

During the meeting the Governing Body heard the Annual Reports of the Council for Mission and Ministry and of Trinity College, Carmarthen, together with the report on the meeting in Trondheim in June of this year of the Conference of European Churches. The Governing Body also heard short presentations on behalf of the Prince's Trust in Wales and 'Building Bridges of Hope', which is a project of the Churches Commission on Mission of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. This was presented by the Revd Terry Tennens, a minister of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. He spoke about the work of the project, which has made considerable progress in some areas, facilitating the co-operation of Christian Churches of different denominations in various ways which has been a great encouragement to all those concerned.

Members were reminded of the need to remember that the Governing Body's meeting in April 2004 is to take place in Aberystwyth. The new arrangements for the April meeting are to take account of the fact that changes in accommodation arrangements at the university in Lampeter mean that it is no longer possible for the authorities there to accommodate the April meeting. No change is currently anticipated for the September meeting.

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IVOR GUILD

Writer to the Signet

At the time of the Synod human sexuality was attracting the headlines, but apart from a reference to the need for right relations by the Primus in his opening address, the subject was not discussed.

Women Bishops

The Canonical change providing for the Ordination of Women to the Episcopate came before the Synod for confirmation of the Resolution passed last year; it required a two-thirds majority of those present and voting in each House. The Resolution had been considered by dioceses, where it had been supported unanimously in some and with limited opposition in others. The College of Bishops had issued a Statement of Intent promising that, if the Resolution were passed, they would recognise the Synod's jurisdiction and authority, and committing themselves to assist in issues of pastoral provision and sacramental care. They also pledged that those opposed to the ordination of women would continue to have a valued and respected place within the Church. Those speaking against the Resolution pleaded for more time before a profound and irrevocable

change were made, while those in favour pointed out that, in the absence of valid theological reasons against ordination, it would be discriminatory not to proceed. The requisite majority was obtained and the Resolution passed.

The Primus then moved a motion expressing the Synod's desire not to break with the tradition of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and recognising the good faith of those who could not in conscience agree with the decision. The bishops promised to ensure fair treatment and equality of provision for those who were unhappy with the change.

Clergy Retirement Age

The introduction of a compulsory retirement age of 65 for stipendiary clergy also required to be passed for a second time. Considerable opposition had been expressed at diocesan levels. In particular, at a time when older people were being encouraged to return to or stay in work, the proposal might send a message that older people were not valued. The Faith and Order Board were against the Resolution and it was not passed.

Incapacity of Bishops and Clergy

Last year a Canonical change was made to deal with the situation where a cleric was unable to carry out his duties. The change did not provide the steps which a bishop could take in such a situation, and an addition was now proposed. The present alteration gave the bishop power to suspend the cleric without loss of emoluments when he had been referred to the Medical Review Panel. It also makes provision as to what arrangements should be put in force if the panel recommended that the cleric undertake a period of leave or was suspended pending appearance before the panel. A Canon covering the incapacity of a bishop was passed last year and this, too, was confirmed by the present Synod.

Child Protection

A Provincial Child Protection Officer had been appointed, and the proposed Canonical alteration enabled an accusation of child abuse to be brought against a cleric and for the accused to be suspended. It was given a first reading and passed. Provision was also made for the resulting expenses of all parties.

A new Canon was also put forward setting up a Child Protection Committee. It defined the powers and duties of the Child Protection Officer, who would have the power to make application for disclosure and to decide on the suitability of persons to work with children. An information pack had already been prepared and circulated.

Justice and Peace Creation

It was announced that a new network within the Church was being set up dealing with these issues. This step was welcomed by such organisations

as the Mothers' Union, since it would build bridges with the work being done by members of such bodies.

Ministry Development Review

This matter, which had been raised at the Synod last year, had been discussed during the year in dioceses. In addition to the training for the ordained ministry, provision was proposed for other emerging patterns of ministry and a new qualification to be known as 'The Bishops' Certificate'. Training would be carried out at diocesan level, though the development would operate within provincially agreed guidelines. Considerable discussion took place. The report was welcomed by a large majority and the new role for the Theological Institute was approved. It was emphasised that adequate financial resources should be provided by the Province.

National Issues

Two dioceses, identifying God's purposes with the national well-being, proposed resolutions about changes in the educational field. Aberdeen deplored the governmental move to charge top-up fees, which would result in poorer students being saddled with higher debts at graduation. This was followed by a motion that the Boards of the Church should be reminded of the serious financial implications of the proposal affecting the future training of Scottish ordinands. In a different field, St Andrews diocese urged the government to endorse the post-Kyoto Contraction and Convergence Programme to mitigate further the impact of future greenhouse gas emissions. Both resolutions were passed.

