pattern of meeting Thursday to Saturday.
- While many claimed to understand Synod processes, fewer felt confident in leading a Motion, and even fewer a Bill.
- There was reasonably high support for making some parts of Synod online.

- While three-year terms were supported, almost half of respondents felt there should be a limit on the number of terms a person could hold.
- There was broad support for every parish being represented at Synod.
- Some felt that Synod representatives did not need to be members of the local Vestry.

Ministry Conference 2024

The theme of the 2024 Ministry Conference was 'Putting the Confer back in Conference' and focussed on providing space for conversations around key issues in ministry in the diocese. Alongside discussions on resources and partnerships, structures for governance, administration and compliance were included. This working group presented work to date, including the survey data, and received feedback. A summary of this feedback is at Appendix D.

Feedback from Conference did not present any particular or creative options, but did affirm the issues identified by the working group and the outcomes of the survey.

Research – The Reverend Richard Bonifant

In early 2025, the committee became aware of the doctoral research being conducted by The Reverend Richard Bonifant. Richard's thesis examines pluralistic ignorance within the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, focusing specifically on Tikanga Pākehā communities.

Pluralistic ignorance occurs when individuals privately reject an established norm while believing others accept it, leading to the norm's persistence despite lacking genuine support. His research demonstrates how misperceptions of group norms may inhibit institutional change and suggests that many Anglicans feel more isolated in their views than warranted. The research findings have implications for church leadership, decision-making processes, and understanding how our diocese navigates change while maintaining a sense of Anglican identity.

A key implication of this work is that synodical processes as we currently practice them are creating a climate in which most participants misperceive what the majority of the Anglicans think and feel about a range of issues. This can be overcome by creating more relational models of governance that allow for greater discussion and clarification of issues before formal decisions are made.

Further details of the research can be found at Appendix E.

One of the implications of the research for the committee focussed on the formation of motions. Rather than starting from the perspective of a statement determined by a small group of people (a mover and seconder, and any people supporting them), a more cohesive position could be arrived at through a broader thematic discussion and agreeing on a collective view that emerges from such discussions. This would avoid the agreement/disagreement duality discussion around the pre-determined statement, and allow for the more diverse exploration of the topic at hand.

A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE

Through the journey of discussions, surveys and feedback, the working group have begun to identify elements of a new model for the provision of Synod. Here are listed the various elements that we will be seeking feedback on at Synod. We remain very much open to where such conversation and feedback take us. These elements are mostly ‘modular’ – in that we can incorporate as many or as few as seem to have the support of Synod.

Genesis of General Motions

An alternative to having motions that begin with the direction of individuals or small groups, the genesis of motions should ideally be born from broad discussion. Inspired by the principles of Talanoa and Hui of our Tikanga partners, this would mean members bringing broader topics and themes.

A range of outcomes may then be available for allowing discussions at Synod. A likely example could be through structured discussion, not dissimilar to the current ‘conference’ that may then identify a motion, or it may be that the discussion is sufficient for its own sake. Mechanisms similar to a ‘select committee’ could be used to form and refine wording.

There would need to be some consideration given to ensure the Synod was not flooded with more ‘themes’ than it would be able to manage in a sitting, be that a decision from Diocesan Council, pre-Synod survey, ballot, or mixture of these. Structures such as Archdeaconry gatherings or Youth Hui could be used as pathways for identifying and refining discussions.

The ideal structure would allow for flexibility to address emerging issues, balancing the need for a known process whilst avoiding having to attend to business in ways that may not seem helpful.

A separate mechanism would need to be provided for addressing business such as the assent (or not) of statutes from General Synod Te Hīnota Whānui.

Recommendation:	That a new structure develops a pathway that reduces the emphasis of Motions in favour of thematic discussions
------------------------	--

Bills

The experience of processing Bills is that people generally feel neither equipped, nor particularly engaged. Much of the work is attended to by a small group. It is important, however, that Synod continues to engage at some level to give mandate to the change of our statutes. In recent years, the main conversation around significant Bills have been through pre-Synod consultation processes, and this has been effective in achieving higher levels of engagement.

The mandate and powers of the Legal Business Committee could be increased to include the role of generating and driving statutory change. A process of consultation would be required, and appropriate checks and balances achieved through the engagement of Diocesan Council. Diocesan Council could be empowered to mostly manage changes that are administrative in nature, which Synod would then be asked to ratify. Synod may need to be more heavily involved in significant changes.

