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GENERAL SYNOD 2014

THE ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL DUBLIN, THURSDAY 8 MAY

The Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland

The Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, the Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke, will deliver his Presidential Address to the General Synod of the Church of Ireland meeting in Christ Church Cathedral Dublin on Thursday 8 May 2014. He will focus on 'Freely you have received, freely give' (Matthew Chapter 10 v.8), speaking of the 'Church as an organism that is characterised by its *giving nature*; its people who are characterised by being *giving people*'. Archbishop Clarke will also stress that 'All life is a gift of God; it is never a commodity'. He will say: '...one of the aspects of modern culture I most fear is that we have turned all human life into a commodity. The very beginnings of life and the end of life on earth are *gift*, never to be treated as anything less.'

The Archbishop will ask questions about society's priorities – in relation in particular to poverty and foodbanks and in funding for hospice provision – and will also encourage people to consider fostering children in need and urge church members to consider being blood donors and to sign up for organ transplant at death, 'as an opportunity for *giving to others*', and as promoted by the Flesh and Blood – 'FAB' – campaign.

The Archbishop will go on to ask: 'I would make an appeal to a wider audience and ask those who have been entrusted with political leadership to tell us what they wish to offer, to give, to the future, to our children and grandchildren. It surely cannot simply be "more of the same" that we wish to offer to future generations?'

Archbishop Clarke will also draw attention to Synod legislation concerning the Covenant between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland and interchangeability in ministries and, finally, looking to the long-term, will outline his thoughts and reflections on some the features which might characterise the Church of Ireland as a whole over the coming twenty years.

The full transcript follows below:

President's Address 2014

Archbishop Richard Clarke, Archbishop of Armagh

I would like to begin at the only appropriate place at which one can begin – with an expression of gratitude, of personal gratitude. I wish to thank all those who have given me such love, encouragement and care over this past year. I am truly more than grateful.

I cannot name every name, although during the synod I will undoubtedly convey thanks to individuals, but there are a few people to whom I believe I should make specific reference at this stage in the proceedings.

The support that the wider Church of Ireland receives from its Church House staff, both in Dublin and Belfast, is remarkable – in both its high level of efficiency and its gracious courtesy – and this should never be taken for granted. I would ask our Chief Officer and Secretary-General, Mr Adrian Clements, both to accept our sincere gratitude and also to relay it to his staff on our behalf.

It is a great pleasure to welcome two new bishops to our proceedings - Bishop Ferran Glenfield of the Dioceses of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh, and Bishop Pat Storey of Meath and Kildare Dioceses. In welcoming both of them to their new tasks and responsibilities, we can of course note that the consecration of the new Bishop of Meath and Kildare brings to a welcome fruition the process begun by the Church of Ireland over twenty years ago, in legislating permission for the ordination of women to the priesthood/presbyterate and to the episcopate. We continue to pray for both our new bishops and for their dioceses.

Sadly, we will soon be bidding farewell to Bishop Trevor Williams of Limerick and Killaloe, who plans to retire in July of this year. We thank him for all that he has brought to the ministry of the Church, as a gifted communicator and also as someone who in his ministry has epitomised the Christian calling to be a reconciler and a peacemaker. We wish Trevor and his wife Joyce every happiness and blessing in his retirement.

Before moving on to the main part of my address, I would ask the General Synod to note two particular anniversaries this year, both very central to the mission of the Church, both here and abroad. 'Us', as the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel is now called, is celebrating its 250th anniversary, and the Church Missionary Society is celebrating its bicentenary. As we congratulate both organisations, we give thanks for the many hundreds of people who have served Christ and the mission of the Church through the endeavours of both societies over so many years.

And, as we think of those who have faithfully served the Church of Christ in the past, we must also in a moment of quiet remember those who have served the work of this General

Synod, and who have died since the last session of synod – Dr Donald Davison of the Diocese of Connor, Mrs Fay Anderson of the Diocese of Armagh, Mrs Helen Livingstone of the Diocese of Down, and Dr Valerie Jones of the Diocese of Dublin.

