

GENERAL SYNOD 2013

Report of Commission on Ministry

Proposed by the Revd Dr Maurice Elliott – Diocese of Dromore

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Archbishop, Members of Synod,

The sports fans amongst us all know that moment of uncertainty when the baton in a relay race is handed on from one athlete to another. There have been some spectacular failures – the baton is juggled; the baton is dropped; the runner steps out of his/her lane; the race is lost. And even when the baton is successfully passed, it can also take a little while longer for the new runner to get fully up to speed. And so it is this year with the COM. For a variety of reasons, some structural and others personal, the membership of the Commission has undergone a significant transition, not least in relation to the chairmanship, but at this stage, I believe, we can report that this most recent configuration of the Commission is safely up and running and well into its stride. In saying that we do place on record our sincere gratitude to all whose involvement with the COM has now come to an end – the names are listed on p.358 and in addition the name of Mr Andrew McNeile who has tendered his resignation since the report was drafted.

In terms of inherited work the COM continues to place a high priority on two well-established programmes, the Pre-retirement Planning Course and the Mid-Career Vocation Programme. Section 5 references the intention to have held another PRC at the end of last month – this however has been postponed due to a low level of demand

currently. The next iteration of MCVP is to take place at CITI at the end of this month and has attracted again a group of around 14. Thanks are due to a number of individuals for the voluntary inputs they have offered in resourcing each of these programmes – in particular we appreciate the contributions of Ruth Handy, Lorna Gleasure, Chris Peters and Terry Scott. Tomorrow/yesterday, heard about the essential work which is being carried out by the Commission on Episcopal Needs, and mindful of that members will be interested to see the suggestion of both induction and refresher training for bishops on p.356.

One of the COM's major projects over the past year has been to begin to put in place some essential thinking concerning how the church should care for its clergy, and how the clergy should be encouraged and trained to care for themselves. Statistically it is important to emphasise that by far the majority of clergy are regularly fulfilled and affirmed in the faithful exercise of their ministry - and I say that even if some parishioners may still wish to define them as 'six days invisible and one day a week incomprehensible'! Nevertheless, we are all aware of the pressures that can quietly build and of the difficulties that can cumulatively arise. The COM is keen to develop its thinking about clergy self-care, and, as outlined in the Appendix Paper A, there are many aspects which may require further discussion and perhaps an early commitment to action. Much more work needs to be done in resourcing clergy to be more effective within themselves in the matter of maintaining appropriate balance and keeping necessary focus, and this is also an area in which I am confident there can be much fruitful co-operation between the agenda of the COM and the work of CITI, not least with our emerging brief

for CME. On the other side of a shared responsibility, however, in addition to flagging up the issue, one of the most helpful things which the church might consider doing at either an institutional or a diocesan level is to become much more proactive in reaching towards clergy so that problems can be forestalled before they become deep-seated. The COM is particularly interested to look in more detail at the system of Annual Ministerial Review which now functions in virtually every diocese of the COE and is widely recognised as a significant means whereby clergy can ‘become more open to the renewal of their spirituality and competence as servants and leaders’. Reviews, including for bishops, are carried out by trained teams of both clergy and laity, and the overarching goal is one of encouragement, affirmation and constructive critique, not appraisal and the threat of sanction.

Another equally weighty matter for the COM has been its desire to progress the prioritising of Pioneer Ministry. This various issues of pioneer selection, pioneer training and pioneer ministry have been bubbling within the COI for some time already. Synod members may recall the stimulating and visionary paper on ‘Church Planting’ written by the Bishop of Derry and included within last year’s report; as mentioned in section 7, the COM received and discussed with significant approval a further paper by Andrew McNeile; as we all know, there have been various diocesan initiatives; within CITI as from next year we are introducing a new elective module on the MTh entitled ‘Building new communities of faith’ and separately we are investigating the idea for Pioneer training which might be offered to serving clergy who are keen to develop that skill set.

We rejoice in every instance of renewed existing patterns of church or new and emerging communities of faith, and we would want to name within any such realm of possibility the role and place of religious communities. Our commitment must be to what Rowan Williams has quite rightly described as a genuinely ‘mixed economy’, but what the COM is keen to realise is that all the potential and all of the divergent strands can somehow be harnessed into a clear strategy and an agreed COI approach. One of our partners in all of this is the Diocese of London, which has implemented a Pioneer training course and a strategy document called ‘2020 Vision’ wherein they commit themselves to specified targets for numbers of new congregations within existing parishes, for new parishes and for entirely fresh expressions of what church might actually look like over the next seven years. For that reason the COM is now convinced that, as it says in S7, we need ‘a tipping point’; we need a structure and we need the momentum that can only really come from synodical mandate. Hence the resolution on p.359, which, if agreed and passed, will instruct the COM and respectfully request the HOB:

- To clearly identify the issue of vocation to, and appropriate training for, Pioneer Ministry as a key priority for the CO at this juncture;
- To appoint a working group from the COM, the HOB and the CITI to explore ways forward in this matter;
- And to report findings as soon as possible.

Archbishop, it is my sincere conviction that the report of the COM this year offers the synod a genuine opportunity to endorse a number of crucially important strategies for the life and well-being, the mission and growth of the COI. I warmly commend all the thinking which this report enshrines and am happy to propose its consideration.