Recommendation:	That a new structure develops a process that progresses statutory change outside the meeting of Synod, empowering responsibility to bodies such as Legal Business Committee and Diocesan Council.
------------------------	---

Online Gathering

There is a strong sense of the Synod wanting to gather in person, to worship and connect as a vital part of our diocesan life. The emphasis of Synod should still be with an in-person gathering.

Feedback also supported the idea, however, of attending to some business by digital methods, where appropriate. Clearer mechanisms should be articulated to allow Synod to conduct appropriate business, either through digital gatherings (such as Zoom) or via electronic communication (such as email or online polling). Examples of business could include more functional matters such as the final assent of Bills, agreement of the final wording of motions, and elections.

Recommendation:	That a new structure provides clear processes and permissions for online gathering and digital communications.
------------------------	--

Elections

The working group continue to wonder about the place for elections. Whilst their functional nature makes them an obvious candidate for an online or digital setting, the face-to-face nature of coming to know candidates may mean they are still best held in person. It is recognised that elections can take a large amount of time and energy at Synod, which may not be an efficient use of that gathering.

On balance, the working group feel that elections should happen after Synod. This could include a system by which nominations open during Synod and close within a set period afterwards. Candidate information can then be promulgated and the election itself conducted online. Exploring a 'single transferable vote' system (where voters rank candidates in order of preference) could help avoid the need to conduct multiple ballots.

With such a system, Diocesan Council members would take office on a certain prescribed date (for example, 1 October each year). General Synod Te Hinota Whanui members already do this.

Recommendation:	That a new system provides for an electoral system that can be conducted both online, and outside of the actual gathering of Synod.
------------------------	---

Membership

There is a strong sense around the importance of representation from every parish, but this needs to be balanced against the observation that many parishes struggle to elect representatives.

Ideas explored included:

- Each parish send one clergyperson and one lay person. In this case, a mechanism for choosing which clergy attend from multi-clergy parishes would need to be identified. Representation from chaplaincies and other bodies would still be included, along the same principles.
- Explore a mechanism for having less definition around numbers (within minimum and maximum limits), but in an environment of limiting the 'voting power' to being the same number for each parish regardless of numbers. This flexibility would likely come with increased complexity.

In balance, it was felt that the current membership was probably OK. There was no significant feedback suggesting Synod was too big. Due to licensing, however, some parishes do get to send a greater number of clergy.

Recommendation:	That membership remains largely unchanged, but a new structure provides for a mechanism to limit representation by licensed clergy to two.
------------------------	--

Limit Terms

There appears to be strong support for limiting terms. The working group did feel that two issues would make introducing term limits problematic:

- Due to the nature of licensed ordained ministry (where often a parish has only one), such limits would probably have to apply only to lay representatives. This could create an unwanted inequality between the houses.
- Smaller parishes may find it difficult to identify Synod representatives if some members complete a maximum term and have to stand down.

Recommendation:	No change.
------------------------	------------

Membership of Vestry

Whilst the majority appear to remain in favour of Synod Representatives being members of their Vestry, some find this to be a barrier or challenge. A person willing to commit to Synod attendance may not have the ability or desire to make the monthly commitment to Vestry. It is noted that Synod representatives attending Vestry is a mechanism for them to appreciate the engage with the needs of their local community.

Recommendation:	That a new structure provides the option for parish Synod Representatives to hold a default 'ex officio' membership of Vestry, with the option of full membership.
------------------------	--

Timing of Synod

Feedback indicates that people are generally supportive of gathering in September as we do now. There was more significant question around the gathering on Thursday night, Friday and Saturday. Weekday gathering appears to be favoured by clergy, as this is a work commitment on a workday. For lay people, however, this requires taking a day off work, creating one of the most significant barriers to participation.

We note that other dioceses take the approach of keeping Synod to Saturday and Sunday. This inevitably means, given the absence of clergy, many congregations gather for Morning Prayer on the Sunday rather than for Eucharist.

Recommendation	Noting that the current statute makes no requirement around this, that Synod arrangements look to trial a Friday night, Saturday, Sunday gathering of Synod.
-----------------------	--

NEXT STEPS

The working group have taken a 'modular' approach to proposing change. In this the group acknowledge that the Synod may wish to accept some of these proposals, whilst rejecting others. Where possible, the working group will also seek to provide flexible structures to allow for Synod arrangements to be made responsive to a variety of contexts.

This paper is being made available now and will be addressed at Synod in September 2025. On the basis of discussions and feedback, the working group will prepare a Bill to implement the changes that have the support of Synod.

This Bill would be presented to Synod in 2026, with fresh structures being in place for Synod in 2027.

APPENDIX A – SUMMARY OF SYNOD CONFERENCE

September 2023

Below are the top areas of response for each question. Question 2 was around specific names of people for the working group and has not been included.

The numbers are a percentage of how many respondents included this answer in their feedback. The total number of feedback groups was 38.

1) The Working Group is to be representative of the diversity of our Diocese. What elements of our diversity do the Diocesan Council need to consider?

Ages / Generation (especially inclusion of young people) (89%)
Ethnicity and Culture (79%)
Geographic Location (especially urban vs rural) (63%)
Gender (50%)
Clergy / Lay (37%)
Ministry Unit Type and Sizes (37%)

3) If Synod were to be restructured, what are the essential elements that need to be maintained?

Corporate worship (55%)
Good process (39%)
Representation in three houses (26%)
Representative of the Diocese (24%)
Gathering of people from across the Diocese (24%)

4) What barriers/challenges do you see that prevent Synod from being most effective?

Formality and legal process (45%)
Timing (29%)
Conflict with work (26%)
Speaking in front of large gathering (16%)
Location (16%)

5) Is there anything else that you would like the working group to consider in its work?

Diversity of meeting options (eg online and zoom) (13%)
Learn from other dioceses (11%)
Hear stories from around the diocese (11%)
Increase use of technology (8%)

APPENDIX B – PURPOSE OF DIOCESAN SYNOD

June 2023

As a Synod, we are responsible for the vision of the Diocese in partnership with the Bishop.

- Setting ethos and culture of diocese
- Empowering Diocesan Council to form and maintain a Mission and Ministry Plan, which they report to Synod
- Provide opportunities for ministry units to discuss how such a plan is implemented in a local context

We exist, and gather, to fulfil the requirements Te Pouhere / The Constitution, and Canons of the Church.

- In terms of Title B Canon II, and related sections of Te Pouhere The Constitution
- To peruse the purpose of the church as set out in preambles 1 – 4 of Te Pouhere The Constitution

We gather as a place where the mind of the Diocese is formed.

- Discussions and resolutions (motions) of the Synod express the collective view of the diocese. On this basis, leaders in the diocese are able to express the ‘view of the church’ on particular matters.

As a Synod we hold ultimate responsibility for the Diocese.

- The Synod has responsibility as the ultimate governing body of the diocese.
- The role of attending to the details of governance is delegated to the Diocesan Council (as Standing Committee), a representative body of the Synod. The Diocesan Council is accountable to the Synod for this work.

We gather as a place where laity, clergy and bishops of the Diocese collaborate in making decisions.

- This is a foundational aspect of our Anglican kaupapa, where decisions are a collaborative effort of these three houses, which in turn are representative of the ministry units and associated ministries (including chaplaincies) of the diocese.

