

SYNOD NEWS

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND 2001

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The legislative programme for the year was heavily weighted with liturgical business. The familiar Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper was presented with some minimal changes, together with a new service entitled 'The Celebration of the Holy Communion also called The Lord's Supper or The Eucharist'. This latter rite, as one might expect, attracted considerable interest and a very large of amendments. Many of the amendments were defeated, leaving the drafting of the Liturgical Advisory Committee more or less intact, and both bills were passed with the necessary two-thirds majorities.

Further amendments to the Book of Common Prayer including the Calendar, the collects and the canticles were also presented, and carried with the necessary majorities.

A Pensions Bill providing for increases in pensions, together with a variety of other Measures relating to the basis of calculation of service, the abolition of contributions in respect of retired members, provision for stepchildren and a number of administrative matters, was introduced and duly passed.

The Synod also passed a bill which provided for the establishment of mediation panels for each province. These will be able to make recommendations to a bishop concerning any case of pastoral conflict which may have been referred to the panel by the bishop and which he considers to be incapable of resolution at a local level.

A bill was also presented to the Synod by its own Standing Committee, which had as its purpose a reduction in the size of the Synod itself. The proposers of the bill put it forward on the basis that it would provide for fairer representation, including elections under the system of proportional representation, by means of a single transferable vote. Its intention was also to reduce the size of the Synod, a measure which, in the view of the working group which had prepared the bill, would lead to improvements in effectiveness and efficiency in the future.

The Synod was not convinced, and rejected the bill by a narrow majority. A subsequent motion requesting the Standing Committee to continue its work on reviewing the structures and workings of the Synod with a view to presenting legislation in the triennium commencing 2003 was passed.

The Synod was given a foretaste of its programme for 2002. Nine liturgical resolutions to lead to bills were proposed, and passed with the necessary majorities. The only resolution to attract any substantial comment was one giving leave to introduce a bill containing a new baptism service. A further resolution of a liturgical nature, introduced by the House of Bishops, which would have had the effect of relaxing to some degree the discipline surrounding the admission of the unconfirmed to Communion, was also presented. As with all such resolutions, voting has to be by orders with a two-thirds majority of both clergy and laity being required for the reso-

lution to pass. In the case of this resolution the necessary majority was achieved among the clergy but not among the laity. Accordingly the resolution failed.

Two other unusual events occurred this year. A petition signed by a number of members was presented to the Synod. This was referred, in accordance with Standing Orders, to the Petitions Committee. Upon that Committee reporting that the petition was in order, the Synod accepted that, as the petition had called for further discussion of a particular matter, and as that matter was to be the subject of debate at the Synod, no further action need be taken. An individual member also brought an appeal to the Synod claiming to be aggrieved by an act of a Diocesan Synod. After hearing an outline of the circumstances the Synod agreed that the question should be referred to the Court of the General Synod for determination.

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2000

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For the first time the General Synod was a residential one and held in Aberdeen. It lasted, as before, for two and a half days. A gathering at which no strong views were expressed, it dealt expeditiously and courteously with all matters on the agenda.

Two years ago a Working Party was set up to study human sexuality. A report was produced this year for the Synod in the form of a study guide of seventy-four pages. Each member contributed a chapter on one area. It raised questions rather than provided answers. The one-page introduction attracted some criticism and was sent back to the Working Party to modify. The report was, however, received by the Synod and commended by them, not to the Church, but to those congregations which wished to use it.

Another item which could have roused contention was the ordination of women to the episcopate. This took the form of a Green Paper which the Faith and Order Board requested should be sent down to dioceses for comment, with the possibility of later canonical alteration, if thought desirable. This proposal was accepted and the necessary resolution passed for the Green Paper to be circulated.

The only canonical change being voted on for the second time added to the membership of the Synod any person elected to represent the Scottish Church on the Anglican Consultative Council. It was unopposed.

A more important canonical change, which was being considered for the first time, was a new canon 'Of Clergy who become incapacitated'. Under its terms, if in the opinion of the diocesan Bishop or Dean (or, in the case of a bishop, the Episcopal Synod) a clergyman is thought to have become unfit to fulfil the responsibilities of ministry through either physical or mental incapacity, he may be referred to a Medical Review Panel. Such a step can be triggered by a request from the Vestry of the charge in which the clergyman exercises ministerial duties, or by a request from the clergyman himself, or the initiative may come from the Bishop or Dean. The panel is to consist of ten practitioners medically or otherwise appropriately qualified, of whom one is to be appointed as the Selector. On a referral being made the Selector