

GENERAL SYNOD 2014

MOTION 2 – ALCOHOL AND TAXATION

Proposed by Mr David Wilson, Diocese of Derry

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Archbishops, Bishops, members of Synod,

I was recently at my local Accident and Emergency on a Saturday evening, for the first time in many years that I've had the misfortune to be there, and Synod I was shocked. Shocked at the consequences of alcohol intoxication. Shocked at the sheer numbers of those suffering from the effects of alcohol intoxication, and shocked at the abuse which staff had to deal with from those who were undeniably intoxicated. When I talked to the A & E staff that night they told me that it was always busy on a Saturday night but now since the supermarkets have started selling cheap alcohol in their off-licences they are busy every night. Also they are seeing more serious health problems due to alcohol abuse.

Alcohol abuse is rife throughout our small island, and I draw your attention to the Irish Health report of February 2012, which stated that the average Irish person drank 11.9 litres of pure alcohol per year this includes around 20% of population that abstained from alcohol. Synod to put this into perspective, this is equivalent to four hundred and eighty-two pints of average strength lager, thirty, 1litre bottles of forty percent spirits or sixty eight bottles of the communion wine we use at Bovevagh!

Now if one was out at a public house, buying this volume of alcohol, say vodka(37.5% vol.) it would roughly cost two thousand, two hundred and ninety pounds over the year (working on the cost of two pounds fifty for a thirty five millilitre measure which is equivalent to 1.3 units) however with the low cost of alcohol available in off-licence where one may purchase a one litre of spirits costing approximately fifteen pounds. This would cost less than four hundred and eighty pounds over the year (21% of

public house price). This is a huge difference, and this low price combined with the ready availability of alcohol sold in off-licences mean that drinking is no longer a social occasion at a public house, but in some cases it has become a solitude affair at home. In fact, the Northern Ireland Executive report on adult drinking patterns showed that 60% of those who drank, drank at home, with 20% drinking at other people's homes and 20% drinking in pubs or clubs.

The cost of alcohol in real terms is now 1/3 (current off-licence price) of what it was in the 1980's, (public house price). As I have alluded to before, people on their night out are getting drunk before leaving their houses, and this is fuelled by the cheap, readily available off-licence sold alcohol.

Synod I am extremely worried. This irresponsible nature of alcohol use is costing in Northern Ireland according to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the equivalent of £900 million per year. The second report of the strategic task force on alcohol reported that alcohol related problems cost Irish society in 2003 in excess of two billion six hundred and fifty million euro, a colossal amount.

The publication of the Slan (Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition in Ireland) published in 2009, stated that Ireland will see a sharp increase in the numbers of people dying from alcohol-related illness in the next 20 years. This will put a huge strain on the economy, health and outlook of this island.

Synod, Governments must act. It has been campaigned for by the British Medical Association and Scottish Devolved Government that there should be a minimum unit price for alcohol, and whilst this is an interesting idea, and one which research by Durham University has shown will decrease alcohol use levels, in my opinion this also increases the alcohol trades profit.

Synod I believe by placing a TAX per unit of alcohol acquired in off licences, we will both decrease alcohol use and increase revenue for our respective health services, but this is not about raising extra money for our health services. This is to protect our society.

Members of synod I am sure you will agree that it is imperative that we educate those around us with regards to the dangers and consequences of harmful drinking. However with increasing amounts being drunk at home possibly in front of young children, this could influence their future alcohol drinking habits and this needs addressed at every level of Irish society.

I am not so naive as to believe this tax would not have a downside and understand that if this off licence tax came into effect it could make the smuggling of alcohol more attractive. To counteract this, the customs, police and judiciary need more powers to deal with illegal smuggling and this is something which is required regardless of any added tax or not.

Synod as Christians it is our duty to protect the weak and vulnerable, and live by example to others, and I humbly ask your support for this motion.