APPENDIX C – SURVEY RESULTS

May/June 2024

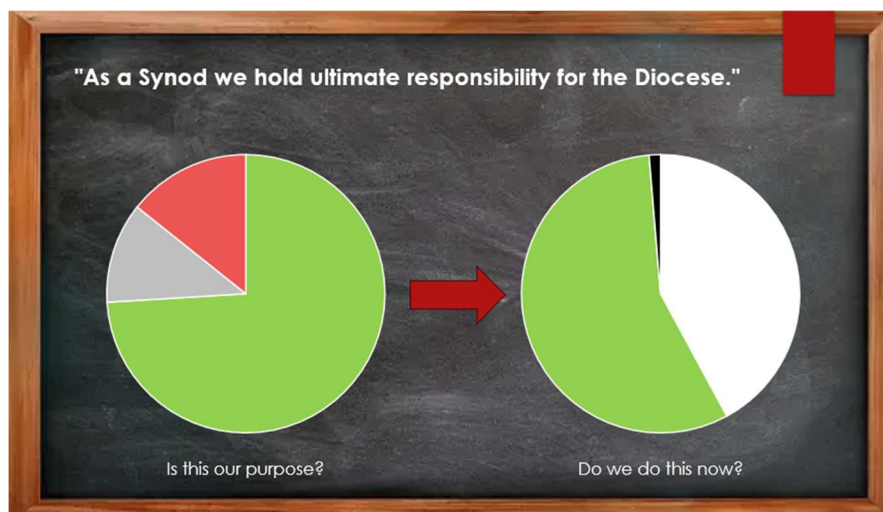
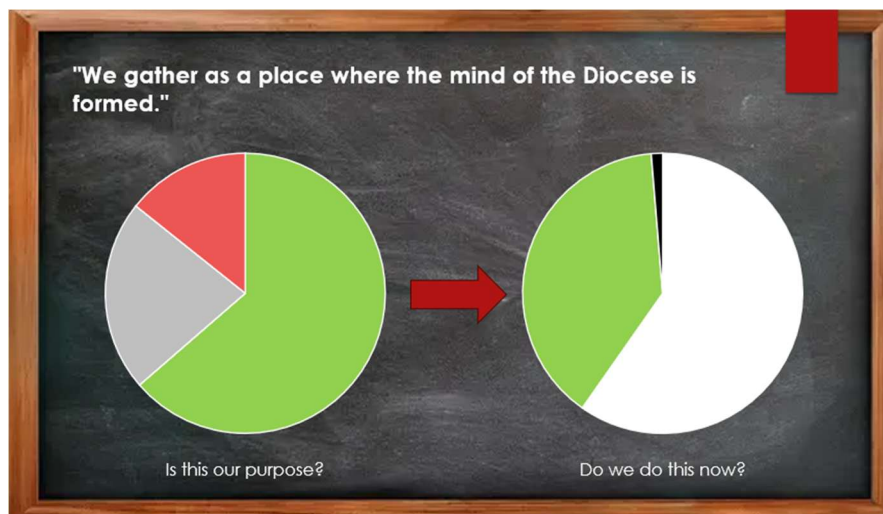
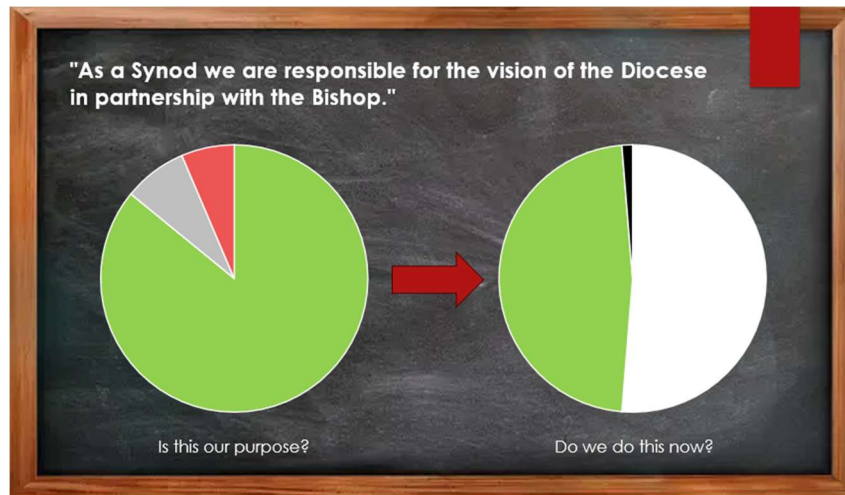
The following graphics provide a representation of the responses to the survey taken in May and June 2024.

