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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **GENERAL SYNOD 2013**

#### **THE ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, ARMAGH CITY HOTEL, THURSDAY 9 MAY**

##### **The Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland**

The Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, the Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, will deliver his first Presidential Address to the General Synod of the Church of Ireland meeting in the Armagh City Hotel on Thursday 9 May 2013. In it, he will ask members to consider 'the fundamental purpose for which this organism of the Church has its existence' and offer that it is 'simply this – to receive the Gospel and to hand on the Gospel in the world ... a delivery point for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Everything the Church does or says is, or should be, connected to this single and fundamental purpose in one way or another – our worship, fellowship, evangelism, prophetic interaction with the world (whether in encouragement or rebuke), our churches and church property, our social activism and compassion, our ecumenical endeavours.'

Archbishop Clarke will also ask members to think about 'how we approach what we sometimes call "end-of-life issues", both pastorally and medically from a Christian perspective and, as a corollary to that, are those ethical questions to do with when life begins, with the limits of bio-medical experimentation and with what is sometimes called human enhancement. When are we using responsibly the God-given gifts of mind and science, and when are we simply "playing God"?' He will say: 'If as Christians, we believe that all life is a gift of God from its earliest beginnings to its earthly end, how are we to treat that gift, even in times of trauma and pain? These are things that really matter to many, many people, both inside and outside the Church. These are also things on which we would be heard if we would speak compassionately, intelligently and spiritually. Let us not wait until state legislation has already decided on such matters before we make a response. By then it will be too late. It is not merely a matter of making statements on behalf of the Church, or even on one's own behalf. Every responsible Christian disciple should be ready to confront those who, whether in political life or not, would treat human life not as a gift but as a commodity. And of course we each have a role in supporting – financially and in any other way we can in our local settings – those

who work with the dying and with their families through hospice care in every part of this island.’

Finally, Archbishop Clarke will focus on the subject of child deprivation throughout the island of Ireland. He will say, ‘I believe that as people of the Church of Ireland we must assist in whatever way we can those who highlight the needs of children in distress today ... and give what support we can to those agencies – both those involved with the Church and those independent of them – who seek to alleviate the pain and suffering of children in Ireland today.’

**The full transcript follows below:**

### **President’s Address**

As I begin, may I first thank you all for your great kindness and generosity of spirit since my election as Archbishop of Armagh last October. Not a move I would ever have contemplated as a desirable or even particularly sensible course of action at this stage in my personal life (nor probably, truth be told, at any other stage in life). I have been truly moved and encouraged by the tremendous welcome I have been given, both in Armagh and throughout the Church of Ireland. I am certainly more than conscious of the privilege I have been given, and of the heritage into which I have entered. As I have said on a number of occasions. I will certainly give the task my very best shot, and with God’s grace and your continuing prayers, my sincere hope is that God in his love and mercy will bring some good out of it all.

But before we even begin to look at the work ahead of us at this General Synod, I would like to sketch out what I believe the context for all our work is to be. We are clearly here to do the work of the Church, but *what do we really think the Church is*, and what do we think its essential purposes may be, the real and fundamental purposes of the Church that you and I must seek to further in these coming days?

Let’s go back to first principles.

It is easy, bewitchingly easy, to think of the Church – the Church of Ireland or the Church as a whole – as primarily *an organisation* (albeit a ‘holy’ organisation), one that has lasted for a long time and which will at least outlast us, if we have anything to do with it, more or less ‘as is’. But this is certainly to get things the wrong way around. As I have said before at a General Synod (many years ago), the Church is called by God not to be *an organisation* but to be *an organism*. And this is not a pedantic distinction but rather a difference in conceptualising, that enables us to think of the Church (I believe) in a far more dynamic and creative way. An organism – whether zoological or botanical – will of its nature be ‘organised’, and it will display many aspects of ‘organisation’ (and must so do). However, whereas an organisation can too easily begin to exist for itself and for its own continuing existence, an organism *will exist only for a purpose* and will thrive or wither in relation to its ability or inability to fulfil its essential purpose for existing. Parts of any healthy organism will therefore flourish and blossom, while other parts – equally

naturally – may indeed wither and perish, and this is not *failure* but utterly essential to its overall wellbeing. On the other hand, an organisation will almost certainly see anything that seems to suggest decline or decay in any part of its structure as a threat or as a failure. It will then instinctively go into self-preservation mode (or outright ‘denial’) and this – let us be clear – is scarcely a Gospel precept.

If therefore you and I are to look to the future of the Church, and do our work over these coming days, with vision, energy and confidence (as I hope we can do), it can only be when we are ready to see that there is nothing unhealthy or threatening about natural and vibrant adaptation to changing internal or external circumstances. The God who makes all things new will allow aspects of our life to wither, and He will inspire other areas to blossom. And God reigns, despite what may happen to us.

