

provision for conscientious objectors. If the first were passed and became a canon it would not come into force until the second bill was approved by the Governing Body and also became a canon. The second bill would include the scheme of pastoral provision as a schedule in order to give objectors as much reassurance as possible that the Church was being faithful to its declared intent in 1996. After debate, the Governing Body agreed the proposals by a majority.

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General Synod of the Church of Ireland

May 2012

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INTRODUCTION

Although six bills appeared on the agenda paper for Dublin this year there was only one of real substance. Two were to correct some cross-references in previous legislation, one was of a technical nature relating to voluntary pension contributions and a further bill imposed a requirement on dioceses to provide statistics to central Church bodies when demanded.

There was also a bill disbanding the existing provincial mediation panels, which have never been used since they were established some ten years ago – not so much because relationships between clergy, parishes and the ecclesiastical authorities in Ireland are so good that there are never any quarrels as because the perception on the part of clergy is that the procedures are inimical to them. At the time that these panels were established, a levy was imposed to provide the funding that it was felt might be necessary. No provision has as yet been made to deal with those funds. It will be interesting to see if they will be retained in central funds or distributed back to the dioceses.

THE COMMISSION ON EPISCOPAL MINISTRY AND STRUCTURES

The final bill, while simple and uncontroversial in itself, might well have significant and far-reaching consequences: it establishes a Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures.

There have been attempts in the past, some successful and some not, to tinker with diocesan boundaries, but nothing so radical as this has been done since the run-up to disestablishment, when the major talking point was whether we needed bishops at all. A glance at the terms of reference, which appear in the schedule to the bill, indicates that the questions to be answered are not quite as fundamental as that. However, they do include: What are bishops for? What skills do they need? How should they be chosen? What structures should they operate in? What resources, funding and training do they need?

The Commission is to run until 2014 before any question of reappointment or dissolution is to arise. With such material to consider, they will need that time and possibly more. The legislation includes a provision whereby, in relation to any final scheme presented by the Commission, the existing right of individual dioceses to veto any scheme that affects them is annulled.

OTHER MATTERS

While there was little legislation of note this year, the various motions and reports raise the promise of legislation for the future. The trials and tribulations of the Clergy Pension Fund have intensified to such an extent as to make it likely that proposals will be brought next year closing the Scheme to new entrants and providing new arrangements for them. The Liturgical Advisory Committee is talking of a new Hymnal Supplement and the Covenant Council has trailed the likelihood of legislation to provide for the interchangeability of ministries with the Methodist Church. While on this ecumenical note, it should be mentioned that the Synod approved the Memorandum of Agreement between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (formerly the Leuenberg Church Fellowship).

CONCLUSION: HUMAN SEXUALITY

It would be difficult to conclude any report of this year's proceedings without mention of the topic of human sexuality. A motion promoted by the bishops came before the Synod after a good deal of procedural discussion. The debate took up about one-sixth of the time for which Synod was in session and would have occupied more if it had not been brought to an end by a closure motion.

The motion was lengthy and contained three main points. These were presented as being, first, a statement of the existing teaching, summarised as being that 'faithfulness within marriage is the only normative context for sexual intercourse'; second, an acknowledgement that the Church was not as safe a place as it should be in the light of our commitment, and continuing commitment, to love our neighbour; and, third, a request to the Synod's Standing

Committee to continue work on the issue of human sexuality in the context of religious belief and to report back. There were a number of amendments put forward but all were defeated. All voting was by orders and by division. The motion was carried by a clear majority.

The passing of this motion means that the conversation, which had already started in the Church with a successful residential Synod conference in March 2012, will definitely continue, in an effort to find some resolution to the various problems.

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General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

June 2012

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INTRODUCTION

To a Synod with little controversial on the agenda apart from the decision about the Anglican Covenant, the Primus in his charge at the opening Eucharist spoke of the economic wilderness through which society and the Church were travelling. The Covenant had been a response to the apparent wilderness of disagreement and disorder in the Anglican Communion, and he hoped that the Synod would express its deep commitment to the version of the Communion in which members were drawn closer to one another. The Scottish Church aspired to be fully engaged in society.

BUDGETS

Opening debates were about finance. While a surplus had been produced in the General Fund, this was partly due to reduced expenditure as a result of grants not being claimed and a two-year moratorium on building grants. This had given a breathing space for other cost savings to be identified. About two-thirds of the annual income of the Synod was derived from investments, which were unlikely to expand to the extent they had done in the past, and deficits were projected for the next few years. The recommendation was for Provincial Quota to