

General Synod of the Church of Ireland

May 2014

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INTRODUCTION

In this, the final year of the current triennium, the General Synod met again in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. Whether it will return to this venue, and if so how often, is open to doubt since the Synod directed that efforts be made to find a more satisfactory meeting place in Dublin having regard to the comparative costs of its regular meetings at the alternative venue in Armagh.

CLERGY PENSIONS

For some years, as has been reported here, the major financial concern has been the Clergy Pension Fund. However, the drastic measures taken last year – closing the fund to new entrants, freezing the rights of existing members and imposing a levy on parishes – are having some effect. The fund is still paying out more in benefits than it takes in by way of contributions but the levy and improved market conditions seem to be moving it in the right direction.

LEGISLATION

On the legislative front there was not much which was of major importance. There was some revision of the legislation relating to the cathedrals at Tuam and Downpatrick. As predicted here previously, an extension of time was sought and granted for the presentation of the final report of the Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures. A restriction on the number of persons under twenty-one who could be elected to select vestries has now been abolished and we can now have as many young people as we like – if we can get them. Moreover, a wider discretion has been given to diocesan councils to enlarge select vestries for limited periods. There was also an attempt to ensure that parish representatives on the bodies which appoint new rectors should be gender-balanced. The logistical and administrative difficulties arising from such provisions in groups and unions of parishes had not been fully considered;

there was, in addition, some lay resistance to being told how to manage their affairs by two clerical proposers. The proposal was rejected.

RELATIONS WITH THE METHODIST CHURCH

The most important piece of legislation related to the ongoing arrangements with the Methodist Church in Ireland. As was reported at the time, the first reading of a Bill to enable the interchangeability of ministry between the two Churches obtained the requisite two-thirds majority of both Houses last year. The second and third readings took place this year. In response to one query as to the attitude of the rest of the Anglican Communion, the Synod was reassured that, while the proposal was a local arrangement, it had received significant international attention and endorsement, notably from the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order. There was also some unease about the validity of orders. However, the various expressions of unease seemed to be directed not so much towards the prospect of a closer relationship as towards the speed at which it was being approached. In the event, the Bill achieved the requisite two-thirds majorities very comfortably. The Churches themselves and their structures will remain separate but, in the future, upon certain specified events happening, the clergy will be permitted to serve in either. Work towards an even closer relationship will no doubt continue.

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General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

June 2014

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INTRODUCTION

This year the General Synod was held in a different venue in Edinburgh, in the former pro-cathedral, which had been renovated and enlarged at great expense, the cost of which had been raised by the congregation. Overall, a useful house-keeping meeting was held, with little contentious argument.