

GENERAL SYNOD 2014

BILL NO 1

Proposed by Dean Nigel Dunne, Dean of Cork

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

TO PROVIDE FOR INTERCHANGEABILITY OF MINISTRY BETWEEN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND AND THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND

As we come to consider this most important Bill, I am almost tempted to say nothing other than to refer you to the reception of Motion 20 at last year's General Synod. The warmth of the reaction to that motion, alongside a vote with all in favour and one abstention, and the memory of the tears of emotion in the Methodist President's eyes, should almost be enough for us to proceed.

Mindful however that there has been over the last year some discussion of key elements of the proposals welcomed in 2013, it is important to clarify a few aspects of this Bill which I think may have been misunderstood.

1. This is not a 'merger' into full organic unity (the ultimate goal of the Covenant). It rather a crucial step on the way to that unity. Whilst full interchangeability will be permitted, both churches will continue to operate their own polities - in other words their own systems of government, organisation and ministry.
2. The threefold order of bishop, priest, and deacon remain fundamental to the ordained ministry of the Church of Ireland - if they didn't, I, of all people, would not be proposing this Bill!

3. A key word in understanding what this Bill seeks to do is ‘consonance’. Consonance can be described as ‘agreement or compatibility between opinions or actions’ and therefore is a good word in describing how the Church of Ireland has been able to move towards what in more traditional ecumenical language might have been called ‘recognition’ of both threefold orders in the Methodist Church in Ireland and the existence of personal, collegial and communal *episcopate* in the Methodist President and the Methodist Conference.

4. A key phrase in understanding what this Bill proposes is that of ‘Episcopal Minister’. The inclusion of this term in the Prayer of Consecration of a President by the Methodist Church in Ireland has been most helpful in making explicit what has always been the implicit intention of that prayer in conjunction with the laying-on of hands.

5. A key phrase in our common understanding of *episcopate* is that of the office and function of a bishop. This Bill proposes that there is sufficient consonance between that of a Church of Ireland bishop and that of the Methodist President. Just as a retired bishop largely ceases to exercise his or her function upon retirement, a Methodist President largely does the same after his or her year in office. However, just as Church of Ireland bishops may exercise some of their functions in retirement, for example, Confirming during a vacancy in a See, so too a past Methodist President may exercise some of their ‘presidential’ functions after their year in full ‘office’. In other words the office of bishops and presidents is for life, the function can vary.

6. Those who may hold a more traditional ‘pipeline’ view of episcopacy and *episcopate* ought to be greatly reassured by the involvement of at least two of our bishops in all future Installations and Consecrations of Methodist Presidents, just as Methodists who may fear that this is in some way a ‘re-absorption’ back into Anglicanism ought to take reassurance from the involvement of the President in Church of Ireland ordinations. The ‘period of anomaly’ may be difficult for some to live with, but live with it we should, in the interest of the greater good, in this case the mission of the church on this island.

7. The explanatory memorandum to this Bill highlights the fact that neither the Church of Ireland nor the Methodist Church in Ireland have done a 'solo run' on the development of this approach to interchangeability. Both traditions have kept in touch with AMICUM (the Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission) and the Church of Ireland, through the Covenant Council and indirect contacts with the likes of myself, have kept IASCUFO (the Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Unity Faith and Order) up to date on our journey to this point. In fact the latter has given a strong endorsement of this proposal, not least in a communication to the Archbishop of Armagh following their last meeting in Jamaica last December. Therefore, whilst this initiative is a local arrangement, confined to this island, it has received significant international attention and endorsement, and I would suggest, may well bring new life to the international scene.

7. Finally, and most importantly, this Bill has come at the end of many years of dialogue, with substantial endorsement of each stage of the discussions on interchangeability by the General Synod at each crucial juncture. At this stage, what stands before you today is the culmination of that process of endorsement, now ready for final and historic endorsement. It is time now to put into action what we have already substantially agreed, mindful always that this initiative is not for ourselves, not for the Church of Ireland, but for the good of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which we are called to serve and to proclaim.