Last year – at what was my first General Synod as Archbishop of Armagh – I spoke to synod about the Church being primarily an organism rather than an organisation. An organism has a natural inbuilt ability to adjust and to change, to grow fresh shoots and to shed dead leaves, whereas an organisation will of its very nature seek to defend and insulate itself against change, and will readily become obsessed with itself and its own structures.

This year I would like to develop one particular aspect of that image of the organism and pose the question as to what the outsider would see if they look at the Church objectively but, more particularly, what the outsider *should* see as characteristics of the organism that is the Church of Ireland. We could produce a long list – outward-looking, mission-orientated, lively, committed, faithful. The list could go on and on. I want to suggest a word that might well encapsulate virtually anything we would want to say about the Church and its characteristics. It is the word ‘giving’. The Church as an organism that is characterised by its *giving nature*; its people who are characterised by being *giving people*. This is very much a Gospel precept – Matthew Chapter 10, with that powerful phrase of Our Lord, ‘Freely you have received, freely give’. We receive grace; we have no option but to respond to the world with an uncalculating and unselfconscious generosity.

Generosity of course includes financial generosity (and we should never for one moment downplay this) but generosity is this and far more. Generosity of character is a disposition that is genuinely more concerned with giving than receiving. It is the moral and spiritual discernment which can recognise that all that we have is itself ‘gift’ – gifted from God – and should hence be given freely to the world, but never irresponsibly and irreverently used or abused as deserved possession.

With this in mind, I would like, on behalf of the whole membership of the Church of Ireland and in particular this General Synod, to thank sincerely all those who give of their time, their means and their expertise, for the good of the Church. I include those who work on committees, boards and commissions, in every area of the life of the Church. Although I am certain that I fall into the trap myself on occasions, I do not greatly approve of the use of the word ‘level’ – parish level, diocesan level or central level – to describe different components of the life of the Church, as it seems to imply a hierarchy of value. I do not believe that there are *levels* in the Kingdom of God. There is commitment and there is generosity of spirit; that is sufficient. As clergy or laity, whether then it is in the life of parishes, of dioceses or in the work of central administration, all service should be valued at a human level. All service is valued by God.

All life is a gift of God; it is never a commodity. Those made in God's image and likeness can never be a commodity for the use of others, to be neglected if they are not of obvious personal interest to us. I have said repeatedly (and well before my move to this present post) that one of the aspects of modern culture I most fear is that we have turned all human life into a commodity. The very beginnings of life and the end of life on earth are *gift*, never to be treated as anything less. We have seen in recent legislation in Belgium that euthanasia is now permitted for minors provided that there has been discussion with parents. This is not merely a slippery slope; it is surely near the bottom of such a slope. North or South on this island, we must surely as Christians never concede that life is other than sacred, a gift of God from beginning to end, never to be thrown away as though it were personal property. And yet, as you probably know, the hospice movement is not given proper support from state funding. A hospice I visited recently on the edge of Armagh diocese has to raise two-thirds of its financial requirements through its own fund-raising operations. We simply have to ask, as Christians living in modern society, where public priorities are?

Of course there can be no simple solutions for the political class to find money for everything in jurisdictions that are – to be straight about it – simply economically insolvent. However, around us we see that it is the poorer who are becoming poorer and in some cases genuinely destitute, right before our eyes. Many of you may well have seen the work of food banks at first hand, as I have. Should we not feel some sense of shame that this system is now accepted as a necessary backup to state support in any modern society? The generosity of so many people in supporting food banks is of course wonderful – a fine example of *giving* – and must be encouraged, but should this particular form of individual giving actually be necessary? Surely not in a functional humane society that looked after its weakest as a matter of course.

