

## **GENERAL SYNOD 2009**

### **MOTION No 6 – COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY & DIALOGUE**

**Proposed by the Most Reverend Dr Richard Clarke, Bishop of Meath & Kildare**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

*That the General Synod is of the view that the time is right for the different Christian traditions in Ireland to explore afresh together a common theology of baptism and to share insights concerning their baptismal discipline and practice. The Synod accordingly instructs the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue to make this issue a priority on its agenda.*

#### **Notes for a proposing speech (Bishop R L Clarke, Bishop of Meath and Kildare)**

The purpose of this motion is not to give instructions to other Christian traditions (which would be both impertinent and possibly even futile), but to encourage all those Christian traditions in Ireland - including our own - interested in the ecumenical venture to consider afresh the implications of our common understanding of baptism, and also to seek to learn from one another how we approach the practicalities of baptism in a culture which is no longer monolithic in terms of any underlying *societal* Christian adherence.

The Commission therefore asks the General synod to give it the impetus to work on this project, ideally in collaboration with other Christian traditions here in Ireland. The origins of this motion, however, lie outside Ireland and may well have implications that will be carried outside this country. It was the ecumenical conference in Sibiu in Romania in September 2007 - which brought together the principal Christian traditions in Europe (including Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran and most of the reformed traditions) - that urged different churches at national level to work together on looking again at the meaning, purpose and discipline of baptism.

Such a shared venture presents immense and creative possibilities. We have become all obsessed with the problems of sharing together at the Lord's Table as different parts of the Body of Christ. But the other great Gospel sacrament – that of Holy Baptism – is one

which we already share and it is after all this sacrament which makes us part of the Body of Christ and already unites us all within that Body. Yet we take Baptism almost, it would seem, for granted, and – dare I say – tend to take a rather offhand (even casual) attitude towards it, within many of the Christian traditions.

In the first rubric in the baptismal office in the previous Book of Common Prayer, clergy are told that they must encourage parishioners not to defer the baptism of their children – in other words to get on with the baptising with any delay. Today, in a changed society, whereas the baptism of children is as crucially important as ever, we live in a culture where there can be no assumptions made - in any of our Christian traditions - that parents will have any idea what Christian baptism is about, what it is actually doing, and the demands it is making on parents, on godparents, on the entire local Christian community, and ultimately on the candidate for baptism himself or herself.

As different Christian traditions on this island, we all need to reflect again and to think together about baptism. The exercise would certainly bring us closer together as we work in an area of existing general agreement with very little historical baggage of polemic or rhetoric. The Commission asks Synod to encourage this task and to direct those it can direct – the Commission itself – to get working on it.