What then is the fundamental purpose for which this organism of the Church has its existence? The phrase I would be happy to use (and not as a sound-bite) is simply this – **to receive the Gospel and to hand on the Gospel in the world, what I like to call ‘a delivery point for the Gospel of Jesus Christ’**. Everything the Church does or says is, or should be, connected to this single and fundamental purpose in one way or another – our worship, fellowship, evangelism, prophetic interaction with the world (whether in encouragement or rebuke), our churches and church property, our social activism and compassion, our ecumenical endeavours. Hence all the work of a General Synod – reports, legislation, finances, pensions, property, ecumenical engagement, educational policy (north and south) – is also to be related to this one purpose, *being a delivery point for the Gospel*.

This of course calls for us to be organised and effective, but as an organism rather than merely an organisation. Yes, we have a definable identity as a living branch of the Universal Church. How we do things is a particular way that makes our identity as members of the Church of Ireland (and as part of the Anglican family) clear and evident. We would say to those who wish to know, that we are biblically based, sacramental, credal, episcopal; we do our decision-making in accordance with the scriptures, tradition and reason. But these traditional tags for our identity are also to be geared to the purpose for which we exist, both as community and as individual Christian disciples, receiving and delivering the Gospel in the world in which we are set – being a delivery point for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But how do the different parts of this organism undertake this? I believe that there are particular functions within the total life of the Church best achieved in its different components.

Much of the actual delivering of the Gospel is of course effected at what we tend to call ‘local level’, in the work, worship and witness of *local* communities (in our context, usually the parish) – clergy and people collaborating and working together. It is done through the discipleship of individual disciples, and through the life, worship and activity of the Christian community itself. The core value in all that is done by the Church (in whatever ‘order of ministry’) must be *service, collaborative service* of God and the world. A great hero of mine, the American lawyer and theologian William Stringfellow,

put it beautifully (if slightly elliptically), ‘No clergy without a laity serving the world, and no laity without a clergy serving the laity’.

But the diocese with its bishop is also an integral part of the organism of the Church. The purpose of diocese and bishop, again in collaboration, is to give support and service – pastoral, missional, financial and logistical support – to the local parish/ community in whatever way possible. It is also to ensure that there is an intrinsic *unity* in the work of the Church – the delivering of the Gospel – and that the local communities of faith do not inadvertently become cults or sects, but remain part of the totality of the living organism of the Church. From the very earliest centuries of the Church’s existence, this was the understanding of the diocese, as the primary element of the working organism of the Church. The bishop is called – and it is an awesome calling (and one that none of us can fulfil as we might wish to do) – to be the focal point *in service*, albeit in collaboration with the clergy and people, of the unity of a diocese, its mission and its service.

And, in this understanding of the Church, a third strand – ‘Central Church’ as we tend to call it – is not *head office*, with *divisional offices* (the dioceses), and *sub-offices* (the parishes). The central church is here, and we are now here in General Synod, to serve the Church in its more local manifestations, and to give further support and cohesion to the life and work of the dioceses and parishes/communities. Here again, to serve the Church as a whole. There are aspects to the health of the organism that require this central core. There are things that only the central Church can do effectively. These include the provision of training for clergy (and laity) and the safeguarding of proper material care of the clergy, the guardianship of the Christian faith (a particular collegial responsibility of the bishops), trustee responsibilities for church property, the financial management of resources, much of the ecumenical involvement of the Church of Ireland with other Christian traditions, relationships within the wider Anglican Communion, the regularisation of common worship for the sake of the unity of the Church, being a voice for a common witness of the Church to society, the organising of mission, global interaction, and financial support for other parts of God’s world. This is what the central Church (and this General Synod) is to contribute to the organism of the Church, but always to the same end – *to be a delivery point for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, receiving the Gospel and handing on the Gospel in the world.*

Much of what I have said may sound rather conceptual, so where, by way of illustration, might healthful change in the organism first become visible to us? I would suggest that it may well be in the way we undertake the work of the Church at local level, certainly in some parts of the country. There are areas of the Church of Ireland, particularly in our inner cities and in the extreme rural areas, where the parish system is – to express it very mildly – *creaking*. Whereas there is no point in dismantling an existing system before we can know that any alternative is better, can we look intelligently at a more flexible, even two-track approach in an interim period? The Commission on Ministry and a number of the bishops are now putting some concentrated thought (and it is planned to coalesce their thinking) into whether more flexible models of ministry and local church might not be developed *alongside* traditional models in some places, at least until it becomes clear how the longer-term model for the mission of the Church in those places may best be

established. Gamaliel in the Acts of the Apostles with his strategy of ‘Let us see if it works before we make a further judgement that it is of God’ was not entirely wrong.