If we go to the earliest stage of life, we find another acute need. Barnardo's – North and South – can testify that there is now a massive need for foster homes for children. In both jurisdictions, the number of cases of abuse or neglect of children has increased dramatically in the past few years. In one sense it is an encouraging sign that people are no longer turning a blind eye to the abuse of children, but it means of course that the number of children now seen as needing care, whether because of neglect or direct abuse, is increasing. Fostering of children can never be easy. It requires so much emotional strength in those who take on this responsibility, that I can only look on with genuine awe and admiration. It is a need in our society, and it is one that those who value life as a gift, who have the necessary strength and equilibrium, and who seek to give love, stability and care to the most vulnerable of all in our society, can meet. I am more than happy to appeal to any who would believe this to be a gift they could provide, to take the necessary steps towards being considered as suitable foster carers.

It is not my intention to comment on all the business of this synod but, in the context of the theme of *gift*, I would like to draw attention to two matters of business that will come before us. The first is the second part of legislation concerning the Covenant between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland. It would be easy to see the legislation for an interchangeability in ministries to be regarded simply as an ecumenical structural arrangement. This would, I believe, be a very limited view of the matter. There will of course be wholly practical outworkings of a new arrangement, if this were to pass through the General Synod, but I would like us to take a broader view of the matter. This is also about the mission of the Church and it is about the gifts that each tradition might give to the other, and hence to the wider world. We have gifts to bring; we have gifts to receive. I am not going to preempt the discussion, nor presume on the outcome. All I would wish to say is that the work has been done very carefully and thoroughly, with prayer and with deep thought, and that the Anglican Communion as a whole, through the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (or 'IASCUFO' as it is probably better known), has signalled to us its approval of the path the Church of Ireland has been following in this matter.

A resolution will be brought to the synod by the Church and Society Commission regarding the 'Flesh and Blood' campaign that has been running in Britain for the past year. I, for one, would very much wish to see this campaign becoming part of the Irish church scene in these coming months, throughout the island, and also as something which we might do in ecumenical partnership with other Christian traditions. I mention it here because, again, it comes straight to our understanding of the human person as gift, and even of the human body in death, as potential gift for others. Flesh and Blood – 'FAB' to use the useful acronym – encourages church members to consider being blood donors and also to sign up for organ transplant at death, as an opportunity for *giving to others*. Although almost everyone would accept an organ if they needed one, not everyone is prepared to make that offer for others. At present, more than one hundred and fifty people in Northern Ireland are on an *active* transplant waiting list (and each year around fifteen people die needlessly as they await a suitable organ), but less than one-third of the population has indicated that they would be organ donors. What is needed in Northern Ireland is needed equally in the Republic – more people who would give the gift of blood in life, or of organs after earthly death. It has been made clear by the organisers that although this is obviously something to be encouraged through FAB, it should not be a matter for pressure or intrusion into the personal wishes of others and, least of all, for competitiveness between people. It is an opportunity for *giving* of which all should become aware.

If we are to be a confident Church of Ireland, we must be a Church which looks beyond itself and looks beyond the present, and also encourages others to do so. Before turning to the ways in which we as a Church tradition might seek to undertake this, I would make an

appeal to a wider audience and ask those who have been entrusted with political leadership to tell us what they wish to offer, to give, to the future, to our children and grandchildren. It surely cannot simply be ‘more of the same’ that we wish to offer to future generations? There is continuing political paralysis in Northern Ireland; a culture of entitlement for those who in the Republic already have plenty; and an austerity which assaults the poor more than the wealthy in both our jurisdictions. This cannot be a political vision that truly seeks *to give to the future*.

But what of us as the Church of Ireland? We cannot ask of others, if we will not look at ourselves and what our hopes might be for the future. I am not, I believe, alone in fearing that the Church of Ireland has become so concerned with dealing with present concerns under our noses – all of which are indeed pressing and critically important – that we have somehow lost the vision and hope to look further into the future, and to ask what we as a church community might propose to give as a legacy to future generations. In partnership with others already mentioned above, I am asking that the Church of Ireland as a whole takes a deep collective breath and looks to the long-term future, and begins to work collaboratively towards what we might wish to be, let us say, in twenty years’ time, 2034 – being a Church for the long-term, being in word and deed a long-term Church. This might be our gift to the future. Not for us, but for our children and grandchildren.

