

GENERAL SYNOD 2014

MOTION 15 – COMMISSION ON MINISTRY - MEMBERSHIP

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EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

It is often not until one is faced with an issue that thought is given to it. Having ministered in mainly urban areas it came as quite a shock to the system to be ministering to a rural population centred on the small city of Kilkenny. Although the majority of parishioners live within 15 miles of the city, and there are two centres of worship in the city, both vibrant in different ways, it is very important that those who have strong ties to the rural churches feel that they are having equivalence not only in terms of pastoral care, but also in terms of provision of Sunday services and in particular Holy Communion. Fortunately I have only four churches and a full time colleague; others are not in that happy position and have huge distances to cover and many services to arrive at on a Sunday morning. Ensuring that everyone is happy is quite a jigsaw and the necessity of having other priests to help out is paramount.

For the last two years the commission on Ministry has, amongst other matters been discussing the difficulties faced in rural areas, particularly in places where it is hard to find full time, stipendiary clergy and in places where such clergy are stretched with multiple church buildings and lack of resources.

Amalgamation of churches and parishes is not the answer. In terms of mission and outreach, visibility in the community and service to the local population it leads to decline and the demise of the church in certain areas. This pattern has been seen over and over again, though it has been the solution to problems in times past.

When a number of years ago we sought to have equivalence in training for clergy, whether stipendiary or non stipendiary in the Church of Ireland it was hoped that a goodly number would continue to opt for non stipendiary ordained ministry. An unforeseen consequence of the new patterns of training has been that numbers of new non stipendiary clergy is in decline.

Reference has already been made to the visit of Canon Andrew Bowden who made presentations not only to the Commission on Ministry and the House of Bishops but also to a large number of people from the Diocese of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, Meath and

Kildare and further afield. His words struck many chords with those who listened and comparisons with the Church of England show there are many intersecting situations where there is need for having different patterns of ministry in rural areas.

We talk a great deal about pioneer ministry and of new ways of being a missional church, but we often forget that we have a presence in even the most remote parts of the island, where faithful people seek to gather for worship week by week and where there is always room for newcomers on the pews. I feel that unless we address the matter of having local ordained ministry, we will find that the Church of Ireland becomes an urban centric church with those who live in rural places watching their churches close and, without support, their own faith ebbing rather than being nurtured.

I would like to propose therefore that the General Synod encourages the commission on Ministry, in consultation with the House of Bishops and the CITI, to continue the process of identifying means by which a diocesan based and local effective self-supporting ministry might be developed as a distinctive vocation.