

Accounts

The Accounts for 2003 and the Budget for 2004 were approved, and quota was fixed at £490,225. Although the Budget was the last item on the Agenda, it did not reflect the financial implications of changes made at the current year's Synod, and this was considered unsatisfactory.

Procedures

Without specific reference to last year's Synod, the Edinburgh Diocese moved that the Synod make it mandatory on all authors of Green Papers or of other papers intended for discussion in General Synod or Diocesan Synods, where such papers exceeded 2,500 words in length, to include a single page summary sheet along with these original documents. This was happily passed.

As always, the Synod dealt with internal housekeeping and regulation very adequately, but wider issues such as the report on relations with people of other faiths were scarcely discussed. With provision already made for the ordination of female priests, the extension of the principle to bishops was not treated as a major issue, and falling church membership was not mentioned. The Primus in his opening address had accepted that differing interpretation of the Gospels could create polarisation and had urged that church members should listen to one another's views in an atmosphere where further discussion could continue, and in this respect had instanced the subject of human sexuality. As a result, these important aspects of church life did not come before the Synod, perhaps justifying the comment that for many in the pew religion was more a matter of habit than of conviction. The agenda, however, was dealt with, and it remains to be seen if the new Bishop of Argyll, to be elected next year, is female.

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

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The main feature of this year's Synod was the crushing weight of the legislative programme. There were no fewer than seventeen Bills to be dealt with and the opening day was insufficient to achieve the first reading of all of these. There does not seem to have been a heavier programme, certainly since 1926 or, perhaps, even 1878, both years, like this year, in which new Prayer Books were finalised.

Most of the Bills related to the new Prayer Book. All the liturgical Bills received the necessary majorities, though some were amended. There were Bills to alter the wording of certain texts to follow the English Language

Liturgical Consultation; authority was given for Holy Baptism in the context of Morning or Evening Prayer; for various prayers and thanksgivings; for a form of Daily Prayer; for a new form of ministry to those who are sick; to provide for a Penitential Service; to authorise a new Ordinal; to provide for general directions for public worship; to include a new preface; and to correct a number of inaccuracies and to remove infelicities of diction.

There were also Bills to provide for the use of The Psalter from *Common Worship*. This faced a spirited rearguard action to include with it the Coverdale-amended version currently used in the 1926 *Book of Common Prayer for the Church of Ireland*. This amendment was, however, defeated, perhaps due to the realisation on the part of members of Synod that the inclusion of two Psalters would add some 200 pages and significant weight to the final book. There was also a successful Bill to provide for a traditional form of Order for Confirmation. The only amendment proposed to this related to the final Rubric, which, in its existing (1926 and 1878) version, reads, 'every person ought to present himself for Confirmation (unless prevented by some urgent reason) before he partakes of the Lord's Supper'. The proposed amendment was that this should be altered, not by substituting for it some new, more liberal direction, such as had been rejected by the Synod in 2001, but by reverting to the older 1662 Rubric which reads, 'and there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed or be ready and desirous to be confirmed'. This amendment was passed and the Bill subsequently received the necessary two-thirds majority at its third reading. Perhaps the lengthiest debates were reserved for the ELLC texts, with particular energy being expended on the discussion of whether, in the Lords Prayer, the plea should be to 'save us from the time of trial' or to 'lead us not into temptation'. In the end, the Synod enthusiastically endorsed the request of one speaker to 'give him temptation every time'.

The final Bill dealing with liturgy, duly passed, was to bring the new book into operation on 6 June 2004. Thus ends for the moment the huge task of liturgical revision which has been going on for some years. The process will not, of course, cease but there is the prospect of a number of sessions of the Synod without any liturgical material before it. Members were heard to wonder what they will have to discuss. Experience would suggest that something will turn up.

There were Bills to amend the Canons by the use of inclusive language and to consolidate the Constitution. There was also a Bill to provide for the establishment of a Severance Fund for Clergy in cases involving mediation between incumbents, parishioners and bishop. There was also an attempt, unsuccessful as it turned out, to enable Boards of Nomination to be held while the current incumbent was still in office. At the third reading of this Bill, a request was made for a vote by orders in which the laity voted in favour of the Bill by approximately three to one, while the clergy voted against it by a clear majority.