

GENERAL SYNOD 2016

Report of the Commission on Ministry Proposer: The Ven Leslie Stevenson

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

On proposing this report and the motion I want to draw to your attention to Appendix 1 on page 349, *Self Supporting Ministry*.

The origins of *Self-Supporting Ministry* go back to various conversations about how to provide pastoral and sacramental ministry to small communities in rural Ireland. This was against the background of parishes struggling to raise assessments to pay stipendiary clergy. A third factor was the drying up of those willing to serve in non-stipendiary ministry as they once had because of an unintended consequence of a training scheme that set the barrier for ordination very high both in terms of length of time involved and academic attainment. Seven years of part-time study before ordination became an impediment for those offering themselves. And those who did tended to opt towards stipendiary ministry as they completed the course.

Without a cohort of non-stipendiary clergy it seemed that there would be more and more amalgamations, church closures and people becoming unchurched as a consequence. It was felt there could and should be something better. A vision of small vibrant congregations reaching out to the wider community. A vision of mission.

So a process of discussions followed, North and South. As those soundings went on it emerged that there were certain parishes in urban areas who also had small congregations battling to raise stipends and whose future was bleak. A familiar set of circumstances was emerging. It was also noted that certainly within the Southern Province a celebration of the Holy Communion was the expectation on an almost weekly basis.

The Commission on Ministry looked to other parts of the Anglican Communion to see if their experience could benefit our thinking. Andrew Bowden was brought over to share the Church of England's forays into ordained local ministry. He spoke to a joint meeting of the Commission and the House of Bishops and then an open meeting in Portlaoise to which clergy and readers were invited from Cashel, Ferns and Ossory, and Meath and Kildare. On

the day others from Tuam and Limerick turned up. There was an enthusiasm and an urgency expressed by the large numbers attending that something had to be done.

So, the Commission brought a resolution to the General Synod of 2014 which encompassed the vision of the Commission that what was needed to meet the financial and geographical realities but yet providing sacramental and pastoral ministry in both rural and urban areas is a “diocesan based and locally effective self-supporting ministry.” The Synod agreed.

A working group was established with representatives from the Commission, the House of Bishops and the Institute was established. It worked, remarkably, quickly and effectively. What emerged was the document, *Self-Supporting Ministry*, that you have before in the report with a motion that Synod would commend it.

It is, and must be emphasised, an expression of priestly ministry in accordance with catholic order and would be recognised by other churches which are one, holy, catholic and apostolic. It is consonant with the Preamble and Declaration of 1870. A priest is still a priest but that can be expressed in different ways.

Self-supporting ministry would be in addition and another pathway to ordination.

Some of the details then. Its qualification would be at NFQ 8 level and would be strictly exercised within the diocese in which the person was ordained. Any transference to stipendiary ministry would be exceptional and only could be done by a rigorous selection conference and a further extensive course of study and assessment.

The course would be the Graduate Certificate in Ministry through the University of Durham and would be non-residential. It would be delivered centrally and locally. There are two modes proposed. One is a three-year course – the first two years of which would involve eight Saturdays, covering academic, practical and pastoral subjects. The third year would be a diaconal internship and pastoral involvement. The second mode would be for those like readers who already have completed the foundation course and would involve a year’s study followed by the internship.

The candidate would be selected locally. It is a process where the candidate would be made known in writing to the DDO commending the person for self-supporting ministry. The person should prepare a CV and consent to vetting. The person should be in a fellowship of vocation before coming before a selection panel. The panel would be made up of four people (lay and clerical) from the diocese as well as two (lay and clerical) from outside the diocese. The person would be interviewed by a psychologist.

When the person is ordained it is envisioned that s/he will be supporting and enhancing existing ministry – offering preaching, sacramental and pastoral ministry. S/he would be

supervised by a stipendiary cleric and would have a licence for five years which can be renewed. It would be hoped that the person would have few, if any, administrative functions. The SSM would be a clerical member of diocesan synod and be eligible to be elected to diocesan and central committees as a member of the clergy.

The Commission believes this is an exciting expression of priesthood that is needed to serve today's church. A ministry that would enable communities in both rural and inner city areas to be vibrant and to reach outwards in service and mission.