

GENERAL SYNOD 2012

THE COMMISSION FOR UNITY AND DIALOGUE

Motion in the name of the Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson and the Revd Niall Sloan

Proposed by The Most Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin & Glendalough

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Increasingly those of us who find ourselves engrossed in the work of The Commission for Unity and Dialogue see that this work is in fact telling us more about who we are as members of the Church of Ireland. It is also enabling others to know from us – by what we say and do and by our involvement with them – who we are. Not only does it fulfil that life-giving Johannine invitation to discipleship from the Gospel chapter 1.46: *Come and see!* but it also offers that great future possibility of what lies before us and which we do not yet know, except in the intimations of hope, from 1 John 3.2: *Dear friends, we are now God's children; what we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*

In each of its three aspects: Anglicanism, Ecumenism, Inter Faith Encounter, The Commission for Unity and Dialogue shows a Church of Ireland which is engaged and critical, urgent and careful, open and traditional. As disciples with our eyes open, we are eager to become the people whom God wants us to become, in full and generous relationship with others as we ourselves *come and see* more of God's work in the world.

Even a cursory glance at the Report of The Commission shows us deepening engagement with the ecumenical instruments in Ireland. This has come about through the work over the past year of the bishop of Meath and Kildare in particular – his Presidency of the Irish Council of Churches, just completed, has clarified and consolidated who we are in the

field of Irish ecumenism – willing participants and active players. Our continuing engagement with international Anglican-Methodist relations through the bishop of Down and Dromore has greatly facilitated our progressive and creative approach to strengthening the Church of Ireland-Methodist Covenant and to breaking new ground in terms of mutuality between the two churches. On the Porvoo front, we are delighted that the bishop of Clogher continues as the Porvoo Contact Person for the Church of Ireland. 2013 brings to Ireland a Porvoo Consultation on Diaconal Ministry which the Commission will help to deliver in partnership with CITI. We are pleased also to have been in a position to nominate the bishop of Connor to membership of the World Council of Churches, representing in this regard also our partnership with the Irish Methodist Church. We continue to develop relationships with those of the Leuenberg Fellowship, with the Orthodox families of Churches and also with the Moravian Church in Ireland. Our Synodical meeting over these three days is much enriched by the presence of our Ecumenical Guests who, of course, now have an entitlement to contribute to debate and I very much hope that they will do so.

One of the most exciting developments of recent years is the manner in which the General Synod has given fresh permission to the Commission to embrace and expand Inter Faith engagement. Inter Faith conferences and meetings now flourish both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, as you can see from the Report. Of particular interest to me is the fact that key phrases which have been hammered out in the arena of Inter Faith dialogue – presence and engagement, embassy and hospitality, sending and abiding – are now central to the mission and development of Christianity in Ireland. This is a fascinating and humbling place to be and perhaps not one where we ever expected to be. Creative minority status enhances real contribution to society by us. So does partnership with those of World Faiths other than our own in community life.

For those of us present who are members of the Standing Committee of this Synod, there is always a point of anxiety during the ecclesiastical administrative year (usually between January and March) when we talk about money and membership of the requisite international bodies. I recognize fully that money is tight to the point of squeeze. My

plea, however, is that we ensure that we do not give the erroneous impression that the activities and the range of memberships required of the Church of Ireland through this Commission seem to be optional extras to who we understand ourselves to be. We are the church of God as well as being a denominational church. Please do not let us lose sight of the former for the sake of the latter. Other churches and provinces smaller than we are find the money to belong as widely as possible and my hope is that we will continue to do so long into the future.