

GENERAL SYNOD 2016

Motion: Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures

Proposer: Mrs Ethne Harkness

Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery

This is the final report of the Commission as our term of office ends with the close of this Synod. It has been fun. I've been working with an excellent team. We come from all arts and parts of the church, different backgrounds, talents, views. We've worked towards our aim of providing this Synod with a series of recommendations for the future of the church. Each of us has set aside the particular preoccupations of our particular diocese for the good of the whole church. We were not set up as a boundaries commission. Yesterday, Synod considered our Episcopal Elections Bill. We have also made recommendations about training for \Bishops – induction and in service training. These have been accepted and implemented by the House of Bishops. We also looked at the question of the role of the Bishop. We looked at this carefully. We have concerns about whether our Bishops today are pushed into functions and activities that take them away from the functions in the Ordinal. That is teachers and pastoral oversight. Last year, the Commission asked every diocese and central Church body to consider the expectations they place on Bishops, transferring jobs from Bishops to other people. Let's all try to do more to release our Bishops to do more 'bishopsing'.

Turning now to diocesan boundaries. We published a booklet at Synod 2015 with maps as examples of where those guidelines might lead us. In particular, we expressed our concerns about numerically small dioceses and the pressures there in terms of needing to support each other in episcopal ministry provision. Last year, Synod approved our thinking and asked us to bring proposals forward this year. We consulted and invited feedback. In some places that was forthcoming and we felt warmly welcomed. In other places there was not full engagement. We met some apathy, some complacency and some nimby-ism and some church politics. We are convinced that there is an appetite for change but wonder if there is an appetite to change.

In 2016 we broached a 10-diocese model, based on proposals originally explored in 1998. 1998 with modification was not acceptable to the two Archbishops. Under the Constitution, we need the assent of the two Archbishops. We felt this is the best suggestion. But, we went back and put forward another alternative. We were saddened and shocked by the opposition to that set of proposals. We were met with language that was intemperate. We had to think what we should do and we were divided about what we should do. We felt a real obligation to bring our final scheme to General Synod because we were told to do that and it is an issue for General Synod to decide. But, we did not seek

confrontation and did not see the wisdom of imposing change where it is not embraced. Even if General Synod has the power to enforce change is this the best way forward? We felt that new structures could more easily emerge out of an atmosphere of harmony not of resentment. We felt that the outcome of our work should not be about success or failure for the Commission, but better episcopal ministry for the church. So for this reason, we put forward our resolution.

The motion encourages those directly affected to explore possibilities building on four years of work. Change is more likely to emerge through conversation and agreement. It asks for reports to General Synod on progress towards this endeavour. It sees practical plans being advanced through an Implementation Committee to be set up by Standing Committee.