

GENERAL SYNOD 2018

Commission on Ministry Report Proposer: Mrs Ruth Galbraith

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Archbishops, bishops, members of the clergy, ladies and gentlemen.

The work of your Commission on Ministry is a combination of both the ‘routine’ and the ‘visionary’. The ‘routine’ being the execution of certain tasks entrusted to us by the Church – and the ‘visionary’ involving our being something of a crucible for fresh thinking concerning ministry in all its forms. The fact that we are so representative of strands in the life of the Church, as well as attentive to the deliberations of the Synod, assists us in this work.

An example of a recent ‘routine’ but important role fulfilled by your commission is the provision of the recent pre-retirement course for clergy.

An example of an issue where our work is largely done, but where we observe with prayerful interest, is the implementation of an initiative we worked hard to develop that of Ordained Local Ministry.

The provision of a place of retreat and hospitality within the life of the Church of Ireland is an issue where we have done much to generate discussion and interest. We note gratefully the readiness of the Theological Institute to develop its own role in an exploratory way to meet this need. We ourselves have organised a small number of retreats. We are grateful for the manner in which the RCB continue to regard this as a live issue in terms of their strategic planning for the work of the Church.

An area where we hope to do further work is in nurturing vocations. This year we held a conference of: CITI staff; directors of ordinands; representatives of the bishops and other ‘stakeholders’ involved in the encouragement of vocation. There is much to be done in terms of communication and we envisage the redevelopment of the September Ember season, now often overlooked in the life of the Church. We envisage redeveloping it as a time to emphasise effectively the richness and urgency of the theme of vocation to a range of ministries.

An area where we have worked hard, but are unclear of direction (yet conscious of a felt need expressed at the Synod last year) is the sensitive yet topical issue of clergy tenure. We've engaged at length with people who operate the common tenure system in England from whom there is much to be learned but we feel it is not quite for us. We really want to hear the Synod's views on models of tenure which preserve the security and independence of clergy, yet have some measure of accountability and in-service review proper to the world of today. We also feel that clergy deserve some definition of the boundaries of their work, their duty of self-care and proper refreshment. All this needs to be done without turning them by stealth into employees in the conventional sense.

The commission wonders whether in due course the Synod might need to establish some expert select committee or commission to deal with this, but we would need to do the spadework for such a body and assist with the articulation of terms of reference to be given to them.

So much done and much more to do and we hope that the Synod will not simply receive our report but also clarify its expectations of us. I propose that Synod adopts the report of the Commission on Ministry.