

GENERAL SYNOD 2011

MOTION NO 8 – HARD GOSPEL IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

Seconded by Mrs Ethne Harkness, Diocese of Armagh

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Hard Gospel Implementation Group has prioritised three areas of work over the past year. In proposing this Motion, Bishop Trevor Williams has spoken on the first of these – the question of gender imbalance. I want to say a few words on the other two areas of work.

The second aspect of our work over the past year was in relation to youth participation in Church life. The feature that struck us was that there has been a dynamic resurgence in recent years and significant numbers of younger Church of Ireland members are organising and leading Church activities and initiatives. At the same time we have not seen that reflected in terms of participation in the structures of our Church, especially not in decision-making at diocesan and General Synod levels. That is a mismatch that we should try to remedy. We need to hear the voice of young people, encourage their participation and benefit from their skills, talents and insight.

How do we achieve that? Do we need to change the business we do or how we do it? Are we doing the wrong things in the wrong way? Do we have an image problem? Can we expect young people who have exciting lives to lead to join in pedantic or technical debates on dates of elections and pensions? Maybe people only participate in what interests them, no matter what age they are.

This topic is work in progress for the Hard Gospel Implementation Group. So far we have met representatives of the Church of Ireland Youth Department. We have got some information on efforts to deal with the same issue in other churches. For example, we are

aware of the programme in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which involves setting up a Youth Assembly. In the Church of England their young adult group now has speaking and voting rights at Synod. We have also looked at some measures various Dioceses in Church of Ireland have introduced. In Dublin and Glendalough there are three seats on the Diocesan Council for people under the age of 30. In Down and Dromore, each parish can appoint an additional member of Diocesan Synod aged under 30. So we have discovered that where there is a will, something effective can be done.

The third area of our work concerns pastoral ministry for gay and lesbian members of the Church. We were asked by the Honorary Secretaries to give consideration to a suggestion from Changing Attitude Ireland that the Church should publish a guide to pastoral provision for gay and lesbian people and other materials to assist parishes and families in understanding the issues facing gay and lesbian Christians. We have had one meeting with representatives of Changing Attitude Ireland earlier this year and we will be taking this work forward, considering the spectrum of views and options and then reporting to Standing Committee in due course.

We would want to make it clear, however, that it is not the role of the Hard Gospel Implementation Group to adjudicate on any theological questions concerning sexual orientation or behaviour. The brief given to us is to consider pastoral provision in the context of the Hard Gospel imperatives: “love God, love your neighbour”. In doing that, we welcome the rich diversity of our neighbours. Over the next year, we plan to consider that pastoral provision and report to Standing Committee for their decision.