



Anglican Church of Australia

Primate: The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith

CIRCULAR LETTER

To: General Synod Members, Guests and Diocesan Registrars
Subject: Eighteenth Session of General Synod – Postponement
Date: 26 February 2021

Eighteenth Session of General Synod (GS18)

I am aware that many of you are in the process of registering your attendance at the meeting of General Synod scheduled to be held from 31 May to 4 June 2021.

Yesterday the General Synod Standing Committee met to consider whether the decision to hold the meeting at that time needed to be reviewed in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

I am writing to advise that it has been resolved to defer the Eighteenth Session of the General Synod to a date to be determined, most likely in 2022.

This difficult decision has been made in response to the continuing uncertainty around travel and gatherings.

Covid-19 has impacted all our communities in profound ways. We are mindful of the grief, disruption and heartache this world-wide pandemic has caused to individuals and communities. We are also thankful to God for the way Australia has fared through this time.

Since the beginning of this year State and Territory governments have initiated lockdowns, border closures, quarantine requirements and meeting restrictions, at very short notice. There is an expectation that this will continue in response to the threat of community transmission and attendance at GS18 is likely to be impacted for some, if not all, General Synod members.

The Standing Committee considered the financial impact of the deferral as well as other meeting options including a fully virtual meeting or a hybrid event where those members who can, attend in person, and those who cannot connect to the proceedings online. None of these options were considered appropriate for the conduct of an ordinary session of the General Synod and the nature of business to be considered at this next meeting.

I appreciate your commitment to serving the national church as a member of General Synod and recognise the impact of the decision to defer the meeting on your personal arrangements. Thank you for your patience.

The General Secretary will be in contact with members with more information on the status of registrations and travel and accommodation requests.

The Standing Committee will continue to review the changing circumstances and you will be advised of a new date for GS18 as soon as it is confirmed.

Proposed conference on Human Sexuality, Same-sex Relationships and Marriage

At the time of our last General Synod in 2017, Australia was in the midst of a significant debate about the legalisation of same-sex marriage. In his Primatial Address to the General Synod, Archbishop Philip Freier, spoke of the proposed changes to the Marriage Act and the upcoming plebiscite. He noted the wide variety of opinions within the Anglican Church on this issue; summarised the doctrine of marriage as set out in the Book of Common Prayer as being between a man and a woman; and expressed his hope for respectful discussion without vilification of those with a different point of view.

The plebiscite result was 61.6% in favour of change of the Marriage Act. In December 2017 the Marriage Act was amended to allow same-sex couples to marry.

The plans for GS18 in 2020 included a conference on Human Sexuality as part of the program. This conference was planned to be an opportunity to listen well to one another before we moved into the process of motions and debate.

When GS18 was deferred to 2021, the Standing Committee considered how this conference could be held outside of a meeting of the Synod. The Standing Committee considered using online meeting technology to enable the conversation but was not able to find a system that would satisfactorily provide a space for our hearing of one another and provide appropriate safety for all participants.

The Standing Committee decided not to hold the conference either prior to or as part of the meeting of General Synod. I am personally disappointed that we have not been able to hold the planned conference, but it has been overtaken by current circumstances.

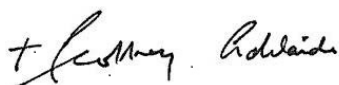
Since the last General Synod two dioceses have considered legislation that sought to respond to changes in the Marriage Act. The Diocese of Wangaratta passed a regulation authorising a liturgy for the blessing of civil marriages. The Diocese of Newcastle considered legislation concerning the discipline of clergy. Questions arising from both these pieces of legislation were referred to the Appellate Tribunal¹. The recent majority opinion of the Appellate Tribunal means that we are in now a very different position from 2017, and the business before the General Synod will no doubt reflect this new space.

This issue, along with other important issues will be before us when we are able to meet together and seek to discern God's leading for us as the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia. The mission of the Church is God's mission, and we are called to bring the good news of God's salvation to all people. I pray that we will approach our meeting of General Synod with much prayer, humility and reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

In these uncertain times, God's faithfulness and changelessness gives us great hope and strength. May God continue his saving and renewing work among us.

I look forward to being with at the Eighteenth Session of General Synod as soon as it can be arranged with confidence.

Yours in Christ



The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith
Archbishop of Adelaide & Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia

¹ For information regarding the Reference to the Appellate Tribunal and their opinion go to <https://anglican.org.au/governance/tribunals/appellate-tribunal-current-matters/appellate-tribunal-determinations/>