

## Rooted in Scripture: Synodical Governance

How do the Churches of the Anglican Communion practice their governance? Despite the notable differences in governance among the thirty-eight Provinces of the Communion, there remains a simple answer, though with a rarified word: Anglican governance is by synod. That is to say, Anglican governance includes laypeople, priests and deacons, and bishops, all meeting together in a decision-making body. Typically, and historically, representative laypeople together with priests and deacons constitute a synod, with a bishop serving as president of the assembly. Our tradition invests substantive authority in its bishops, but properly, bishops exercise no authority apart from the whole People of God. The term “bishop-in-synod” best describes the seat of episcopal authority within Anglicanism.

This collaborative style marks the Episcopal Church at every level of governance. Parish meetings, required by canon, gather at least once per year. The rector—not a bishop, in this case—presides, and all adult confirmed laypeople of the parish receive seat, voice and vote in this key parish body. Diocesan Conventions include all active clergy canonically resident in a Diocese, along with representative laypeople from the various parishes, missions, and other faith communities. The General Convention of the Episcopal Church meets every three years and has a distinctive synodical style, in that it is bicameral. The bishops meet in one

House, while the representative laity and clergy (deputies) from the 108 dioceses meet simultaneously in another House. Resolutions must pass both Houses to be binding. The Lambeth Conference, an assembly of all active bishops in the Anglican Communion who meet once each decade, though important, is not a synod, since it excludes laypeople and the other orders of ministry from its deliberations.

These musings are pertinent, coming on the heels of a very fine Diocesan Convention in November, and with the anticipation of Parish Meetings almost everywhere in January. Plus the General Convention meets in July 2012, this time in Indianapolis.

The synodical style of governance looks to Acts 15 for inspiration, and a glance at Galatians 2 gives an interesting and alternative slant on the Acts account. Reflection on these passages makes good preparation for any Church meeting.

Synods are by no means unique to the Anglican way, but they characterize our method of governance at every level. They find their roots in scripture, and they take into account the insight of everyone involved. At its best, synodical governance results in decisions transcending the mere sum of the individual insights. Here is Spirit-inspired collaboration at its best.

*Bishop Wayne Smith*   
January 2012

## Rooted in Scripture: Synodical Governance

How do the Churches of the Anglican Communion practice their governance? Despite the notable differences in governance among the thirty-eight Provinces of the Communion, there remains a simple answer, though with a rarified word: Anglican governance is by synod. That is to say, Anglican governance includes laypeople, priests and deacons, and bishops, all meeting together in a decision-making body. Typically, and historically, representative laypeople together with priests and deacons constitute a synod, with a bishop serving as president of the assembly. Our tradition invests substantive authority in its bishops, but properly, bishops exercise no authority apart from the whole People of God. The term “bishop-in-synod” best describes the seat of episcopal authority within Anglicanism.

This collaborative style marks the Episcopal Church at every level of governance. Parish meetings, required by canon, gather at least once per year. The rector—not a bishop, in this case—presides, and all adult confirmed laypeople of the parish receive seat, voice and vote in this key parish body. Diocesan Conventions include all active clergy canonically resident in a Diocese, along with representative laypeople from the various parishes, missions, and other faith communities. The General Convention of the Episcopal Church meets every three years and has a distinctive synodical style, in that it is bicameral. The bishops meet in one

House, while the representative laity and clergy (deputies) from the 108 dioceses meet simultaneously in another House. Resolutions must pass both Houses to be binding. The Lambeth Conference, an assembly of all active bishops in the Anglican Communion who meet once each decade, though important, is not a synod, since it excludes laypeople and the other orders of ministry from its deliberations.

These musings are pertinent, coming on the heels of a very fine Diocesan Convention in November, and with the anticipation of Parish Meetings almost everywhere in January. Plus the General Convention meets in July 2012, this time in Indianapolis.

The synodical style of governance looks to Acts 15 for inspiration, and a glance at Galatians 2 gives an interesting and alternative slant on the Acts account. Reflection on these passages makes good preparation for any Church meeting.

Synods are by no means unique to the Anglican way, but they characterize our method of governance at every level. They find their roots in scripture, and they take into account the insight of everyone involved. At its best, synodical governance results in decisions transcending the mere sum of the individual insights. Here is Spirit-inspired collaboration at its best.

*Bishop Wayne Smith*   
January 2012