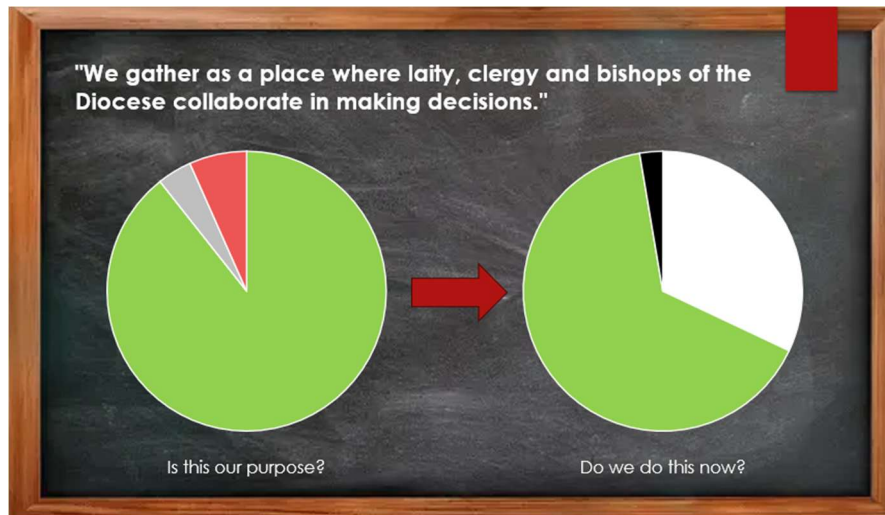
The Survey



Purposes of Synod



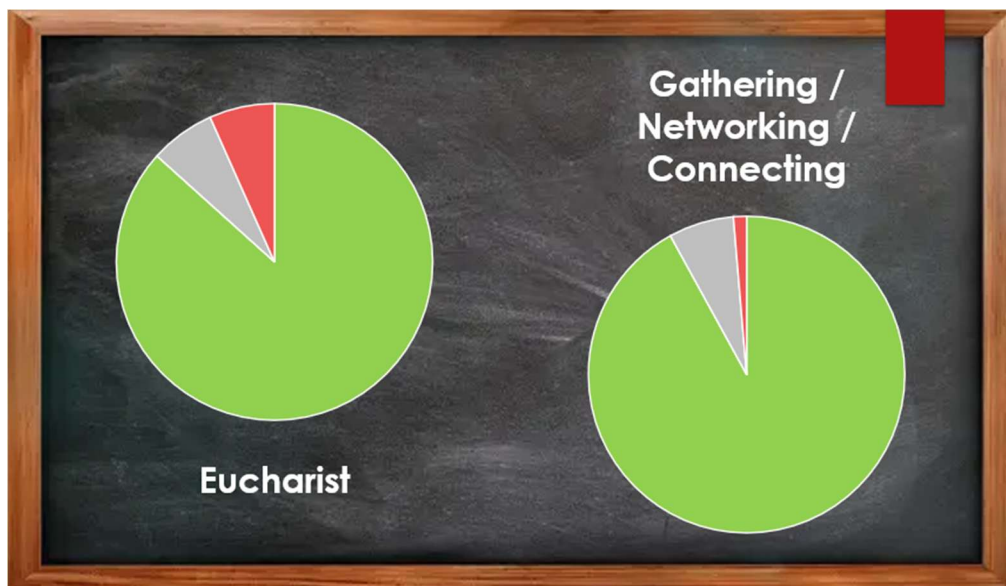




For the above five graphics:

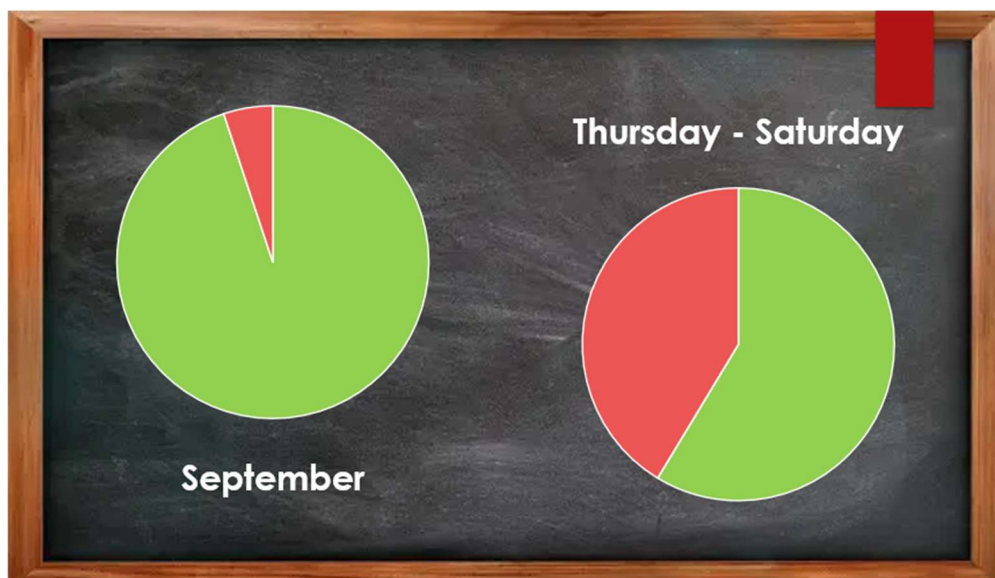
LEFT: Green = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don't Know; Red = Disagree / Strongly Disagree
RIGHT: Green = A good amount / Strongly; Black = Too Much; White = None at all / A little

