

The Report of the Commission on Ministry has been presented to General Synod this afternoon (Friday May 13).

Proposing the report, the Ven Leslie Stevenson (Meath and Kildare) highlighted the section on *Self Supporting Ministry*. He outlined the origins of *Self-Supporting Ministry* which he said went back to various conversations about how to provide pastoral and sacramental ministry to small communities in rural Ireland. This was against the background of parishes struggling to raise assessments to pay stipendiary clergy he said. He added that another factor was the drying up of those willing to serve in non-stipendiary ministry as they once had because of an unintended consequence of a training scheme that set the barrier for ordination very high both in terms of length of time involved and academic attainment.

Archdeacon Stevenson said that without a cohort of non-stipendiary clergy it seemed that there would be more and more amalgamations, church closures and people becoming unchurched as a consequence. It was felt that there should be a better way. Research took place North and South and the Archdeacon said the commission looked to other parts of the Anglican Communion and they turned to the Church of England's efforts on ordained local ministry. Following Synod 2014 a working group was established with representatives from the commission, the bishops and the CITI which resulted in the *Self Supporting Ministry*.

"It is, and must be emphasised, an expression of priestly ministry in accordance with catholic order and would be recognised by other churches which are one, holy, catholic and apostolic. It is consonant with the Preamble and Declaration of 1870. A priest is still a priest but that can be expressed in different ways," the Archdeacon said. Providing the details he said self-supporting ministry would be in addition and another pathway to ordination. Its qualification would be at NFQ 8 level and would be strictly exercised within the diocese in which the person was ordained. Any transference to stipendiary ministry would be exceptional and only could be done by a rigorous selection conference and a further extensive course of study and assessment. The course would be the Graduate Certificate in Ministry through the University of Durham and would be non-residential. It would be delivered centrally and locally. There are two modes proposed.

"The Commission believes this is an exciting expression of priesthood that is needed to serve today's church. A ministry that would enable communities in both rural and inner city areas to be vibrant and to reach outwards in service and mission," he concluded. The report was seconded by the Archdeacon of Armagh, the Ven Terry Scott, who spoke of a three day gathering of clergy on sustaining vocation. He outlined a scoping study which was taking place into the establishment of a centre of retreat which would support efforts to sustain ministry. He also endorsed the efforts on Self Supporting Ministry. He said the proposals on Ordained Local Ministry offered an exciting and viable ministry and urged that they be embraced with enthusiasm and courage. Points raised during the debate on the report include:

- Religious communities and initiatives were highlighted.
- An imaginative approach to rural ministry was encouraged.
- There was an update on pioneer ministry – people connecting with people with little or no church background.
- Self Supporting Ministry was deemed a step forward.
- A scheme in the 1980s was recalled in which clergy from the Diocese of Dublin visited vacant parishes in Kilmore for a weekend to provide both pastoral care and take services.
- Concern was expressed about creating a two-tier ministry.
- Concern was expressed about how part time clergy were treated.
- There was support for the establishment of a retreat house.

- The question of whether people involved or employed in other aspects of parish or church work also go forward for self supporting ministry was raised.

Responding to the discussion, Archdeacon Stevenson said that people in the employ of the church could go for selection.

The report of the Commission on Ministry was received by Synod.

A motion commending the proposals in the report was passed by Synod.