

GENERAL SYNOD 2009

BILL NO 5 TO AMEND CHAPTER IX OF THE CONSTITUTION

Proposed by Mr Wilfred Baker, Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

In its mission in the community, the Church seeks the promotion of justice, equity and fairness. That being so, it would be reasonable to expect the application of the same standards in its own internal affairs. I am sure that this is indeed the case, but occasionally an injustice can occur by default, for which nobody is directly responsible, and I think that such a position has arisen with regard to the Auxiliary Ministry – I will call it that for convenience.

Most people will be aware of its history: It was introduced in the 1970's to bring into the ordained ministry men (as it was then) who were engaged in paid employment or occupations, by which they supported themselves and their families, and who wished to serve the Church in the capacity of assistants to the full-time clergy – hence the name 'auxiliary'. It was envisaged that they would assist with the conduct of Sunday services – though probably not every Sunday – and also with such pastoral work in parishes as the limited time available to them allowed. As self-supporting people, no payment would be made and indeed payment for work done was prohibited.

When proposing the Motion at last year's Synod which led to this Bill – as outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum – I said that the Auxiliary Ministry has been a victim of its own success, and I hold to that view. Over the years, auxiliary clergy have become indispensable, to the extent that large numbers of parishes, and most dioceses, could not now function without their contribution. Many auxiliary clergy conduct services virtually every Sunday throughout the year and undertake substantial amounts of pastoral work and hospital visiting. Some are in charge of parishes, either during vacancies or on a long-term basis, to all intents and purposes carrying out the functions and duties of full-time clergy. In addition, the circumstances of some of those involved is often different to that originally envisaged.

Not all are in full-time paid employment. Some may have taken early retirement, some may have been made redundant – an ever-present possibility for anyone working at the present time. All in all, the goalposts have moved substantially since the establishment of this form of ministry, but the rules governing its operation have not.

Those in the Auxiliary Ministry who undertake vital and indispensable work on behalf of the Church, either on a substantial part-time or virtually full-time basis, have a right to expect remuneration for such work, if they so wish. The need becomes all the more acute if the people concerned are not themselves in a particularly affluent situation. Yet no remuneration can be made under present arrangements. This is an injustice and is clearly seen to be so in the parishes where auxiliary, or as they are now called, non-stipendiary clergy, are so highly valued. Many parishioners are extremely uncomfortable that such huge demands are being made on unpaid people

The inequity has become so obvious that in many cases Select Vestries and Diocesan Councils seek ways in which appreciation may be shown. Queries often arise as to various possibilities: payment of expenses – can they be pumped up to an exaggerated level? Could a house-for-duty arrangement be used; Could ‘gifts’, either in kind or in money be given? Could straightforward payment be made? Such suggestions, while very well-intentioned and perfectly understandable, are really attempts to circumvent the rules and are not the way to go about it – the rules themselves need to be changed.

The purpose of this Bill is to correct the obvious injustice which has arisen. Under its provisions, auxiliary clergy would be entitled to claim payment in appropriate circumstances. This would arise when such clergy spend substantial amounts of time in parish work and the payment would be based on ‘sessions’ worked on a basis and at rates to be determined by the Representative Church Body. Should those concerned not wish to be paid, this option would, of course, remain. It should be pointed out that the arrangements being proposed will apply only to those already in the auxiliary ministry and those beginning training at present. The new ministry training system, in course of introduction, will allow transfer between full-time stipendiary, part-time stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry, making

various options open to all. This means that the provisions of the Bill will apply for a finite period only.

In starting this ball rolling last year I had hoped that the process of putting the necessary arrangements in place would be relatively simple. I was wrong. The group set up by the Commission on Ministry has worked hard during the year and has held several meetings. Guidelines as to method and rates of payment have been drawn up and it is hoped that these will be taken into consideration by the Representative Church Body when drawing up the detailed rules. Matters relating to employment law, pension rights and legal matters were considered at length and many questions asked as to how proposed arrangements might work out in practice. I can inform the Synod that assurances have been received from the relevant legal authorities in the Church that the provisions of this Bill, if enacted, will not in any way alter the Church's position with regard to employment law nor open it to any potential liabilities which do not already exist in this area.

I want to thank the Commission on Ministry and the House of Bishops for taking up the challenge brought forward in last year's resolution and enabling this Bill to be presented. Particular thanks are due to the Bishop of Derry for his diligent and helpful chairmanship of the working group. Though not a member of the Commission I was kindly included in the group and was also asked to propose this Bill on the Commission's behalf – I suppose a question of "I've started so I'll finish."

I hope that Synod members will look favourably on our proposals which are designed to set right a situation of injustice in the Church which has arisen through nobody's fault.

I commend Bill No. 5 to the Synod.