

GENERAL SYNOD 2017

Motion No.8: Inter-Diocesan Conversations Proposer: The Rt Revd Patrick Rooke

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Your Grace, members of Synod,

On page 48 of the motions document you have a summary of the conversations between representatives of Tuam, Killala and Achonry and Limerick and Killaloe. These have been very encouraging and I pay tribute to the Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe and his colleagues, and indeed to those from my own diocese, for their co-operation and goodwill. I think the main learning from these has been how much we have in common and the benefits of collaborating together in the future, even if that only means joining together for particular annual events such as clergy and other diocesan conferences. Nonetheless, we have been considering much more than that and hence we are seeking, in part i of this motion, your endorsement to continue these conversations along the lines indicated.

In part ii we are looking for your guidance on one possible solution to the ‘Tuam issue’ that has exercised the mind of the Church for some time now and came to a head during the last episcopal vacancy. The small numbers in Tuam, in my view, raise not one but three issues. First, for the wider Church which is largely responsible for funding a separate diocese and the structures required; secondly for the diocese itself which, with limited personnel, demands multi-tasking and extensive distances to travel; and thirdly, for the Bishop, who though privileged to know his flock in a very personal way, can feel frustrated by the limitations the small numbers impose.

The particular option, option B in our report, has proved popular in our inter-diocesan conversations but it really only addresses one element – that of the Bishop’s role. This would only represent relatively small financial savings for the whole Church and be of no benefit at all to those in Tuam who, both clergy and laity, bear so much of the non-episcopal responsibility for the diocese on top of parochial and other commitments. Neither does it in any way formalise the link with Limerick, which may soon be in similar numerical

difficulties. Nevertheless, this is one of the favoured options and we would value your views, positive or negative, prior to a collective response.

A specific portfolio or half-time position at central church for the Bishop of Tuam has also been suggested as an alternative to the future Bishop taking on a parish, and of course there is obvious merit in this. The fear though, in such a scenario, is that the role of Bishop in Tuam may become secondary and the diocese end up with a square peg in a round hole which would be in no-one's interest.

Part iii of the motion addresses another option – Option C, the one that scored highest among our diocesan representatives! This would see all of Limerick and all of Tuam being amalgamated but, with two bishops – a diocesan based in Limerick and a suffragan in the Tuam end of the diocese, i.e. in Connacht, also looking after a parish.

As a former member of the Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures, I know some people are adamantly against the idea of suffragans in the Church of Ireland. So we need to know whether this option is one General Synod would endorse. Most members will know that in the Church of England, suffragans have and haven't worked – they've also fulfilled a variety of roles. Our situation is different, so let us hear the reasons why this option would or would not be right for the particular situation in the West of Ireland. In my view, if we are to have a suffragan, he/she would have to be appointed by an Episcopal College in the normal way and secondly would need to be a full member of the House of Bishops.

In conclusion, I remind General Synod that even if you assent to either or both these options, the respective diocesan synods may decide on any of the five options we have identified. The purpose of this motion is merely to determine what is on offer from which they may make their choice.

Your Grace, I propose Motion No 8.