

GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND 1996

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There was particular interest at the Synod this year in the first of the Bills appearing on the agenda which provided for the regulation of marriage discipline in the Church of Ireland. This Bill was presented under the Special Bill procedure which is required when there is any question of change 'in the articles, documents, rites, rubrics or formularies of the Church. . . .'. Such a Bill requires a two-thirds majority. These majorities were achieved without difficulty.

The Bill commences with an affirmation of adherence to our Lord's teaching that marriage is in its purpose a union permanent and lifelong, for better or worse, till death do them part, of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side. It goes on to set out the procedure to be followed by any clergyman approached with a view to solemnizing a marriage between parties either of whom had been a party to a ceremony of marriage with another person still living.

Such a clergyman is to seek from the Bishop an opinion as to the advisability of solemnizing the marriage. The proposals lay a duty on the clergyman to provide all information which the Bishop may require and to take the Bishop's opinion into account in exercising the discretion, vested in the clergyman by law, as to whether or not to solemnize the marriage concerned. The Bishop, in communicating the opinion to the clergyman is to declare, in cases where a decree of nullity has been granted on grounds acceptable to the Church of Ireland, that the applicant is, *ipso facto*, free to marry in church. In other cases the Bishop is to prescribe that the clergyman conduct a private service of preparation for remarriage with the parties involved. An amendment to give the Bishop a discretion in the matter of the service was defeated. The form of service was presented by way of regulation for consideration after the Bill and was duly approved. The date of 1st September 1996 was fixed for the adoption of the new procedures.

A further Special Bill, to remove a discrepancy between the two Prayer Books having the authority of the General Synod [the Book of Common Prayer (1926) and the Alternative Prayer Book (1984)] was also passed. The Bill enables those who follow the Alternative Prayer Books Rules to observe St Stephen, St John the Evangelist, Holy Innocents and the Naming of Jesus on the Sunday after Christmas should they deem this to be appropriate and instructive for the congregation. The Bill did not make this course of action mandatory; the option of transference is retained.

There were two further Bills. The first provides an amended framework for the management of property by the Diocesan Glebes Committees and the Representative Church Body. It does not involve any radical change.

The second of these Bills dealt with some technicalities of pensions. It relates only to contributors to the Church of Ireland Voluntary Contributions Scheme who are resident in Northern Ireland. It incorporates amendments to the rules as required by the Pension Schemes Office, an Executive Office of the Inland Revenue of the United Kingdom.

In last year's report reference was made to the adjournment of the debate on a Resolution arising out of a report from the Select Committee on the Communion of the Baptised but Unconfirmed. The Resolution had sought leave to introduce a Bill to repeal the final rubric in the Order for Confirmation. On the resumption of debate the proposers of the Resolution sought leave to withdraw it. Such leave was granted. A new committee to present a report in 1998 was appointed.