



An easy(er) guide to Standing Orders

What is a Synod meeting?

Our Synod meeting is a group of Local Church Elders, ministers and community workers, supporting staff, and ecumenical friends who meet twice annually to have oversight of the work of the whole North Western Synod.

What do we do?

When we gather, we worship, pray, and eat together as well as doing the more formal business of receiving committee reports on work done, discussing new ideas together, and deciding on new work to be undertaken.

(Standing Order 1)

Who decides what we discuss?

As well as reports and motions from committees, there are procedures for enabling local churches and individual members of Synod to bring new ideas to the table too.

(Standing Order 5)

The Synod is our meeting, to discuss together our life and ministries.

The Clerk and the Synod Executive will organise the day and the order of business, ensuring a mix of worship, reports, discussion, motions, presentations, speakers, and and hopefully inspiration!

(Standing Order 1.9)

Did you know?

Not all information needs to be formally presented to the Synod. Members can also request a stall for people to visit during lunch, or information to be added to the collection of leaflets and documents in the Synod pack for each member and church.

(Standing Order 11)

How do we discuss and decide?

The way we handle our business can be done in three ways;

A: en bloc - for matters of simple formality, but which require a decision to be recorded, *en bloc* voting can be used. This is where all information has been sent to synod members in advance for consideration, and at our meeting we vote on all the en bloc issues as one, with no further discussion.

(Standing Order 2)

Important: If anyone feels there is an item in en bloc which does require further explanation or discussion, there is a procedure for asking for an item to be removed if you, (and enough others) feel this is necessary.

B: Majority Decision - for business which probably requires opportunity for questions to be asked, but does not necessarily require much discussion or amendment, *majority voting* is used. This allows for questions to be answered, but the business can be past efficiently by the majority required by our constitutional rules. These rules will be used, for example, when approving accounts or deciding on constitutional amendments.

(Standing Order 3)

C: Consensus Decision Making - when discussing the work and mission of the church, a full exploration and discussion of the issues is vital to help ensure everyone fully understands, takes part in, and supports the decision. We call this *consensus*. For larger meetings like Synod we have rules to help us make decisions in this way which can make it sound complicated and formal, but the principle is that on important decisions about our mission and ministry we work at the ideas until everyone is content their view has been heard and understood, (including the Holy Spirit), and that even if there is still some disagreement we can move forward, together. We can only move forward in this way if we are united, 'winning' a vote by a narrow margin cannot achieve this.

To explore further the principles, the Biblical basis, and the different methods of seeking consensus you can read the Synod booklet 'Discernment for Missional Disciples', or visit the '[Discerning Together](#)' page on our Synod website.

(Standing Order 4)

Making good decisions and making them well

We're here to make good decisions, not simply pass business. Therefore there are many other ways we can contribute and help shape the decisions we make.

Amendments

If you don't think an idea is clear, or can see a potential problem, you can suggest alterations to the wording.

If you think the idea is good but could be made even better, you can suggest amendments like that too.

If you like parts of the idea but not all, it may even be possible to pass some of the idea but take other parts out.

(Standing Orders 3.5 - 3.10, and 4.3)

Needs more work!

If it is felt by the Synod Meeting that lots of changes are needed, we cannot do that well or quickly as a large group of people. So if the meeting decides the idea is good but needs improvement before we make a decision, we can send it back to the appropriate committee(s) for further work, and say when we'd like it to come back to Synod for discussion.

(Standing Orders 3.1, 3.13, and 4.4.4)

Got a better idea?

Sometimes inspiration does strike, or the Holy Spirit is heard! So we even have procedures which allow us to do things like break into smaller discussion groups, and suggest alternative approaches to the issue under consideration.

(Standing Orders 3.10, and 4.3)

Remember!

The job of our committees is to carry out the work we have decided together at our Synod meetings, and for us all to bring our different contexts and experiences to the Synod meeting where we listen together for where the Holy Spirit is leading us together.

(Standing Orders 2 - 5)

There are also rules to try ensure discussion remains focussed, fair, and not too long. You don't need to worry about these now, you'll be told if you're breaking them!

Other important bits and bobs

(Standing Orders 7 - 15)

- ▶ There are occasions when our constitution requires an accurate count of the vote, on such occasions a paper ballot may be used. (SO 7)
- ▶ Sometimes something crops up which isn't covered in the agenda, you can request time for issues like this in emergencies, or if you think there is an important omission in the agenda. (SO 8)
- ▶ If something is unclear, or you believe it is being misrepresented, you can ask for clarification, or to speak yourself. (SO 9)
- ▶ If you really cannot accept a decisions, you can ask for your disagreement to be recorded in the minutes. (SO 9)
- ▶ Our meetings are open for anyone to attend, so you can bring along others from your church if you wish, but only the Member of Synod may speak and vote. (SO 10)
- ▶ If you've got some news or information you wish to share, contact the Clerk in advance of the meeting about how best to do this. If you turn up on the day and distribute information which has not been previously agreed by the Clerk, you will be asked to stop. (SO 11)
- ▶ Occasionally the business we discuss can be sensitive, if this happens we may decide only members of Synod may be present and observers are asked to leave. (SO 12)
- ▶ We know if a debate is not exactly thrilling you may be tempted to play with your phone, or if its exciting you may wish to tell the world on Social Media. However, please wait until breaks and the conclusion of business before you do either. (SO 13)
- ▶ So we know what we decided, and it can be communicated to our churches, a record of what's been said and agreed is always kept by the Clerk. (SO 14)
- ▶ There are occasions where we may also decide to temporarily ignore any of the rules above, but we can't change or scrap them! (SO 15)