This is neither to be at the exclusion of ‘solving’ present day issues, nor to prevent wonderful creative local projects from flourishing, such as those encouraged and supported by the Priorities Fund. I believe, however, that only when we are also prepared to look beyond ourselves (and our own immediate concerns and interests) to a *future spiritual place* for our children and grandchildren, a place which we ourselves may not still be on earth to see, that we are following a path of true Christian hope and vision. Our ancestors in the Church of Ireland, at the time of disestablishment, had to take courage in both hands and believe in a future beyond themselves, and then to work and plan energetically for that future. Such an attitude is surely equally necessary again, in our time and place? What do we wish to give to the future?

Some years ago, the archbishops and bishops produced a vision statement, ‘Growth, Unity and Service’ for the encouragement of the Church, and in the hope that it might provide incentive for fresh initiatives and a new resolve in mission. The document had a certain amount of take-up, but little follow-through. In retrospect, I believe that we may have put these aspirations in the wrong order. We should perhaps have entitled it, ‘Service, Unity and Growth’. Why? Because it is in giving and serving together that so many of the barriers between Christians – within traditions and between traditions - are pulled down. It is in serving the world, that those walls between the Church and the world are broken down. This is how unity in its fullness can evolve, and it is through a spirit of unified purpose that true Christian growth that is more than mere recruitment can become reality.

Whatever for that, what now follows is based firmly on ideas contained in ‘Growth, Unity and Service’, but looking also into a further future. The ideas now being proposed are drawn with intentionally broad-brush strokes, as what is suggested will not have the same appearance in every place. Some of these hopes for the long-term future are indeed already being developed. Some will require major work at local community level. Some will need the energy and vision of the so-called ‘Central Church’, whether through its trustee body (the RCB) or its legislative body (the General Synod), or with both working in tandem. Some may be diocesan-led projects, albeit with support from the central church or local parish communities. I hope that the Church as a whole may grasp a vision of what we can achieve for the future. Staging posts on the journey will be needed, where what has been done may be assessed and, where necessary, modified for the future. The vision will undoubtedly change and develop in different ways as time goes on, and local applications may well differ. None of this should be feared. What is utterly essential, however, is that there should be a spirit of collaboration rather than of competitiveness throughout the Church, and of true hope rather than passive cynicism. Cynicism is cheap and easy. Commitment and conviction do not come cheaply.

In terms of a time-line, it is hoped that the basics of a strategy for moving towards the goals which I wish to propose will be worked through in the coming autumn. I am grateful to all those who have already given encouragement for this project, surely a ‘big idea’ in which we all might share, under the title or heading of ‘Long-term Church’. We are here for the long-term. We need to think in the long-term.

This is not a mission statement, nor is it a statement about mission *per se*, which will inevitably follow differing contours in different parts of the Church, but thoughts and reflections of some the features we might hope would characterise the Church of Ireland as a whole in 2034. In broad-brush strokes, let me suggest the following ideas –

- To continue to be Anglican in worship and practice and to be a clearly identifiable and vibrant part of the worldwide Christian Church, involved energetically in its mission.
- To have a coherent and meaningful structure that is well understood by those within and outside the Church.
- To be relevant to and visible in the community in all parts of Ireland, making a positive contribution that gives witness to the work of the Church and its people.
- To be an obvious home for those who are seeking faith in an increasingly secularised world.
- To be a hands-on church with involvement with the deprived areas of Ireland and the world.
- To be competent, professional and accountable in all aspects of delivering ministry, with a self-sustaining pattern for local and regional/diocesan ministries.

- To have specialist central support available for critical and innovative aspects of Church mission and administrative work.
- To have resolved the heritage issues of surplus properties.
- To have processes in place to support ministry and ministers, including those encountering difficulties, and to enable speedy re-allocation of resources where ministry requires re-visioning.
- To be spending less on conservation and more on growth.

To return to where I began this address – ‘Freely we have been given’. Surely we can be characterised as a Church which gives freely, which is generous, and which will give, freely and generously of itself – even, and indeed *certainly* at a risk to itself – giving to others and giving to the future in the name and the power of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.

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