

OXFORD DIOCESAN SYNOD

22 March 2014

FIRST NOTICE PAPER

QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 70

1. **John Cook (017)** to ask –

Following his recent *Ad clerum*, can the Bishop of Oxford confirm that he and the Area Bishops of the Diocese will adhere to the House of Bishops' pastoral statement on Civil Partnerships, which states that: 'The House of Bishops does not regard entering into a civil partnership as intrinsically incompatible with holy orders, provided the person concerned is willing to give assurances to his or her bishop that the relationship is consistent with the standards for the clergy set out in *Issues in Human Sexuality*'?

The **Bishop of Oxford** to reply –

Yes.

2. **Prudence Dailey (113)** to ask –

Are there any legal, conventional or ethical constraints which apply to bishops and archdeacons in relation to lobbying in respect of clergy and lay elections to General, Diocesan and Deanery Synods?

The **Diocesan Registrar** to reply –

As the Presiding Officer for the Diocese in relation to General Synod elections, it is my legal duty under Rule 39(7) of the Church Representation Rules to ensure that 'during the period beginning with the date on which nominations are invited and ending on the last date for the return of voting papers, no papers or other literature except election addresses ... shall be circulated to the electors by or under the authority of the Diocesan Synod or in the Deanery Synod or distributed at a Synod meeting which in [my] opinion are likely to prejudice the election'. Area deans, lay chairs and secretaries of Deanery Synods are similarly under a duty to ensure that 'no papers or other literature form part of an official circulation or are distributed at a Synod meeting which in the opinion of any of them are likely to prejudice the election'.

The Rule applies to any relevant material (whether produced by a bishop, an archdeacon or anyone else). It has always been my practice to draw attention to this Rule in the run-up to every General Synod election, and this question gives me the opportunity to do so again well in advance of next year's General Synod election process. Please draw this Rule to the attention of Area Deans, lay chairs and deanery secretaries, and tell them that I will be writing to them about it again in a year or so's time.

The Rule of course applies only to elections to the General Synod, and to the specific period I quote above. There is no similar provision under the Rules which relates to Deanery Synod elections or Diocesan Synod elections.

In accordance with Standing Order 70, it would not be appropriate for me to answer the question insofar as it relates to 'conventional and ethical' considerations. My answer would be bound to stray into expression of opinion, which could affect the exercise of my judgment in the event that I have to decide as Presiding Officer on any material which might be put in circulation next year in breach of Rule 39(7). For the same reason I will not be able to answer any supplementary questions which invite expressions of opinion. However, I would like to draw everyone's attention to a helpful paper issued by the General Synod office, concerning the deanery synod elections now taking place. It can be found at <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1944524/deanerysynodleaflet.pdf>