General Questions



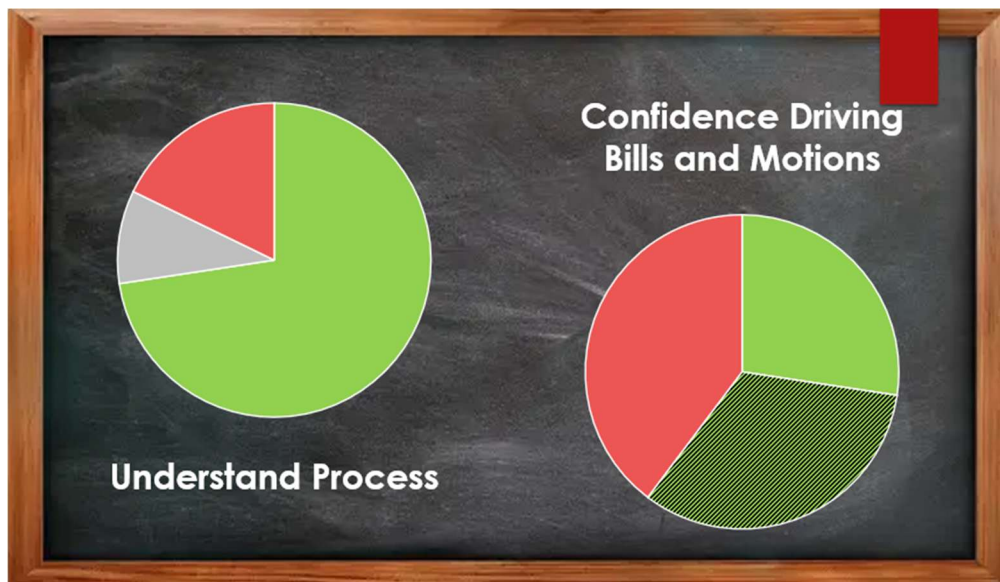
Left: "Opening Synod with a Eucharist service is an essential part of Synod."
Green = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don't Know; Red = Disagree / Strongly Disagree

Right: "The opportunity for gathering, networking and connecting across the diversity of our Diocese, is an essential part of Synod."
Green = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don't Know; Red = Disagree / Strongly Disagree



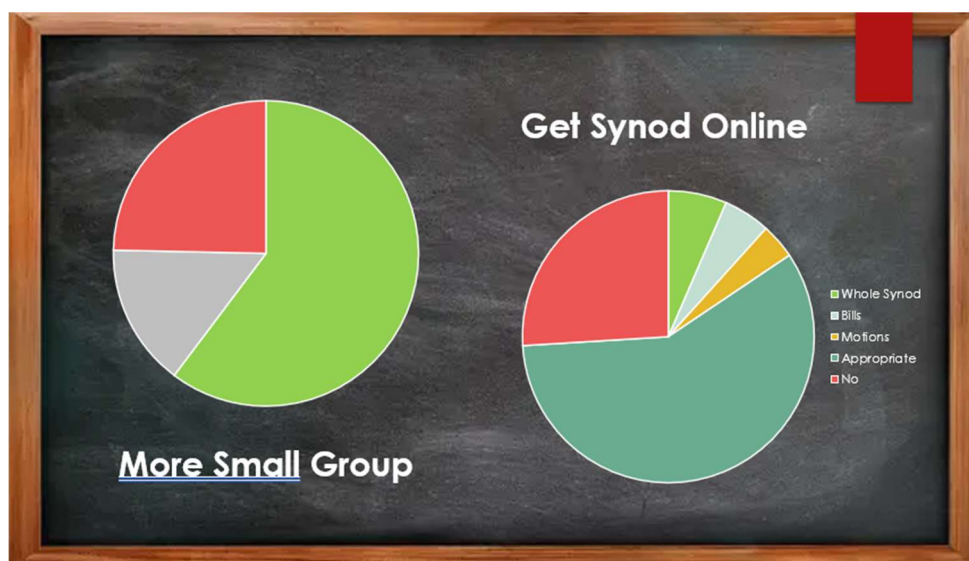
Left: "Synod meeting in September is a barrier to attendance and participation."
Red = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don't Know; Green = Disagree / Strongly Disagree

Right: "Synod meeting Thursday evening through to Saturday afternoon is a barrier to attendance and participation."
Green = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don't Know; Red = Disagree / Strongly Disagree



