

Motion No.10

General Synod Representation Report

Proposer: Mr Ken Gibson

To remind Synod of the background to this I want to give a summary of the 2018 bill and the various amendments and will point out how they helped Standing Committee evolve its thinking. I will then comment on how Standing Committee went about the task synod set it and then say something about the criteria or parameters that emerged leading to the conclusions that are before you. I also remind synod that all our speeches and discussion focus on the House of Representatives - the clergy and lay members of synod.

You may recall that in 2018 synod gave the Bill a first and second reading - i.e. agreed to the bill being introduced and indicating that it wanted to consider change. Given the range, complexity and importance of the issue, synod then passed it to Standing Committee - you will see the wording on page 245.

The Bill proposed a model that linked membership to the number of cures in the church. The bill proposed a synod of 530 as opposed to 648 at present.

A benefit of the model is that it is easily understood and the bill indicated how it could be regularly reviewed.

The first amendment added a baseline of 6 places per diocese plus one place per cure accepting the need to help the smaller dioceses to have a voice stronger than only cures would give. As you will see, the evolution of this concept played a key role in Standing Committee developing the proposals before you.

Moving through the rest of the amendments.

One suggested one place for every 5 beneficed and licenced clergy adding to a House of Representatives of 360 - **but** it then proposed giving each diocese exactly the same number - 12 clergy and 24 lay per diocese.

Is that what we want? Standing Committee believes **some** proportionality is fairer.

Two amendments were similar - one advocated a 30% reduction across the board with a synod of 456 and the other 40% with a synod of 390.

Their simplicity initially made them look attractive but on closer analysis Standing Committee pondered further on the need to ensure that the smaller dioceses maintained a strong voice - some proportionality was needed.

Another amendment advocated ring fencing places for deans and archdeacons with a further 10 clergy places per diocese, all balanced by 2 lay per cleric giving a synod of just over 500.

This raised 3 issues. Firstly the fact that for historic reasons a number of dioceses have multiple deans whereas others only have one. Two large dioceses have 2 and 3 archdeacons respectively given the number of parishes. Finally this proposal contains no proportionality.

Furthermore this would change our long held view that no group should receive special treatment, in fact something synod rejected not that many years ago.

Another amendment advocated a synod based on geographic boundaries and resulted in synod of under 100. Standing Committee agreed that this would have serious implications for the voice of all dioceses, would slow down turnover thereby upsetting the balance of new blood and experience.

Finally an amendment that did create considerable thinking by Standing Committee - 1 rep for every 2 cures **plus** 1 rep for every 3 licenced clergy engaged in non parochial ministry. This model would have reduced synod well below 300 and the inclusion of ministries other than cures was interesting.

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Standing Committee ultimately recognised that this was an evolving area given the advent of OLM and lay leadership and while clerical hospital and college chaplains are easily quantified, it does not believe we are yet in a position to bring into the equation these other ministries many of which had or may have equal validity in the future.

I now want to update you on how Standing Committee went about the task.

As required by synod, Standing Committee wanted to have full ownership of the debate, the working out of any proposals and the presentation of a report to this synod. It recognised however that considerable fact finding, analysis and “number crunching” would be required. It decided to bring together a working group of one member of Standing Committee per diocese thereby allowing all to have a say. Standing Committee also asked 2 of its Honorary Secretaries - Canon Wharton and myself to facilitate the group. I want to thank that gang of 12 for their commitment, diligence, openness and enthusiasm to the task.

Standing Committee debated the whole issue of representation at each of its meetings during the year, and, as you will have read, devoted a full day to the topic at a special meeting last November. It finalised its thinking at its March meeting and the Honorary Secretaries finalised the paper in your book. I emphasise that this report and resolutions comes from Standing Committee and not from the “number crunchers”.

I would however like to make a few comments on how the 12 plus 2 got on - both together and with our work.

It is not often that a smallish group of disparate people representing different parts of our church working in very different contexts and cultures have the opportunity to share their thoughts, concerns and issues over quite a prolonged period - we met half a dozen times for most of a day each time and exchanged many many papers, emails and phone calls

Gillian and I conclude, and I think others would agree, that:-

- there was respectful listening;
- there was an increased understanding of each other’s context and culture (e.g. ministering in rural Ireland where the CoI population was small but where civic society was keen it played its part compared to the highly populous northern dioceses greatly affected by the Troubles etc.)
- bringing such a disparate group together was a very positive experience;
- there was shared learning and differences were respectfully shared and understood; and
- perhaps some perception/stereotypes were broken down.

A couple of things both the “number crunchers” and indeed Standing Committee were aware of were:-

- the need to avoid inadvertent consequences of any change - making sure what addressed one issue did not create an issue elsewhere;
- a need to remember that we are at synod to formulate what is best for our church as a whole and not, like in other secular elected contexts, to “fight the corner” and
- the importance of any change following a simple model that can be easily adapted over time.

We also had the benefit of 2 papers produced by members of the working group which looked at the some of the “theology” around synods. This work was helpful in that it reminded us that:-

- the church is firmly part of God’s good creation, an assembly of people who love and support one another through all the joys and difficulties;

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- with the right attitude, disagreement is perfectly agreeable and fundamentally healthy;
- synod is a decision making process which facilitates the life of the church and helps sustain the unity of the church;
- representative government is fundamental to church polity and in matters which touch all, all should have a voice;
- the need for consideration of a theology of the marginal or of fragility;
- the rural/small/isolated/weak church often plays a pivotal part in its community with an influence and importance much greater than the size of its congregation. There is a need to avoid these voices being squeezed out of church life; and
- to be fair to all means ensuring that the full range of diversity is represented;

Taking all of this on board - the bill, the proposed amendments, the careful discussion and the sharing of contexts and cultures, the need to get an agreed way forward, Standing Committee believes these proposals represent a pragmatic way measured against a number of key principles. These are listed on page 246 of your Book of Reports and I summarise as follows:-

- the voice of the marginal, weak, remote, minority must be able to be heard, this would be impossible if numbers of cures were the only determinant;
- a desire to maintain our long standing policy of fair nomination and election of all and not introduce any form of “ring fencing”;
- set the future size of our general synod to be manageable, encourages debate and participation and allows the regular turnover of members - by this we mean that if we go too small, the harder it becomes for new members to get in. Whilst not the driving factor, cost and the availability of suitable venues is also an issue;
- the model must be easily understood and allow for regular review;
- the evolution of new ministries to sit alongside cures is still in its early stages but will need to be considered in the relatively near future. Canon Wharton will say a bit more about this;
- the critical need to be alert to, sympathetic and generous towards the discussions between Tuam, Killala and Achonry and Limerick and Killaloe. Those discussions will not come to a conclusion until after their diocesan synods this June and September respectively; and
- there must be sensitivity towards places where historic changes mean larger representation than the current scale would suggest - hence Standing Committee wants changes phased.

These factors, particularly the latter two, mean that this year Standing Committee is, as requested, bring forward its report and describing the legislative proposals it is minded to table as a bill in 2020.

Archbishop, in line with what Standing Committee was asked to do in 2018, I propose that the General Synod welcome and adopt the report of the Standing Committee on Synodical Representation and endorses the principles contained therein and look forward to the presentation of a bill at General Synod 2020.