

property of the Representative Body, and its work and the employment of its staff would become the responsibility of a St Michael's College Committee of the Representative Body.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

In September the Governing Body considered the report of a Working Group on Representation of Women, which revealed a faster rate of improvement than expected. A number of senior clerical post-holders were now women, they made up 41 per cent of the Governing Body, there was an equitable gender balance of churchwardens and treasurers at parish level, all posts were advertised as equally suitable for men and for women and significant efforts had been made to ensure fairness and equality in appointments. Governing Body had approved an Equal Opportunities Statement and some dioceses included equal opportunities training in their continuing ministerial development programmes.

doi:10.1017/S0956618X11000810

General Synod of the Church of Ireland

May 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Having met in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin in 2010, in 2011 Synod returned to the less spiritual but rather plusher surroundings of the City Hotel, Armagh. It was comforting to note from the attendance figures that the level of luxury seems to have little effect on the willingness of delegates to attend.

The first piece of legislation was to provide for the inclusion in the *Book of Common Prayer* of a prayer for the Northern Ireland Assembly and its Executive. Anyone who has followed the workings of the Assembly would support a move to improve it and the necessary majorities to carry the Bill into effect were easily achieved.

The remaining legislation was of a technical and administrative nature. There were Bills to reorganise the Board and Chapter of St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, to regenerate local ecumenical partnerships and three to revise, respectively, the commencement dates of service on General Synod following election, the timetable for approving rises in clerical salaries and, consequently, the machinery for establishing the Pensionable Stipend. The Primate in his Presidential address had called for passion in our debate but it was difficult to generate in these areas – even for those proposing them. The only passion evident was the heat with which the laborious working out of the legislative procedure was denounced.

Fortunately there were other matters to be discussed where passion could more easily be aroused: education, mission and ministry to name but three. There were also two significant pieces of business that had the potential for passion and that certainly demanded thoughtful and mature consideration: the Anglican Covenant and the Church of Ireland's Covenant with the Methodist Church in Ireland, which is driven by the Covenant Council.

THE COVENANT COUNCIL

It will be recalled that a statement of agreed principles had been brought to the Synod in 2010. That statement had set out an agreed discernment of personal, communal and collegiate *episkope* in both the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church and an acceptance that all three expressions of *episkope* are essential to the polities of both traditions. A further statement was brought forward this year suggesting that, in light of the agreement already reached, from an agreed future date (2014 at the latest) the two Churches should take part in the installations/ordinations/consecrations of each other's Presidents and bishops and be prepared to live, as did the Church of South India, with 'a period of anomaly'.

The statement also identified the full meaning of the diaconal order as a subject for further work and pointed up a number of areas in which practical arrangements will have to be made if interchangeability of ministry is to become a reality. The effect of these arrangements, if implemented, would not be to unify the two Churches but to put them on a footing comparable to that of the Porvoo Churches. This matter has been referred to Standing Committee for implementation. If the target date is to be met it will need legislation – soon.

THE ANGLICAN COVENANT

Every Synod member was provided with a copy of the text of the Covenant and, in the book of reports, a note containing 'some explanatory thoughts' from a

working group set up by Standing Committee to consider the issue. The varying reservations about the Covenant probably mirrored those expressed elsewhere in these islands and elsewhere in the Anglican Communion. To some the regulatory provisions were regarded as harsh – to the point, perhaps, of almost being designed to encourage division and exclusion. To others the provisions were too weak – perhaps to the point of ineffectuality.

The motion before Synod was ‘Seeing that the Anglican Covenant is consonant with the doctrines and formularies of the Church of Ireland, the General Synod hereby subscribes the Covenant’. The effect of this, as it was explained, would not be to install the Covenant as part of the Church’s formularies or of its own internal self-understanding. Rather, it would be received as a means of regulating the Church of Ireland’s relationship with other Churches and an acknowledgement that, in making major or innovative decisions, no Anglican province can simply walk alone but must recognise the relationship consequences of such decisions.

Although, in the event, the motion was carried by a significant margin of over four to one there was no impression of a tidal wave of enthusiasm. Rather, it seemed that Synod concluded after consideration that adopting the Covenant, even allowing for the possibility of its eventual failure, was the better thing to do at the present time.

doi:10.1017/S0956618X11000822

General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

June 2011

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INTRODUCTION

The agenda seemed slight and uncontroversial. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland had been stimulated by the debate on homosexual ministers but nothing in the programme of discussion for Synod seemed likely to spark such feeling and argument. The Anglican Covenant could excite members to threaten schism or lead to a divided Church but it did not look likely.