

GENERAL SYNOD 2016

Bill No. 4

Proposer: The Rt Revd Alan Abernethy

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

I was chatting recently to someone who relishes being a granny and she often has her grandchildren to stay. One of her grand-daughters was staying recently and she is six years old. As she was saying goodnight, her grand-daughter astonished her by saying: “Granny, you are very like God.” Amidst her embarrassment, she made the mistake of asking: “Why?” To which she got the reply: “You are both very old.”

We seek to serve in a rapidly changing world where the speed of change is frantic. The culture in which we seek to service is also changing so quickly and we at times find it hard to relate and connect with local communities. I am looking at this Bill particularly through the lens of Connor Diocese as that is where I serve and seek to give oversight and leadership. In North, South and West Belfast, we have many church buildings and the options have been closure or amalgamation. However, I want to help us reimagine church for the future which will mean more flexible and creative thinking and indeed an imaginative use of our regulations.

I am grateful to the RB for proposing these gentle but creative changes to the Church Fabric Fund. The RB, as a trust body, are trustees and are there to serve the needs of the Church. They are, by good stewardship, to enable the next generation to maintain properties. I believe these changes will help to ensure there is a next generation to pass on our assets to. This gives an ability for reimagining church and findings ways of connecting church with local communities and culture beyond the beauty of historic buildings. When church buildings are sold at present the proceeds are invested for the rainy day to help parishes maintain their church buildings. The rainy day has arrived. These changes will allow the flexibility for parishes to make proposals to use their assets for some imaginative development plans in the parish or, if they wish, in a local area or deanery. The parish would still be in control of the asset but allowed to use it more creatively for development. For example, I can imagine in some parts of the city of Belfast, a massive church building could be reimagined to be a

community centre, which could even produce an income, or a small shopfront may be of more use serving the community than an old and weary church hall.

As the RB have 20% of the Fabric Fund to allocate they are also willing to look favourably upon applications for development in any parish or diocese as we seek to develop and look to the future. This flexibility will allow for parishes to maintain their assets but free them up to be used for development and it will also allow the RB to support creative planning for the future. If Synod passes this Bill, there will be a small group formed to bring proposals and guidelines for the use of this fund to the RB and Standing Committee before it can be used.

I have great pleasure in proposing this Bill and commend it to the house.