



## Discussion Paper – Communicant Members & Parish Rolls

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### Background

The Synod passed the following resolution at the 2022 annual session of Synod:

#### COMMUNICANT MEMBERS & PARISH ROLLS

**Moved by The Rev'd Stephen Bloor**

**Seconded by Mr Neil Woolman**

That this Synod requests that Diocesan Council explores the option of parish electoral rolls, to help define who communicant members of parishes are, reporting back to Synod next year.

### Current position

The criteria for eligibility to participate in parish vestry meetings are contained in the Parochial Administration Ordinance (at s6(1), s9(1) and s13(1)). However, the criteria are expressed in a circuitous way, as they provide

There shall be a Vestry consisting of ...all members of the parish/congregation qualified at the time of any meeting thereof to elect lay members of the Synod in accordance with the Constitution

Section 13 of the Constitution tells us who is eligible to vote for lay members of Synod.

Constitution s13

13. (1) No person shall vote for the election of a lay member of the Synod unless at the time of such election he or she:
- (a) is a communicant, and
  - (b) has attained the age of sixteen years, and
  - (c) is a member of the parish for which the election is conducted and does not purport to be a member of any other parish in the Diocese, and
  - (d) shall have signed a declaration in the form contained in the Fourth Schedule hereto.

The declaration is as follows:

I DO HEREBY DECLARE that I am a member of The Anglican Church of Australia, that I am a communicant of the said Church, that I do not belong to any other religious denomination, that I have received the Holy Communion not less than three times during the past twelve months, that I have attained the age of sixteen years, that I am a member of the parish of:

.....

and that I do not consider myself to be a member of any other parish in the Diocese of Adelaide

## The problem

1. It can be difficult to ascertain who is entitled to participate in Annual Vestry Meetings, as there is no definitive list of parish members. This can lead to unfortunate scenes at the beginning of AVM's when people realise that they are supposed to sign the Declaration but are not sure if they meet the four stipulated criteria.
2. It would be helpful for the parish priest or priest in charge or locum to have a sense of who sees themselves as committed to the parish. Furthermore it would be useful for them to be able to communicate with everyone who considers themselves to be a member of the parish.
3. Similarly it would be helpful if the Archbishop and the Secretary of Synod were able to communicate directly with all members of the Church within the Diocese.
4. The problem is particularly acute in parishes which have multiple worship centres or congregations:
  - Parishes which operate under Parochial Administration Ordinance Part II Division II (sections 8 – 11) and
  - Parishes which operate under Parochial Administration Ordinance Part II Division III (sections 12-16).

For these parishes, everyone needs to be clear which congregation a person belongs to, because each congregation needs to elect churchwardens [Division II - s45(1)(c) and Division III - s15(a)]. It would be very helpful for people to nominate 'their' congregation in advance, rather than at the beginning of the meeting, where feelings could run high. There is also merit in nominating for a period of more than 1 year, to avoid the impression that people swap their allegiance when a contentious issue comes up for discussion.

## How other dioceses approach this

A straw poll of nine dioceses revealed that the majority (2/3) do require parishes to maintain an electoral roll:

Electoral roll required:

North Queensland, Newcastle, Melbourne, Tasmania, Bendigo, Perth

Electoral roll not required:

Sydney, Gippsland, Canberra & Goulburn

The Church of England also maintains Church Electoral Rolls.

In addition to spelling out who can participate in elections, the roll can be used to establish eligibility for the various positions for which elections are held (churchwardens, members of parish council, lay Synod representatives, parish representatives on Nomination Committee).

Some dioceses make a distinction between people who can attend and speak (parishioners) and those who can participate fully by voting on motions and in the election of parish office-bearers. (For example, parishioners between 16 and 18 can speak but not vote: parishioners who are on the electoral roll of another parish can speak, but not vote; retired clergy can speak but not vote).

Many dioceses stipulate that you have to have attended worship in the parish regularly (for example, Tasmania, 6 times in the past 12 months) or that you have been a worshipper in the parish for a specified period (for example, Southern Queensland 3 months)

One diocese includes a statement indicating commitment to contribute from their gifts to the life of the parish.

## Pros and Cons of Parish Rolls

### Pros

1. Clarity as to who is eligible to vote at parish vestry meetings
2. Clarity as to who is eligible to be elected as churchwarden, parish council member, lay Synod representative
3. Tangible sign of commitment to parish
4. *Provided parishioner gives permission to share personal information*, scope for improved communications from
  - a. Parish priest to parishioners
  - b. Parish council to parishioners
  - c. Archbishop to parishioners
  - d. Secretary of Synod to parishioners

### Cons

1. Additional administrative burden on parishes
2. Exclusion of newcomers or of elderly/infirm parishioners who are unable to attend church regularly