

Bill No 5**Explanatory Memorandum**

While the Church has talked a good deal of late concerning increasing the levels of participation by various groups such as women and young people in its decision making bodies, it has never formally examined the size of Select Vestries, surely a factor affecting the extent of access to membership of them. For generations the elected membership of Select Vestries, over and above the parochial officers such as churchwardens and glebewardens, has been fixed at twelve – this rooted in a time when many parishes were small and rural and all members were men.

The existing paragraph 13 (c) of the Constitution varies that basic requirements for Select Vestry membership in two ways. First of all, it prescribes that not more than three members of the Select Vestry should be under 21 – surely an anachronistic provision at a time when we want to reduce the number of even symbolic impediments to the participation of young people.

The paragraph also permits, in one situation only, an increase in vestry size for a seven year period to a maximum of twenty. This may be permitted by the diocesan council when a number of churches which previously had a separate Select Vestry either though having an incumbent of their own or being part of a Group of parishes are joined together in a Union with a single Select Vestry. To facilitate the bedding down of such an arrangement and to avoid the instant exclusion of talented and committed people, the Constitution permits the existence of an enlarged Select Vestry for seven years.

This Bill proposes to do away with the limitation on Select Vestry participation by young adults, and to extend the powers of a Diocesan Council to permit the operation of enlarged Select Vestries in particular situations for specified periods. Councils will be expected to examine each particular situation on its merits, and to report in writing their reasons for exercising their powers. They would also be obliged to review their decisions on a regular basis.

This Bill would allow a Diocesan Council, where a cure is growing or changing, to draw greater numbers of parishioners into its governance. It could permit a Council to facilitate the enlargement of a Select Vestry for a specified period in order to encourage the involvement of a larger number of women or young people or newcomers to the Church of Ireland the administrative life of a parish. These goals, set before us by the Hard Gospel process, are difficult to achieve where Select Vestries are small and where their membership is traditionally associated with families who have been parishioners perhaps through several generations.

This Bill also reflects the experience of rural dioceses where cures with many churches have in recent times made a courageous transition from Group to Union. Such an arrangement is not merely administratively convenient; it also brings about a sense of interdependence and common purpose in ministry and stewardship, a worthy requirement to bear one another's burdens. In such a situation the present permitted transitional period of up to seven years with an enlarged Select Vestry has tended to prove too brief – such arrangements need time to bed down and work fruitfully and to be 'owned' by all. In a cure with seven or more churches, for example, a Select Vestry of only twelve means in reality that, over and above the churchwardens, perhaps just one person from a particular congregation will be numbered among the elected Select Vestry members. Both in changing and growing city parishes and in extensive rural cures the possibility of a Select Vestry of twenty rather than merely twelve might be considered eminently reasonable.

THE BISHOP OF CASHEL, FERNS AND OSSORY
MR SAMUEL HARPER

BILL

To amend Chapter III of the Constitution

WHEREAS it is desirable, in certain circumstances, to increase the prescribed size of Select Vestries in order to enhance participation in the governance of the Church;

AND WHEREAS for such purposes it is necessary to amend Chapter III of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland;

BE IT ENACTED by the Archbishops and Bishops and the clergy and laity of the Church of Ireland in General Synod assembled in Dublin in the year 2014, and by the authority of the same as follows: -

1. In this statute 'Chapter III' means Chapter III of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland.
2. That in Chapter III, section 13 (c) of the Constitution be amended to read as follows –

(c) Not more than twelve other persons elected by the registered vestry members to be members of the select vestry; Provided that the diocesan council may direct an alternative number of other persons be elected by the registered vestry members to be members of the select vestry. Such number shall not be less than twelve or more than twenty. Any directions given by the diocesan council in accordance with this provision shall be reviewed at least every seven years and the reasons for such directions shall be reported in writing to the diocesan synod.