



Guidance Notes for those considering Constitutional Reform

In general, constitutions should be as brief as possible, clear, and not bound with lots of restrictions. That is they should if possible be positive and permissive. However, they do need to be fit for purpose, and to answer the questions most people might ask about a Chaplaincy.

Constitutions should begin with a description of the Chaplaincy, making reference to its relationship with the diocese, province and Anglican Communion. Some geographical reference will be necessary, but this need not be a long section. Thinking about a pithy description of a Chaplaincy makes a useful exercise for a congregation!

The next section will be about membership and how that is to be reckoned. The typical Anglican way here is not to define membership as such – all baptized Christians will rightly think of themselves as members in some way – but rather to set out how the Chaplaincy is to be governed, and this inevitably means defining a kind of institutional eligibility. The usual way forward is to define who can be on the Electoral Roll. This is the group from whom candidates for certain offices can be drawn, and who are eligible to vote in official Church meetings. The constitution should define what privileges and responsibilities belong to entry on the Roll, and most importantly, who can be on it.

In UK settings, membership of the Electoral Roll would usually be restricted to confirmed Anglicans, or full members of Churches in communion with the Anglican Church or one of its provinces. In Cyprus and the Gulf that is not practicable. Many members of our congregations come to us as the only Protestant option, or the only geographical option or the only English language option, even though they may have a long history in, for example, the Methodist or United Reformed Churches. Chaplaincies will usually, however, want to make a distinction between ‘mainline’ churches such as those mentioned, and ad hoc gatherings or fellowships, whose members will have little sense of how to organize a fundamentally Anglican Church. That is not to say that people from those backgrounds are not welcome in absolutely every aspect of church life. It is to say though, that on a list of people who will vote for or become people who are responsible to bishop and archdeacon within an Anglican framework for many elements of the Chaplaincy’s life, it makes most sense to have people who have understanding of and sympathy with that responsibility. The kind of words we have been using recently to describe this are something along the lines of: “a member of a church in communion with the Anglican province of Jerusalem and the Middle East, or of a church in a Covenant relationship with such a church, within the Anglican Communion.”

You may wish to include a pro forma for application for membership of the Roll, as an appendix. You will need to say how the Roll is to be kept up to date, and who has final jurisdiction over someone’s right to be on the roll (usually the archdeacon or bishop).

The next section will deal with the Church Council. What are its functions to be? Head of these should be something about leading the mission of the church, and cooperating with the Chaplain and ministry team to that end. There will also be a number of practical responsibilities about finance and fabric, and about the day to day administration of the church. Membership and makeup of the Council needs to be defined. Councils should not be overlarge. Remember Jesus managed with twelve. You should also decide whether co-options are desirable, and in what circumstances. It is logical that anyone whose name is on the Electoral Roll may be a member of the Council. Some Chaplaincies, anxious about Anglican identity being swamped also want to put some kind of quota of ‘definite Anglicans’. This may well best be achieved by making sure that the Wardens are confirmed Anglicans, though even here there may be occasions when it is desirable to have a non-Anglican as Warden. The way forward here is



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to include a phrase such as, “except with the Bishop’s consent.” You will need to say something (positive) about the relationship between Chaplain and Council, and about Chairmanship. You may want to be specific about some aspects of how meetings are to be conducted: for example, how often should the Council meet; does all business have to be notified in advance; what notice should be given of meetings etc. You will probably want to make provision for sub-committees (one of which would probably deal with finance and one with fabric), congregational meetings, if there is more than one congregation served, and to decide whether there should be an executive committee and how it should be constituted, when it should meet and how its minutes should be published. Transparency is important in all church meetings.

The arrangements for the Annual General Meeting should come next. The constitution should say when it will be held (bear in mind diocesan budgeting deadlines), what its agenda should be, and how elections will be conducted. This last will also include when nomination papers need to be distributed and so on. It will be wise to include provision for an Extraordinary General Meeting. How would such a meeting be prompted, and how would it be conducted. Normally, such meetings would have just one pressing agenda item.

Multi Church Chaplaincies will need to define the relationship between each of the churches and the Chaplaincy, and to decide on local leadership and how local issues are to be dealt with.

The office of Church Warden may need a complete section. Diocesan guidelines will soon be available to describe the role of Warden, and it may be that here, as elsewhere, all that is necessary is to draw attention to those guidelines and agree to be guided by them or adopt them. This would also be true particularly on the guidelines for appointing Chaplains and for reviewing their contracts.

So as not to be tied down to an outdated constitution you will want to include details of how the Constitution can be amended (this will normally mean an EGM), and to be complete, you need to have some kind of instruction as to what happens to any Chaplaincy assets if the Chaplaincy ceases to exist.

Other than this, there should be little to include in a constitution as such. Other matters of custom and practice in particular places, should be regarded simply as that. Issues around ecumenical relations, discipline, styles of worship etc. are outside the boundaries of what a Chaplaincy constitution should contain.

John Holdsworth
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