

could choose either to remain in their current offices on the basis of the existing provisions but without the additional rights and protections under Section 23 or to transfer to common tenure.

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General Synod of the Church of Ireland

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The Synod met in Galway; there were two Bills of particular significance.

ECCLESIASTICAL COURTS

The first Bill represented the culmination of a review, begun in 2003, of the structures and procedures of the Church of Ireland Ecclesiastical Courts and Tribunals, which had remained virtually unchanged since the latter part of the nineteenth century. A new disciplinary process was required, sensitive to the concerns of the clergy and the key pastoral role of bishops, while at the same time ensuring compliance with the legislation of both jurisdictions in Ireland and with European legislation on employment rights.

The existing provisions relating to the operation of the Diocesan Courts and the Court of the General Synod regarding such matters as granting licences, dispensations and faculties, remain largely unchanged. The substantive changes were contained in Part IV, which provided a new structure, in addition to the existing Diocesan Courts and Court of the General Synod, for dealing with disciplinary matters. The Bill sets out who may make a complaint and how it should be brought to the attention of the authorities, and provides a filtering mechanism. There is also provision for pastoral resolution of problems, with reference to a disciplinary tribunal as a final possibility, and provision for a right of appeal.

Compared to the old system, the new procedure places more emphasis on lawyers than on bishops. However, in one respect, the bishops retain the last word. If a question relating to the doctrine or ritual of the Church of Ireland arises in any matter before a disciplinary or appeal tribunal, the tribunal shall, if it considers that an understanding of the doctrine or ritual concerned is

necessary for making a ruling, request the House of Bishops to issue a statement setting out their collective understanding of the position of the Church. That statement will be binding on the respondent, the appellant and the tribunal concerned.

CLERGY PENSIONS

The clergy pension scheme is a final salary scheme and has not been immune to the problems that have beset all pension schemes recently. The retirement age was reduced some years ago but, on actuarial advice, the trustees considered it necessary to revise the 'normal retirement age' for new entrants from 65 to 67. There was some resistance to this proposal, but the Bill passed comfortably. There were a number of consequential amendments to the scheme relating to such matters as early retirement, retirement on grounds of ill health, and late retirement. There was no change to the facility that enables the purchase of additional service years.

OTHER LEGISLATION

Two final Bills related to reorganisation of the Chapter of St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, and the introduction of provision for rural deaneries in a united diocese to cross diocesan boundaries. Both Bills were passed unanimously.

The first reading of two new Bills to be presented to the General Synod in 2009 was satisfactorily concluded. Both Bills concerned changes to the *Prayer Book*. The first proposed the inclusion in the *Prayer Book* of a declaration adopted by the General Synod in 1999 to set the 39 Articles in their historical context. The second proposed a Bill to amend the marriage service to comply with changes in the marriage laws. Both resolutions received the necessary majorities.

PRESIDENT OF IRELAND'S ADDRESS

The Synod was addressed, for the first time, by the President of Ireland. President McAleese made an inspirational speech identifying the present time as a pivotal moment in the journey of the new Ireland from conflict to peace and prosperity. While acknowledging that the churches had sometimes been accused of being part of the problem, she saw the churches as persuaders for peace and the unobtrusive builders of healthy cross-community and cross-border relationships. She spoke of her vision for Ireland as 'as a welcoming homeland for people of all faiths and of none'; and she wished the Synod well in its task of making Ireland the best it can be.