

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

Draft Second Reading Speech

Bill No 15

Proposed by Lady Brenda Sheil

Your Grace

The General Synod of 2001 authorised the Legislation Committee to prepare a Bill to consolidate the Constitution of the Church of Ireland.

A consolidation does not permit substantive amendments and accordingly a number of amendments of substance which could not be included in the Consolidation Bill were brought before General Synod last year in what has become Chapter IX of 2002. Those amendments, together with the amendments of Special Bill No 14, for the introduction of which leave was given by General Synod in 2002, are included in the Schedule to this Bill which, if enacted, would constitute the 2003 edition of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland and replace the 1988 edition of the said Constitution.

In the 15 years since the last consolidation of the Constitution there have been many changes and a very considerable volume of legislation has come before General Synod.

While, in the immediate past, much of the statutory change has been effected by liturgical legislation nonetheless over the past 15 years there have been substantive amendments of the Constitution – especially in the field of clergy pensions. Perhaps the single most significant change, however, has been that effected in 1990 when provision was made to permit the ordination of women to the diaconate and to the priesthood. It is appropriate, therefore, that this consolidation of the Constitution should, as agreed by the Legislation Committee, be drafted in inclusive language.

The process of adopting inclusive language throughout the Constitution has not been easy and has involved much painstaking detailed work. I wish, therefore, to pay tribute to the time consuming work of a small group of people who with me devoted many hours to

this task and without whose dedicated commitment the Bill would not be before Synod today.

Mr Derek Phillips, Clerk to the General Synod, again proved indispensable in the work of consolidation and to him, to Miss Elaine Whitehouse for her linguistic dexterity and to Mr John Buttimore for his wise counsel much credit must be given, but above all our thanks are due to Mrs Claire Burrows of Cork whose clear legal mind proved invaluable in the process of drafting the 2003 Consolidation of the Constitution.

Your Grace, I would remind members of Synod that the Consolidation is just that – a consolidation of what has been enacted before and no more. While last year the opportunity was taken to make several amendments to provisions of various chapters of the Constitution, such as that concerning the minimum and maximum age limit for members of General Synod, the list of amendments was not exhaustive and inevitably there are provisions of the Constitution which still require amendment to a greater or lesser degree. The process of revision will, therefore, continue. However what is before General Synod today is the first consolidation of the Constitution in inclusive language which, it is hoped, will be of practical use to members of General Synod and, indeed to all members of the Church of Ireland.

I beg to move that the Bill be now read a second time.