

GENERAL SYNOD 2007

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

Proposed by Canon Alan Abernethy (Down & Dromore)

Your grace and members of synod in proposing this report of the commission on ministry I have learnt again that very important lesson of committee work. Never miss the meeting at which they decide who will propose and who will second the report at synod. I am here because I missed the last meeting. However I am delighted to do so and want to highlight two aspects of the report.

The commission on ministry as been in existence for many years now and at times recently it may appear as if not a lot is happening. However when you examine the thinking that is taking place on the subject of ministry throughout the church it is clear that they have been an important part in that very process of changing our thinking.

There are two issues that I want to highlight under this report one of which will be presented in more depth by the team that have been working on the subject of ministerial formation and training.

Some of the key principles behind the proposed changes are important to clarify.

- There will no longer be different training for stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry. There will be a part time or a full time course of study and anyone can do either of these modes of study. This is not a case of stipendiary doing full time and non-stipendiary doing part time, this is a case of life choices and family needs.
- This training will be not just training for ordained ministry but will be developed to offer various forms of training for many ministries.
- There will be accommodation provided to assist those families who want to live together during the training process.
- This training will be a professional training in ministry and thereby will move from a qualification in theology to a qualification in ministry that will include theological study.
- This training will be firmly rooted in a parish context connecting learning and practice at all levels of the course.
- There will be three core modules to this course and they will be scripture, theology and ministry.

These are exciting times and it is important that we all work together to ensure these changes are implemented for the future development of the ministry of Christ that he has gifted to us.

The other issue from this report that I want to highlight is the consultation day that was hosted by the Church of Ireland and C.P.A.S. last year to explore the subject of how young people view the church and thereby ordination. There is a leaflet on your seats please read and if anyone needs anymore they are available at synod. The Priorities Fund sponsored this consultation and we are very grateful to them for their generous support.

I found it fascinating how so many of our young people are passionate about their faith but feel disconnected from their church. They want to be leaders and they want training but they at times feel excluded. When they discussed ordination they had concerns around their perception that there was no flexibility or creative thinking in ministry and one size fits all is what we practice.

I found their energy, their passion and their willingness to ask hard questions very encouraging and hopeful. These discussions will be continuing and we all can help our young people in valuing and affirming them.

In conclusion I believe these are exciting times to be involved in ministry in whatever form that takes. Let us pray to our Lord for wisdom, vision and courage to go forward together.