

### **Bill No.3**

#### **Proposer: The Very Revd Alistair Grimason**

The conversations between TKA and Limerick and Killaloe have reached a significant point. We now come before General Synod to seek the approval of this House to enact a Bill which will allow for the creation of a new diocese.

It was our intention to have this Bill moved and seconded by two members of the laity of our respective dioceses. For personal reasons, Professor Paul Johnston (a member of TKA Diocesan Synod and a parishioner of mine) is not able to propose this Bill so I have been called upon to step into the breach. None the less, I know that Paul wholeheartedly endorses what we are seeking to do.

This Bill and its intricate detail is largely the work of Mrs Ethne Harkness and the purpose of this Bill is well set out in the excellent explanatory memorandum on page 27 of the Bills bundle. And I thank whoever is responsible for the clarity and simplicity of this memorandum.

In broad brush strokes, The Bill seeks to amalgamate the current Dioceses commonly known as Tuam and Limerick into one New United Diocese which will be known as Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe ... TLK in shorthand.

I'm sorry now that none of us had the foresight to make a documentary film about the process in a similar vein as 'Brexit Behind Closed Doors'. But if we had, members of Synod would have witnessed a series of meetings, over a number of years, of a steering group made up of representatives of both diocesan synods, talking, discussing, debating, swapping ideas in a spirit of co-operation and respect and unity of purpose. I doubt whether our film documentary would have made for compelling viewing though because, unlike the Brexit film, there was no rancour, no point scoring and no bitterness. We recognised the simple good sense of what we were about and got on with the job. The fruits of which are before you today.

That said, this has not been an easy task. We need to recognise and thank all those who have worked hard to get us to this point. All the members of the steering group; the sub-committees which looked at how best to deal with the administrative detail post-amalgamation; those who worked on reconciling the two sets of diocesan regulations; Mrs Ethne Harkness who helped us through the legal aspects of the Bill proper; our two bishops who have encouraged us at every step; and not least the members of our two diocesan synods who gave and continue to give us permission to explore the possibilities and bring this Bill to General Synod.

Specifically in relation to TKA, two items need to be noted.

Firstly, it is with a heavy heart that we mark the fact that if and when the New Diocese comes into effect, The Parish of Ballisodare will move from TKA to Kilmore Diocese. We understand and respect the wishes of Ballisodare in this matter. Considering the geography which will come into play, their decision is understandable.

We also note the provision that when the change happens, TKA will move from the Province of Armagh to the Province of Dublin which, as the Constitution requires, has been agreed to by the two Archbishops.

Among the many things that we considered throughout this process is the matter of geography and identity. It's a long way from the but-end of Kerry to South Sligo. A huge track of land for one bishop to cover. Similarly, in a purely territorial sense, Tuam will not have a resident bishop post-amalgamation. This caused concern that Tuam might lose its feeling of distinctive identity. However, both of these anxieties have been overcome by the undertaking of the RCB to provide accommodation and meeting facilities in the north end of Tuam diocese for the bishop of TLK. This will match accommodation Limerick currently has in Tralee for the use of the Bishop in the southern end of the new United Diocese.

The anxiety was further assuaged by the undertaking of the RCB to have these facilities in place ahead of the actual and corporeal amalgamation so that there will be no long-fingering of this provision. Rather it shows a concrete goodwill and commitment of central church to support the

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efforts of Tuam and Limerick, echoing the goodwill and commitment of the dioceses themselves. It is important to note this and to take it seriously because, should this Bill be passed by General Synod it must go for final ratification to the Diocesan Synod of Limerick in a matter of weeks and to the diocesan Synod of Tuam at the end of September. Reticence on the part of central church on this matter might make those diocesan synods a tad complicated.

As things stand, co-operation between the dioceses has already started and is bearing happy fruit. We trust that the House will pass this Bill and allow us to take it to the next stage.