

GENERAL SYNOD 2008

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY REPORT

**Proposed by the Very Revd Dr Susan Patterson
(Diocese of Tuam, Killala & Achonry)**

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace, Members of Synod:

It gives me great pleasure to propose the report of the Commission on Ministry, as the newest member of that Commission, because I believe that both the issues addressed by the Commission during the past year and its aims for this coming synodical year are of fundamental importance for the life and work of the church. There has been for some time the need to examine patterns in ministry that have formed and grown in an ad hoc way in response to ministry needs within the church. And then there has been the need to examine and reformulate the equipping and enabling of ministers, both lay and ordained, both present and future, who supply – or who will supply - these needs.

If I could comment first on the future of part-time ministry in connection to non-stipendiary ministry: the evidence that these two categories are tending to merge has obvious training implications which are being addressed by the changes in theological training – the improved coherence and greater flexibility in the new ministry training programme, the aspiring to equivalence of standards in qualification so that there is no longer any slur of ‘second class’ to be incurred by non-stipendiaries, yet in so doing allowing that life-experience is recognised as a component of qualification. While the raising of the level of theological qualification has raised some issues that arguably still

need to be addressed, I must applaud these changes. In so many places our NSMs are now doing work, and carrying workloads, that were never envisaged when the Auxiliary Ministry was first devised. It is now catch-up time for training. It needs to match the level and content of the work and not the level and content of remuneration or lack thereof.

The other issue apart from training that arises from the convergence of NSM and part-stipendiary ministries relates to the arrangements under which our ministers actually carry out their duties. I am very glad that a survey is being carried out to ask NSMs themselves how they feel and how they cope – to discover the joys and the pains, the good things and the bad things about their working arrangements. It is expected that this survey will lead to a bill being presented to next year's General Synod. I myself feel that proper ministry descriptions are well overdue in this church. They are becoming the norm elsewhere and are vital for the safeguarding of aims and expectations and the prevention of clergy abuse! - which can arise with the best of intentions simply because of pressing needs due to minister shortages and emergencies. In unmonitored, or inadequately monitored situations there is such a thing as creeping overload, which insidiously adds to hours and work stress until it takes its toll on health or motivation. By 'proper' ministry descriptions, I don't mean something rigid and exhaustively detailed. It is possible to combine flexibility, in the form of a template that can set overall guidelines, with the detail appropriate to a particular context and people which can be agreed between the people and reviewed at regular intervals to allow for changing situations. I hope that the Commission will continue to work in this area and keep a watching brief on developments.

Related to the review of these ordained ministries is the ongoing work in relation to Reader ministry, leading up to next year's convention to mark the Centenary of Lay Readers in the Church of Ireland. Questionnaires have been sent to all Diocesan Readers and we have had a good response to these. It is very important that we listen to our Readers and be prepared to recommend and implement changes where changes are appropriate. Our Readers provide a very valuable ministry, without which our church, in rural areas at least, would grind to a halt! They should never be taken for granted. They deserve the best resourcing, equipping and support that we can give them. I would like to thank all those Readers who took the time and trouble to respond to the questionnaire and to promise them, so far as I am – we are - able, that it will not be in vain.

All this reviewing of and tweaking of ministry for which the Commission carries the brief must relate to a vision of church and ministry in which people are released into Christ-shaped ministries rather than forced into slots within institutional structures. As Dr Maurice Elliot, the new director of the Institute of Theology, said recently at a meeting of Standing Committee: 'It is not that the God of the Church has a mission, but that the God of Mission has a church.' The vision for ministry in the Church of Ireland under the new Institute is more mission-focused and more equipping- and enabling-focused because it recognises the priority of the equipping and enabling of the missional ministry of the whole people of God. I applaud that vision! And I believe that as the vision takes shape we will see the attracting of younger ordinands that is another significant issue facing us at the moment. The cry we heard from young lay people at the recent Fresh Expressions of Church conference in Lurgan was 'enable for us the ministries to which we are called – equip and authorise us, and make space within the structures for us to pioneer and

develop new ways of doing mission and being church. At present they don't see the ordination pathway as delivering this. Can we blame them? A working group is being set up between the Commission on Ministry and the Council for Mission to address these issues. We must not let them down!

Finally, and I thank you for your patience! - there is the need to make sure that, as a church, we care properly for those who have served us faithfully over the years and are about to take retirement. I commend the Commission on taking this seriously in the form of offering courses for retirement planning. It will hit us all sooner or later! Are we prepared? How can we be better prepared? The church as a whole has the responsibility of being pastor to the pastors. I am glad that the Commission has acted in this regard on all our behalf.

Your grace, I propose that the Report of the Commission on Ministry be received.