

GENERAL SYNOD 2014

THE REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SEXUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Proposed by Dean John Mann, Diocese of Connor

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace; members of General Synod; my brothers and sisters in Christ; I would very much like to help you see beyond the bare words of what is only an interim report of the Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the context of Christian Belief, by giving you some idea as to how we are approaching, what most people consider to be the difficult task, of, encouraging constructive discussion and informed views on all areas of human sexuality, as considered from a specifically Christian perspective.

The subject matter itself is large enough, without the additional complication of needing to become familiar with the variety of views sincerely held on this subject, and which have resulted in the voicing of points of disagreement, or even dispute, in a way that can damage Christian unity. But even that important spur to action, is not the primary area of concern for the work of this Select Committee. We are conscious that all that we are talking about affects individuals; chiefly those within the LGBT community, but also every other person that is consciously, or sub-consciously, seeking to relate, within the fellowship of the Church, to those of a different sexual orientation to themselves – or who may, in fact, be struggling to understand their own attractions, or lack of them, within ordinary daily life and the normal joys and sorrows of their practical Christian discipleship.

Our first task, as members of this committee, was to enter this debate with an openness to receive and a willingness to give. That involved, and continues to involve, the exposure of each of us to one another. To achieve such vulnerability takes time and the building of trust. This I report to you has been extraordinarily successful. You have a Select Committee that is united in its purpose. Gradually we have been able to approach others, from whom we need to learn: biblical scholars, members of Changing Attitude Ireland; and in time other theologians and representatives of groups, not yet consulted, will be approached. Of course, we do not agree over everything. But our common concerns remain: to seek to produce, first of all, for initial consideration by Standing Committee, a working document for members of General Synod, which can then be disseminated to parishioners throughout the Church of Ireland, and will seek to address the need for a straightforward guide to the debate.

This is not as easy a task as it may at first sight be seen to be, for we perceive that it needs to cover, fairly and squarely, as many aspects as possible in an attractive, readable and simple form, so as to encourage substantive engagement with the issues, even by those who have made up their minds already, or alternatively, want to walk away from a debate that they do not feel is their concern. It should, we feel, prompt prayerful and careful thought, and not lead its readers onto a prejudged path. To achieve unanimity over such a document, the first part of which we are working upon at the moment, is our hope by the autumn of this year.

Whilst the Select Committee is clear that its remit is to include other aspects of human sexuality, than those which divide the church, it is also conscious of its timeframe, and the need to respond to the very understandably insistent voices that may view its progress as painfully slow. For this reason, these other aspects, such as those indicated in the printed report, will be examined later.