

Anglican Church here may ease rules on divorce

By Tonny Chan

ANGLICANS in Hongkong and Macau may get divorced and have their remarriage solemnised in church by a priest, if a proposal to relax the rules is accepted by the church.

The proposal submitted recently by a commission appointed by the church's standing committee said "divorce may be allowed if the objective criteria for continued faithfulness no longer exist."

The commission, headed by Rev Michael Poon, also recommends that provision should be made for the possible remarriage of divorcees in church to show the church will not abandon them.

The proposal, together with the controversial issue within the church of mixed marriages, has been put on the agenda of the upcoming 38th Diocesan Synod of Hongkong and Macau.

There is at present no clear common understanding among Anglican churchmen on divorce. Anglicans in Hongkong and Macau cannot be remarried in church, and the church will not solemnise the marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian.

Diocesan Secretary General, Rev Louis Tsui, said the synod would try to find a clear understanding for the diocese on di-

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— Church commission

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Rev Poon said the Anglican Bishop of Hongkong had permitted only two divorce cases in the diocese's history, by granting "a dispensation," not approval in the general sense.

According to the Anglican church's official publication, *Diocesan Echo*, representatives at the synod will decide whether or not to set up special working committees to follow up the proposal.

Rev Poon said the large number of divorce cases today had made it a potentially complicated issue which could not be handled on an individual basis.

He said the Diocese of Hongkong and Macau, which was independent in jurisdiction from the Church of England, was caught in a difficult position.

The four-day synod, opening on November 29 at St John's Cathedral here, will be attended by more than 200 representatives from Macau and the terri-

tory.

According to the November issue of the *Echo*, the proposal on divorce and remarriage in church was contained in a report sent to the Diocese's standing committee in August.

Rev Poon said details had yet to be discussed but added that reasons like an unsatisfactory sex life between couples would not be good enough for the church to allow a divorce.

The report also said there must be a one-year gap between a divorce and remarriage, and that each remarriage proposal should be referred by the parish priest to the bishop.

The report said a remarriage service should be similar to a normal wedding service, with prayers of dedication and thanksgiving, rather than the less formal wedding blessing.

According to the *Echo*, the synod will also be asked to allow the marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian to be solemnised upon request. This is currently forbidden by the church.

The proposal to formally recognise mixed-marriages was put forward because Hongkong was a pluralistic society and marriages between Christians and non-Christians had become a fact of life, said the report.