But to move on to the work of the General Synod before us. It is of course difficult to know what will excite the time and attention of any synod, and what will – sometimes surprisingly – appear to slip through with little comment or concern. We have a considerable raft of legislation before us and this will take discipline and discernment on the part of all of us to deal with, both carefully and expeditiously. Of great significance will be our discussion and decision-making on clergy pensions. There is also the opening resolution for synodical legislation to permit a degree of inter-changeability of ministries with our partners in a special Covenantal relationship, the Methodist Church in Ireland. At this synod, we will be tasked with the setting up of a select committee to further our ongoing discussions on human sexuality in the context of Christian belief, following directly from the resolutions at last year’s General Synod. There is consideration to be given to the work of the Standing Committee and the Representative Church Body.

And there are many other reports from hard-working commissions and committees which also labour effectively, conscientiously and energetically on our behalf, and the work of which deserves our full attentiveness and support at this Synod.

I am returning to a practice of the early General Synods of the Church of Ireland in the 1870s, when the chairing of Synod was always shared out between different bishops, although the Primate remained formally and legally as president of the Synod. My hope is that this may serve to give a different dynamic, and perhaps even a greater sense of variety to the work and atmosphere of our synod.

In looking back over the past year, I would wish to pay a warm tribute to two of my former colleagues within the House of Bishops. First, my predecessor, Archbishop Alan Harper, who served as Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland from early 2007 until the autumn of last year. His exemplary diligence and devotion to his task, coupled with a compassionate outlook and a real willingness to be of help to all in every situation, deserves our gratitude in abundance. We wish him and Helen every happiness in retirement.

Bishop Ken Clarke of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh has not so much retired as been “re-invented” in a new manifestation as Mission Director for the South American Missionary Society in the United Kingdom and Ireland. His great gifts as a preacher, pastor and teacher, matched by a huge warmth of personality and capacity for friendship, will happily still be put to great use, but his immediate ministry will indeed be missed by his former diocese, by his episcopal colleagues and by us all. Thankfully we will of course still see plenty of him in the life of the Church of Ireland, as we wish him and his wife Helen well in the years to come in this new chapter of ministry.

We look forward to the consecration of the Revd Ferran Glenfield as Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh at the end of this month and we pray for him and for the dioceses. As we continue to pray for the people of Meath and Kildare in their sadness at his time, we

also remember the responsibilities given to them and to the whole Church in the appointment of a Bishop for those dioceses.

I would like to thank those who provide such wonderful support for the life of the Church in the Church House offices in Dublin and Belfast. We welcome Mr Adrian Clements as our new Chief Officer and Secretary-General, and I very much look forward to working with him and supporting him in his new role. I also pay a sincere tribute to his predecessor, Mr Denis Reardon, who faced up bravely to huge financial and organisational challenges of the Church administration in a time of recession, with immense determination and conscientious thoroughness; he willingly confronted many very difficult tasks unflinchingly. We warmly thank him for this, and wish him and also Mr Philip Talbot, for many years a trusted and respected Head of Investments for the Representative Church Body, with their families, every happiness in retirement from the Representative Church Body.

In thanking the staff of the Representative Church Body, I also urge them never to feel that they are ever taken for granted by all of us who rely heavily on their work and support. We welcome Ms Kate Williams and Mr Roy Asher as they begin their work heading the Finance and Investment departments respectively. I hope that *all* the staff of Church of Ireland Houses in Dublin and in Belfast are enabled to see their tasks as essential in empowering the Church of Ireland to be what it is called to be in the service of Jesus Christ. My thanks to our professional staff is coupled with gratitude to the many people who give so much of their time to committees of both the Representative Church Body and of the General Synod. Their expertise and generous commitment enables us to continue to function as an instrument of God's love and goodness in the world, *a delivery point of the Gospel*.

A number of former members of the General Synod have died since our last meeting. We give thanks to God for their work for the Church and pray for those closest to them who grieve their departure from this earth. There are three in particular to whom I believe I should refer in the context of the detailed work of General Synod.

And so we remember with thanks before God a former clerical honorary secretary for the northern province, Dean Herbie Cassidy who died recently after a long and difficult illness. Dean Cassidy will be remembered for his competence, generosity of spirit, approachability and lightness of touch which permeated all that he did for the Church of Ireland, both here at central level and in his work as a Dean in two dioceses, as a priest and as a human being of great generosity and spirituality.

Canon Brian Mayne will also be recalled with thanks to God for the massive amount of work that he gave to the Church. In particular, we remember his tireless and often unseen work as secretary to the Liturgical Advisory Committee at a crucial time of preparation for the Book of Common Prayer which has been such a wonderful asset to the worship of the Church.

