

GENERAL SYNOD 2016

Bill No. 1

Secunder: Mrs Ethne Harkness

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Bishop

The Church of Ireland is an episcopal church, led by Bishops and governed by Synod. The two elements coming together have given us strength and adaptability and sustained us since disestablishment. Because all of us place a high value on the role of Bishops in the life of the Church, it is important to ensure that the processes involved in selecting Bishops and Archbishops are the best we can have. And because we know that Bishops are not elected to serve in one diocese but are truly Bishops of the Church of God, we have episcopal electors representing diocesan synods and balances within the episcopal electoral colleges that reflect the role of Bishops in the Church as a whole.

In seconding the Bill, I want to emphasise the fact that the responsibility and privilege of electing Bishops of the Church must always remain with the episcopal electoral colleges. We should ask ourselves, however, whether the present arrangements in the existing Chapter VI of the Constitution are the best we can provide to enable our episcopal electors to carry out this task. The answer has to be that we can do better. To help the college know more about the diocese seeking a Bishop, the Bill provides for a profile and needs paper to be prepared. And secondly, to help the college know more about the men and women who may be called to that position, the Bill provides for a committee of its electors to consider their academic career, ministerial service, qualities of heart and mind and suitability for election as Bishop by the college. That committee will report in writing to the college with a shortlist of between three and five persons for the college to consider at its second meeting.

The fundamental principle underlying this change in the existing procedure is that the process of discernment remains with the college, but more information should be made available to help in that process. That is where the supporting or subsidiary role of the committee comes in. Nominations come from the college, the college selects the members of the committee from amongst itself, the college, with the President, decides how the committee is to conduct

its work, and the college elects. If the college is not satisfied with the first shortlist, the college may nominate additional persons and send the committee back to do further work and then the college will meet again – a third meeting of the college if necessary. But always a college with information about the diocese and the persons under consideration. Inquiry is for the committee but discernment and election for the college.

Bishop, I want to refer finally to another aspect of the Bill. When the Commission brought its position paper to the General Synod in 2015, we said that we wanted to reflect and consult further on the process of election of the Archbishop of Armagh. We have done so and the Bill provides (in clause 2) that a diocesan profile and statement of needs should be prepared for the diocese of Armagh – that is new. It would be submitted to the House of Bishops for the Bill says that, as is the case now, the election of the Archbishop of Armagh should be for the House of Bishops. The consensus in the Commission and among Diocesan Council members we asked about this was that the present system did not need to be changed.

Bishop, I second the motion that the Bill be now read a second time.