

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND 2015

BILL NO 2

PROPOSER'S SPEECH

**The Bishop of Derry and Raphoe
The Right Rev Ken Good**

Thursday 7 May

Bill Number 2 contains a proposal to address part of Section 34 of Chapter IV of the Constitution – that is, when clergy become unable to fulfill their duties of office because of illness.

The premise of the Bill is that Section 34, in its current form, does not make proper provision for the care of clergy and their families, and, at the same time, provides the potential for clergy to become stranded in their current post, to their detriment and to the detriment of the parish.

Section 34, as it stands, describes what happens if a member of the clergy becomes unable to carry out his or her ministry as a result of *mental illness*. It provides that such a situation be dealt with by the bishop referring the case to the *Court of the General Synod*, which decides on the capacity of the cleric to continue in ministry.

In at least two important respects, Section 34 is not a perfect solution to the possibility of illness preventing a cleric from continuing in ministry. Firstly, it does not provide for *physical* illness, and secondly, it makes no mention of a *medical opinion* being sought. It seems outdated and, at best, lacks proper compassion.

The Bill now before General Synod seeks to expand the reach of Section 34 to include incapacity on medical grounds, no matter what the cause. And the relevant medical opinion would be provided by a panel of medical experts consisting of not fewer than three members.

The power will continue to rest with the diocesan bishop to refer the case to a Church panel, consisting of an archbishop or bishop, an honorary secretary of General Synod and the Chief Officer of the RCB.

The Church panel will request the member of the clergy to make him- or herself available to the medical panel. In the event that a member of the clergy is unwilling to take such a step, the Church panel will be enabled to require him or her to do so.

Ministry in the parish needs to be protected as well as the member of the clergy and their family.

To provide protection for the individual member of the clergy, the medical panel will consist of not fewer than three experts and the member of the clergy may provide his or her own medical evidence.

A decision of the Church panel may find that the cleric is considered to be permanently incapacitated from being able to carry out their ministry, and in that case may make a decision that the office held by the cleric be vacated. This is not a new provision.

The change is that, under these proposals, the decision would be made by **a Church panel on the basis of medical evidence**, rather than by the Court of General Synod as has historically been the case. Under these proposals, the member of the clergy would be able to appeal the decision of the Church panel.

An essential part of Section 34, as it currently stands, sets out that reasonable future provision must be made for the member of the clergy where a decision to vacate is made. This continues to be a vital part of the proposed legislation. It has to be made possible for the member of the clergy to move on in a dignified and humane fashion. This is right for the individual and their family and right for the Church.

[Bill Number 3, which will shortly come before General Synod, will seek to make a positive and practical start in this direction.

This Bill also recognises that circumstances in health can change and **improve**. Medical prognosis and available medical treatments may change. So this Bill is not about a resignation from ministry, but a resignation from **office**. Changed circumstances in the future can also be envisaged, with the potential for ministry to be resumed.

I am hopeful that Synod will agree that this is a reasonable and sensible change to Section 34. And that it is practical for the member of the clergy, the parish and the Church.

Archbishop, I have pleasure in proposing that Bill No 2 be given a Second Reading.