

In Armagh last year the General Synod approved in principle this a Service of Holy Communion by Extension for Persons Unable to be present at the Public Celebration. This Bill is the next part of the process of legislating for that service within the Church of Ireland.

The Service has been in use with permission from the House of Bishops in what essentially is experimental form, for over a decade. During that time, the LAC analysed its use and we discovered that there are certain parts of the Church of Ireland where this service meets a real pastoral need.

This material provides a means by which those unable to be present can receive the sacrament – which of course can happen through a home celebration – but there are two important things this service offers that home celebration does not. The first is that it affords a direct connection between the person or persons receiving Communion and the gathered people of God who have met around the table in Church. I can attest to this in my own pastoral ministry – the context where I minister is not one where I have scores of Home Communion, but I know that those to whom I do bring Communion by extension appreciate the fact that the elements have come from a celebration in the Parish Church. It should be noted that the expectation is that there will be a direct administration of such Communion – whenever elements are kept from the main celebration for use with this service it should be for a specific use.

The second added bonus is that this service is designed to be used not only by priests, by also by deacons and lay people. The manner of that ministry will look different from parish to parish and diocese to diocese, but it may well be a ministry of affirmation and enrichment for both the recipient and the woman or man who administers.

As well as recognising this service for what it is and what it offers, it is also important to note what it is not. If I may quote from our chairman's speech last year in presenting this bill as a motion in its first stage, this is not 'some kind of underhand way to introduce reservation of the blessed sacrament, and the rubric at the end of the liturgy makes it clear that the remaining bread and wine are to be consumed'.

This is a practical service that allows more opportunity for more people to feel more engaged with the body of Christ, which is the Church, through the Eucharist. It also allows for the empowerment in ministry of laity and deacons in a way not previously available. I have great pleasure in presenting it to this Synod, and I propose that the Bill be given a second reading.