Archdeacon Philip Patterson, whose funeral is taking place this morning was a very active and energetically engaged member of the Standing Committee, the Representative Church Body and of the General Synod. In recent months he had been appointed to the Stipends Committee of the Representative Church Body. Formidable in debate, he always presented his arguments with care and with clarity, and for what he believed were the best interests of the Church. He was indeed a servant of the whole Church, in addition to being a much respected and diligent pastor in a more local setting.

We give thanks to God for the life and witness of all God's servants and we pray for their families and for all those whose earthly lives have been left so much the poorer for their passing to a greater light in the presence of God.

As we begin our tasks as General Synod – I hope and pray as a delivery point for the Gospel of Jesus Christ – I want to make a couple of rather personal comments and I hope that you will forgive me (but in fact I may not lie awake at night even if you do not forgive me). I truly have no idea when I may leave office as Archbishop of Armagh and Primate but, with the best will in the world, it cannot be indefinitely into the future, even if ill-health, a diminution of energy, or mortality itself were not to intervene in the meantime. As those of you who were present at my enthronement will have heard, I hope to exercise a distinctly collaborative ministry as Primate. I am more than aware that it is an illusion to think that any individual has all the gifts and charisms for episcopate.

I cannot do everything I might wish to do, nor should I attempt to do so, lest I achieve absolutely nothing. I will certainly try to work with you all in the tasks that confront us directly as a Church, but I also ask your indulgence if there are some areas to which I will return again and again, even if only in my own right, as they are matters I hope that the Church will see the need to confront. They are things about which I genuinely feel passionately, and I have no intention of letting go of that passion, which I believe is - for me at least - a spiritual imperative.

The first is the area of how we approach what we sometimes call 'end-of-life issues', both pastorally and medically from a Christian perspective and, as a corollary to that, are those ethical questions to do with when life begins, with the limits of bio-medical experimentation and with what is sometimes called human enhancement. When are we using responsibly the God-given gifts of mind and science, and when are we simply 'playing God'? If as Christians, we believe that all life is a gift of God from its earliest beginnings to its earthly end, how are we to treat that gift, even in times of trauma and pain? These are things that really matter to many, many people, both inside and outside the Church. These are also things on which we would be heard if we would speak compassionately, intelligently and spiritually. Let us not wait until state legislation has already decided on such matters before we make a response. By then it will be too late. It is not merely a matter of making statements on behalf of the Church, or even on one's own behalf. Every responsible Christian disciple should be ready to confront those who, whether in political life or not, would treat human life not as a gift but as a commodity. And of course we each have a role in supporting – financially and in any other way we

can in our local settings – those who work with the dying and with their families through hospice care in every part of this island.

The other issue very much on my mind and in my heart is that of child deprivation throughout this island. You may remember that, some years ago, Archbishop Robin Eames had hopes of an initiative on the part of the Church of Ireland to combat child poverty. I was fully in support of this and we did indeed have some useful meetings, both in Drogheda and in Armagh, but somehow the project never quite took flight as Archbishop Eames and I (with others) might have wished. I do not intend that we should necessarily resurrect this initiative and I know that many of you do indeed support children's charities, but I believe that as people of the Church of Ireland we must assist in whatever way we can those who highlight the needs of children in distress today. We must not only avoid damage to children under our direct care, and in this connection I commend the work that is being done to ensure that, through our Safeguarding Trust protocols, we do our utmost to protect children involved in the life of the Church from harm. But I believe we need to go further and give what support we can to those agencies – both those involved with the Church and those independent of them – who seek to alleviate the pain and suffering of children in Ireland today. Nor do we need to be afraid of being involved.

According to Barnardo's, about 100,000 children are living in poverty in Northern Ireland. In areas covered by two local councils, over one-third of all children are living in what is defined as poverty. In 2011, 9.3% of children – children aged up to 17 - in the Republic of Ireland continued to live in what is defined as 'consistent poverty', a figure up from 8.8% in 2010. This equates to over 100,000 children. Consistent poverty means that these children are living in households with incomes below 60% of the national median income, and will be experiencing deprivation based on agreed indicators. This can mean going for twenty-four hours without a substantial meal, or being cold because parents are unable to afford to heat the home.

We do not need to be told that poverty, whether in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland, damages every aspect of any child's life, having massive consequences (in both the short term and longer term) on their health, their education outcomes and the simple chance to 'make a life' for themselves. Surely we should not be able to remain detached or indifferent in any part of this island to any child's suffering, let alone to such a level of suffering that is clearly there all around us?

So it is in humility, with purpose, *and with penitence* that we now place our work over these coming days into God's hands, praying that all we say and all that we do will be acceptable in His sight, our Strength and our Redeemer, and that receiving the Gospel and handing on the Gospel in the world, this General Synod will truly be a delivery point for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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