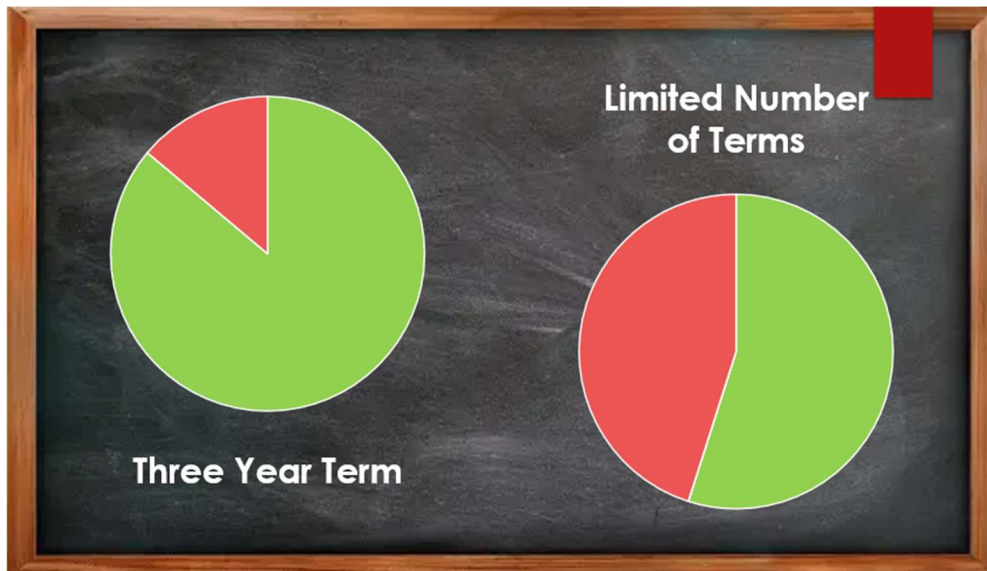
Left: "I have a clear understanding of the current processes of Synod"
 Green = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don't Know; Red = Disagree / Strongly Disagree

Right: "I have confidence that I could take a bill or motion through the Synod process"
 Red = No; Green Hash = Motions Only; Green = Bills and Motions



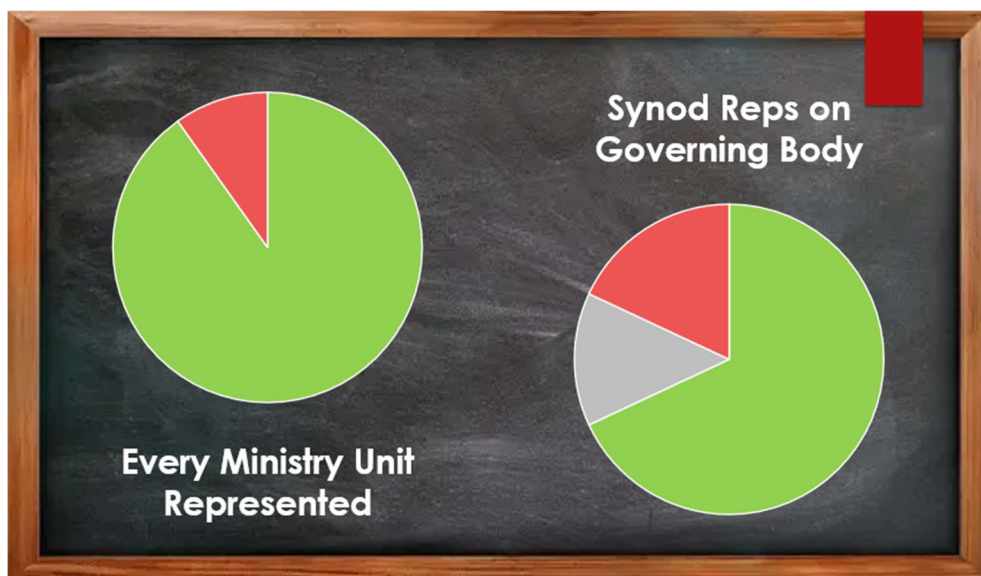
Left: "We should have more small-group/conference discussions to progress the business of Synod."
 Green = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don't Know; Red = Disagree / Strongly Disagree

Right: "Should we make more use of online platforms to do the business of Synod?"
 (key, as noted on graphic)



Left: “Three years is an appropriate term for Elected Synod Representatives”
Green = Yes; Red = No

Right: “Should there be limits on the maximum term for Elected Synod Reps?”
Green = Yes; Red = No



Left: Does every Ministry Unit need to be represented at Synod?
Green = Yes; Red = No

Right: “It is important that all Ministry Unit Synod Reps are members of their Ministry Unit Vestry / the Governing Body.”
Green = Agree / Strongly Agree; Grey = Don’t Know; Red = Disagree / Strongly Disagree

June 2024

Two questions were posed to the conference and the 130 responses collated through a word cloud.

