

requirement that an 'Anglican Eucharist' be celebrated in the parish on certain specified days. The Amending Canon has that effect and provides guidance to bishops on how they should exercise their discretion to dispense with the celebration of Holy Communion, whilst still ensuring that it is celebrated (as required by the Canons) with 'reasonable frequency'. As the draft Amending Canon represented 'Article 7 business' for the purposes of the Synod's Constitution, it had to be referred to the House of Bishops before coming back to the Synod for Final Approval; and the House exercised its right to amend the draft by changing the matters to which a bishop must have regard in exercising his discretion.

SECONDARY LEGISLATION

Finally, the February and July groups of sessions also saw an unusually large number of pieces of secondary legislation, in addition to the usual Fees Orders that have to be taken every July. A number of them related to amendments to the two Church of England pension schemes. But the most significant related to the terms of service of the clergy: as the next step in implementing 'common tenure' – the new form of tenure for clergy to be introduced under the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) Measure 2009 – approval was given in July to Regulations which set out the detailed terms of common tenure and make provision for other forms of instrument (such as codes of practice and guidance by the Archbishops' Council) which will come to the Synod for approval at future groups of sessions with a view to completing the implementation process by the end of 2010.

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General Synod of the Church of Ireland

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MICHAEL DAVEY
Solicitor

BILLS REQUIRING A TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY

There was a varied legislative programme at Synod this year. There were two special Bills requiring a two-thirds majority of each order of the House of

Representatives. This procedure is applicable where any modification or alteration in ‘the articles, doctrines, rites, rubrics or formularies of the Church’ is involved.¹ One of the Bills provided for some minor changes to the marriage service arising out of changes to the civil law. This Bill achieved the necessary majority without comment.

The other provoked more discussion. It provided for the inclusion in the *Book of Common Prayer*, adjacent to the text of the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*, of a declaration seeking to set the *Articles* in their historical context and to distance the present-day Church from the extremes associated with the original text. This declaration had been adopted by the Synod in 1999. There was no intention of amending or altering the underlying theology; but some fears were expressed that the language of the declaration, if adopted by the Synod under the special procedures, might have that effect. Accordingly an amendment was proposed and passed to ensure that what was being called into question was the tone and tenor of the *Articles* rather than their theology: to ensure that, as one speaker put it, we might disagree without being disagreeable. The Bill, as amended, easily achieved the necessary majorities.²

CLERGY PAY AND PENSIONS

The clergy pension fund had reported a difficult time in the Synod of 2008. Not surprisingly it presented a similar report in 2009. To meet the statutory requirements there had to be an injection of funds and, in addition, increases in contributions both by the clergy themselves and by the parishes/dioceses. Similar financial difficulties were reported by the Central Church Authorities with similar effects, such as a freeze on clerical and central Church salaries. The dire financial news was in no way unexpected and did not, on this occasion, attract criticism. The Pensions Bill was duly passed.

Despite the financial problems the Synod also approved, in principle, machinery for the making of rules under which non-stipendiary clergy could be paid for duties performed at the bishop’s request and be reimbursed for expenses incurred in the performance of such duties. This provision will be of limited effect only, since no new members of the class affected, namely non-stipendiary ministers, will be created under the new clergy training arrangements which start this year.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

A Bill was also presented to disband the Commission on Church Buildings. This Commission was originally brought into existence to assist dioceses by bringing

¹ *Constitution of the Church of Ireland* I 26.

² The text is available at <<http://ireland.anglican.org/cmsfiles/pdf/Synod/2009/bills/billa.pdf>>, accessed 7 June 2009.

in recommendations for the closure of churches which were no longer required. Its assistance had only been requested twice and on each occasion its recommendations had created controversy. The last time it was requested to act was in 1988 and in the circumstances it was felt that it should now be disbanded. This was duly done and such monies as it retained transferred back to central church funds.

CATHEDRALS

In 2007 legislation had been introduced to provide for the appointment of Ecumenical Canons to the Chapter of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. This year further legislation was introduced to provide for the assignment of stalls to such Canons and for their residence qualifications. Not to be outdone, the Dean of Belfast proposed a Bill to provide for the appointment of both Lay and Ecumenical Canons to the Cathedral Church of St Anne, Belfast. These Bills were duly passed, completing the legislative programme.

CONCLUSION

The Synod of 2009 was characterised by a number of experiments. Instead of the usual mid-week meeting it took place over Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The mid-week meeting, it was felt, militated against attendance by such groups as young people, people in normal employment and mothers with young children. Attendance figures suggested that at least the new format had done no harm; however, given the triennial nature of Synod elections, it will clearly be some years before it can be determined whether the experiment actually results in a wider and more diverse membership. The debating procedures were also reformed, with the removal of many formal introductory speeches. The impression given was of less pressure on time and more balanced discussion of the various topics. There also appeared to have been some relaxation of the episcopal dress code, since members were intrigued to discover that one member of the Bench was wearing rainbow-coloured socks, albeit with the emphasis on purple.

Finally, the Synod Eucharist, the central feature of the weekend, included two sermons: the first from the Bishop of Limerick and the second, in response, by Cardinal Brady. The Bishop reminded us of the need for self-examination in approaching living with difference. The Cardinal's central message was that our instinct for exclusivity is damaging to any Christian denomination.