

GENERAL SYNOD 2009

MOTION No 5 - FOLLOWING THE REPORT OF THE MARRIAGE COUNCIL

Proposed by the Reverend Brian Harper – Diocese of Armagh

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Motion: That the General Synod takes seriously the impact of ministry on clergy marriages and family life and encourages the marriage council to develop methods of support.

Much of the report this year concerns issues that are specific to marriages in which one, or both, partners have been called to the ordained ministry. It is an area which has been taken for granted in the past and which our researchers have discovered to be an area of concern. Ministry is not just a job – it permeates almost every aspect of marriage and family life. It is a privileged lifestyle and it is a lifestyle which carries its own stresses. These are often unexpressed lest they give the impression of selfishness, lack of commitment, lack of faith.

When a new cooker is needed in the rectory, imagine the joy when the rector returns home from the vestry meeting to report “Great news! We’re getting a cooker. Tom has very kindly donated their three ring eye level grill calor gas to us because they’re installing a new oil-fired Aga with four ovens in their newly renovated kitchen-cum-conservatory” And everybody smiles and feels that the rectory family is well-supported by the love of the parish.

Or imagine when the rector was reticent to attend the baptism of the spouse’s nephew because it would involve spending £50 from his own pocket for Sunday

cover and someone would be bound to ask if they were entitled to a weekend off in April?

Or the neighbour who felt that the curate was sufficiently “public property” that she could comment freely on the frequency and timing of the fiancé(e)’s car being parked in the drive.

On their own, these issues are perhaps small and petty, but isn’t it on a build up of such issues and unresolved hurt over many years that marriages begin to struggle under the stress. Certainly, every career has its own unique stresses, but these are the families with whom we are involved and to whom we are responsible because they have offered to serve us and trust us for their support.

We have begun the process of taking the care of clergy marriages seriously and looking at how best we can support couples as they manage together in ministry. It should start from the moment the DDO is approached by a married candidate or when a cleric is preparing for marriage, right through to the issues involved with clergy widowhood. It’s a huge area. Our pilot focus groups have raised a number of issues which need to be progressed and we would also want to extend the model of our focus groups in to other dioceses. That, in itself, is showing the families of our rectories that the Church does care and does listen and does want to show love to those who serve.