Inter-Church Relations

For eight years discussions had been going on with the Church of Scotland, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church on the Scottish Church Initiative for Union (SCIFU). At the recent General Assembly of the Church of Scotland it had been decided not to continue with such discussions. Despite this decision, the Episcopal Church resolved to honour its commitment to the process and to what could be regarded as a visionary model which could take forward mission. Doubts, however, were expressed, even by those passionate about ecumenism, in respect of the maxi-parish, but a motion to withdraw from the SCIFU proposals was turned down. The proposals of SCIFU were commended to dioceses for discussion and comment.

Membership

Last year a Green Paper on Membership had been sent down to dioceses for discussion. It contained a variety of options. The Faith and Order Board had elected to propose two motions derived from it. The first recommended the extension of Eucharistic hospitality to baptised communicant members of any Trinitarian Church, and this was passed. The second, which proposed the establishment of a congregational Electoral Roll

(in place of existing congregational rolls, which were considered as works of creative fiction) excited much criticism and discussion. It was put forward largely on the ground of fixing those legally responsible in an unincorporated association such as an individual church. It, too, was passed by a two-thirds majority.

Standardisation of Congregational Status

A Green Paper was presented on this subject last year, with a variety of options suggested. The Faith and Order Board, in the belief that the Church was not yet in a position to answer the underlying policy questions, had refused to put forward any of the proposed models to the Synod at this stage, and was not against the continuation of the status quo. The Synod requested the Board to set up a working party and to produce firm proposals which would resolve current problems and provide for quinquennial review of mission and finance within each congregation

Pensions

The Pensions Fund of the Church was no different from many other pension funds, and on an unadjusted basis showed a shortfall of £3.5 million. Reluctantly it was agreed that from January 1 2004 the contributions rate should be increased to 25.3 per cent of standard stipend and pensionable salary. The scheme would continue to be non-contributory by the clergy.

In previous years suggestions had been made that clergy be offered interest-free loans to enable them to buy a house for occupation on their retirement. The Administration Board had considered the idea, but it did not feel that it was an appropriate scheme to set up since it was not a benefit which was available to members of a congregation.

Clergy Marriage Breakdown

The need for pastoral care in such breakdowns was emphasised; some financial assistance could well be offered to reduce consequent hardship, but it should be on a short-term basis and compatible with the Church's limited resources. Two resolutions were passed, the first welcoming the proposal for the establishment of Provincial Financial Assistance Grants to help in such cases; the other, welcoming the proposal for the establishment of Provincial Housing Loans to assist in similar cases.

Clergy Stipend

In 2000 the Synod had decided to aim at achieving parity with the Church of England National Stipend benchmark by 2005, and to this end had increased the stipend for 2003 by 4.2 per cent. The Church of England had increased the benchmark stipend by 5 per cent in real terms, and this required the Synod to reconsider how its policy of 'catching-up' was to be achieved. Longer-term financial planning was clearly needed, and a change in the budgetary process.

Accounts

The Accounts for 2003 and the Budget for 2004 were approved, and quota was fixed at £490,225. Although the Budget was the last item on the Agenda, it did not reflect the financial implications of changes made at the current year's Synod, and this was considered unsatisfactory.

Procedures

Without specific reference to last year's Synod, the Edinburgh Diocese moved that the Synod make it mandatory on all authors of Green Papers or of other papers intended for discussion in General Synod or Diocesan Synods, where such papers exceeded 2,500 words in length, to include a single page summary sheet along with these original documents. This was happily passed.

As always, the Synod dealt with internal housekeeping and regulation very adequately, but wider issues such as the report on relations with people of other faiths were scarcely discussed. With provision already made for the ordination of female priests, the extension of the principle to bishops was not treated as a major issue, and falling church membership was not mentioned. The Primus in his opening address had accepted that differing interpretation of the Gospels could create polarisation and had urged that church members should listen to one another's views in an atmosphere where further discussion could continue, and in this respect had instanced the subject of human sexuality. As a result, these important aspects of church life did not come before the Synod, perhaps justifying the comment that for many in the pew religion was more a matter of habit than of conviction. The agenda, however, was dealt with, and it remains to be seen if the new Bishop of Argyll, to be elected next year, is female.

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

MICHAEL DAVEY

The main feature of this year's Synod was the crushing weight of the legislative programme. There were no fewer than seventeen Bills to be dealt with and the opening day was insufficient to achieve the first reading of all of these. There does not seem to have been a heavier programme, certainly since 1926 or, perhaps, even 1878, both years, like this year, in which new Prayer Books were finalised.

Most of the Bills related to the new Prayer Book. All the liturgical Bills received the necessary majorities, though some were amended. There were Bills to alter the wording of certain texts to follow the English Language