What makes Synod feel like a chore to you?



What makes you come away making it feel like time well spent?



What would your best Synod experience look like? – A summary of the feedback:

Atmosphere & environment

- **Less hierarchical and intimidating:** Avoid setups like parliaments or elevated high tables.
- **More relaxed and welcoming:** Comfortable seating, laughter, chocolate fish, and informal interactions.
- **Inclusive and safe:** Especially for youth, neurodiverse individuals, and minority voices.
- **Celebratory and visionary:** Opportunities to share good news, inspiring worship, and pride in being Anglican.

Structure & format

- **Shorter and more focused:** Suggestions for one-day Synods or splitting into two shorter gatherings (“business” vs. mission/vision mahi).
- **Residential or hybrid models:** Including online participation and residential weekends.
- **Flexible timing and location:** Weekends for accessibility, rotating venues, and regional meetings.

Worship & spiritual Life

- **Inspiring worship and prayer:** Reflecting the diversity of the church, with varied expressions.
- **Opportunities for ministry sharing:** Workshops, presentations, and storytelling from parishes.

Pre-synod preparation

- **Better pre-Synod engagement:** Focus groups, online discussions, and written submissions.
- **Advance publication of materials:** Bills and motions shared months ahead.
- **Pre-Synod huis and strategy sessions:** To reduce repetition and improve debate quality.

Participation & dialogue

- **More equitable speaking opportunities:** Limit dominant voices, allow speaking from the floor, and use tech tools like Mentimeter.
- **Small group discussions:** Mixed groups for broader understanding, ensure safe facilitation.
- **Encourage diverse voices:** Including introverts, youth, and culturally diverse perspectives.

Decision-making & efficiency

- **Streamlined processes:** Efficient handling of consensus items, online committee work for technical bills.
- **Clear moderation:** Professional moderators to ensure fairness and inclusivity.
- **Accountability and follow-up:** Track actions taken on agreed motions.

APPENDIX E – RESEARCH ABSTRACT

July 2025

This thesis investigates whether pluralistic ignorance - the psychological phenomenon where individuals privately reject a group norm while believing others accept it - influences Pākehā Anglican identity formation in Aotearoa New Zealand. Beginning with the misperceived attitudes that were observed during a diocesan synod debate on inclusion of the Rainbow community in leadership roles, this research examines how Anglicans may self-silence due to inaccurate assumptions about others' beliefs. Using a mixed methods approach, Study 1 comprised of 15 structured interviews with Pākehā Anglican bishops, clergy, and laity in the Auckland Diocese. Twenty-six sub-themes were identified within the three major themes of Anglican Liturgical Tradition, Anglican Ritual Practice, and Anglican Understandings of Marriage. In Study 2, 229 participants were surveyed and paired questions were used to compare personal positions with perceptions of others' views. The research found statistically significant examples of pluralistic ignorance in 20 of the 26 sub-themes. Key findings revealed Anglicans consistently underestimated support for inclusive language, liturgical innovation, and socially progressive positions on marriage and sexuality. Female clergy emerged as strong advocates for change while consistently underestimating broader support. All demographic groups perceived themselves as outliers from imagined "typical Anglican" positions, despite expressing widely shared progressive views. These findings challenge conventional narratives of Anglican division between progressive and conservative factions. Instead, progressive aspirations appear more prevalent than perceived, with institutional narratives shaped by vocal minorities creating false impressions of conservative dominance. Hierarchical church structures and Westminster-style governance foster climates where pluralistic ignorance flourishes, leading to institutional decisions based on inaccurate assumptions about congregational beliefs. The thesis proposes Pasifika deliberation models, particularly talanoa, as alternatives that promote authentic dialogue over adversarial debate. By addressing the decision-making contexts in which pluralistic ignorance occurs, the Anglican Church might better align institutional responses with the genuine aspirations of church members.

Keywords: pluralistic ignorance, Anglican identity, liturgical tradition, church governance, talanoa