

## **GENERAL SYNOD 2014**

### **REPORT OF COMMISSION ON EPISCOPAL MINISTRY AND STRUCTURES**

**Proposed by Mrs Ethne Harkness, Diocese of Armagh**

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Archbishop, the Report of the Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures is found at pages 383-400 of the Book of Reports, along with the Preface on page 361 - that is, the joint statement which we share with the Council for Mission and the Commission on Ministry.

The Commission has already featured on the Agenda of this Synod, through consideration of the Bill to extend the lifespan of the Commission for another two years. Firstly, I want to comment briefly on that issue.

Last year in Armagh there was also substantial time allocated to the remit of this Commission. In our work over the past year, we have often referred to those break-out sessions. That consultation was so important not only because of the information and insights gained from Synod members, not only because we learnt the value of listening and genuine consultation, but also because it encouraged us in our conviction that episcopal ministry matters, that episcopal leadership matters, and that structures to support that ministry of leadership in the mission of the church have to be carefully built up and then sustained. That is why the job given to this Commission is worth doing well.

In doing the job to the best of our ability, we have developed our paper on *Vision and Principles* which is attached as Appendix B to the Report (page 397). The principles set out there are the foundation for detailed, specific proposals. Working through that paper, with that vision ahead of us and constantly testing suggestions against those principles, will make sure that we keep our focus on the mission of the church. In the words of the Preface, it will help us play our part in ensuring that episcopal ministry is contemporary,

flexible and effective in the mission of the church. We invite members of Synod to comment on the *Vision and Principles*, if not today, then in writing or by email later.

Of course we know people want results – results in the form of detailed proposals on the various specific aspects of episcopal ministry and structures listed in our terms of reference. So do we. We are working towards a solid, evidence-based, sustainable and affordable package of recommendations, true to the theology and ecclesiology of the Church of Ireland and fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Report shows how we have progressed, more so in some areas than in others, and in general terms more in relation to ministry than structures. For example, our work on the role and models of episcopacy and arrangements for training, development and ministerial review is substantially complete. Also nearing completion is our work on appointment processes. We want to consult further on those issues, to learn from people, lay and ordained, engaged in the work of the church in all our different communities, in order to test the acceptability of all the recommendations brought forward. Then on to structural issues, including the vexed question of diocesan boundaries, but with the assurance that our conclusions on ministry issues are well-founded. The overall, comprehensive set of proposals must be coherent and robust enough to stand up to scrutiny.

With the help and confidence of the General Synod, the members of the Commission will renew our commitment and efforts to bring proposals on Episcopal Ministry and Structures that will deserve support across the Church of Ireland.

Archbishop, I propose the Report of the Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures.