

## **GENERAL SYNOD 2014**

### **MOTION 3 - FLESH AND BLOOD**

**Seconded by Canon Shane Forster – Diocese of Armagh**

#### **EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

#### **CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Archbishop,

Like many of my clerical colleagues, on a Sunday after the morning Service, during the last hymn, I head down to the back of Church so that I can shake hands and chat with my parishioners as they are leaving. Normally the conversation is no more than “good morning...” or “how are you keeping...nice to see you,” and there will always be those throw away comments, as is fairly normal in Ireland, about the weather. “Isn’t that a beautiful day...” or “oh dear, look at the rain this morning, the forecast is not looking great.” Yet I have one parishioner who come rain or shine will say something along the lines of, “isn’t that a great day to be alive!” He is always positive, “always looking on the bright side of life” as the song says. From the first day I met Mervyn Johnston, I noticed how positive he was about everything and then I discovered why. In November 1978 Mervyn received a kidney transplant which changed, transformed and indeed saved his life.

Let me very quickly tell you his story. In 1973 Mervyn was a fit and active young man, just a year married, someone who enjoyed good health and really had never had a day’s sickness in his life. Suddenly, he was taken ill and his body became very bloated – it was the onset of kidney failure. His condition, although treated by medication and careful control of his diet, continued to deteriorate over the following five years, until in June 1978 there was no other option than for him to begin kidney dialysis. At that time, dialysis lasted for 8 hours in the day, three times a week. After each session it took about twenty four hours for his body to recover. Added to this was the travel involved – a seventy mile round trip from his home in Country Armagh to the Renal Unit of Belfast City Hospital. Life was difficult and now with two young daughters he feared for the future and was literally at death’s door on a number of occasions. Then in November 1978 the phone call came to say that a suitable donor had been found. At that stage there was little information about where the donor kidney came from, other than the fact that it was cadaveric, that is, someone had died and their organs had been donated. The news Mervyn got was simply that they had found him a kidney and it was being flown to Belfast. The surgery went well and the rest is history so to speak.

Mervyn feared he would never see his daughters grow up, well not only has he seen them grow up but has also in recent years become a devoted grandfather to four wonderful grandchildren. He has also served as Churchwarden and on the Select Vestry and been a faithful member of the Parish Choir. With his permission I tell you his story today because he has given thanks to God, day and night in the 36 years since, for the precious gift he received of a healthy working kidney. Indeed he continues to give thanks for the chance of life that gift brought him. He has never forgotten that after someone else's death he had the chance of life and although he doesn't know anything about the donor he will always be grateful to them. And so, for Mervyn, every day is a great day to be alive!

Sixty two years ago when my own mother was born, due to the Rhesus factor, she had to receive a total exchange blood transfusion at birth. Three years previously her baby sister had died within hours of being born, because of complications due to the very same condition. It was due to medical advancement and the availability of blood for a transfusion that my mother survived and has been able to lead a perfectly normal, healthy life in the years since. Without that lifesaving blood transfusion she would not be around today and hence neither would I.

Transforming gifts. Lifesaving gifts. Just two examples, yet I am sure within Synod and within all the Parishes we collectively represent, many similar stories could be told.

The Flesh and Blood campaign aims to get donation on the agenda of the church and in the conversations of the church, equipping those who wish to be organ and blood donors and advocates with the information and support they need. It is about opening a conversation - encouraging people to talk about their feelings in regard to organ donation, with their own family and friends, as well as registering as a donor. In the end it is all about a gift which can transform and change the lives of others for the better.

I count it a great honour and privilege today to be able to formally second this motion.