

Commission On Ministry

Text of speech by David Hannon (Down & Dromore) seconding the adoption of the Report

‘Embargoed until delivery’

Many people and organisations in different walks of life spend a great deal of time in effect contemplating either their individual or their corporate navel. The Church of Ireland is no different in this respect and, as a result, it set up the Commission on Ministry whose tasks are listed in Paragraph 3 of this report. Once a body such as the Commission has been established, many people are inclined to wait for it to come down from its contemplative mountain and announce its conclusions and its recommendations with all the weight and authority of its delegated responsibility.

In the past year, however, the Commission decided to fly in the face of that methodology and, if I may change the metaphor, to try to involve the punters who might be affected by its deliberations. Hence the Summits.

The aim of these gatherings was twofold. Firstly it was intended to make people from all parts of Ireland feel that their views on Ministry were valued. Secondly it was intended to tap into the enormous resources which the variety of practices and challenges faced in different places would represent.

Perhaps the choice of ‘Summit’ to describe the events was inappropriate - in that it may have raised false hopes of the announcement of some earth-shattering ‘Good-Friday-Agreement’- type pronouncements which could be carried back to the many diocesan corners of the country. I spent some time with my Thesaurus and under ‘gathering’ I found words such as ‘assembly’ (dismissed as too Presbyterian) and ‘conclave’ (rejected for other reasons!) – so I tried looking up ‘congregation’ . Even then I found that a suitable synonym suggested was ‘convergence’ – a most unlikely outcome from such a gathering. Perhaps ‘Convention’ might be considered for future use – but only if we want to see the Church of Ireland stride forward into the land of the un-conventional!

The first Summit was perhaps longer than it could have been, although many new friendships and contacts were made. The second gathering in March of this year was much more tightly structured and revealed the extraordinary variety of activity already taking place in our Church - within existing

parameters.

It would be fair to suggest that one thought came clearly from the two events. Ministry is not just the work that goes on behind a clerical collar. Of course, ordination to the priesthood brings authority and, if a layman may say so, fairly carefully guarded rights and privileges. But it became soon abundantly evident that ministry, in its wider perception, brings challenges to everybody in the Church.

Democracy is defined as government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Ministry has much in common with that definition.

- It is a ministry of the people (or perhaps, **to** the people)
- It is ministry by the people – *all the people*
- It is ministry for the people

Importantly, too, we must remember that when we say ‘the people’, we don’t mean just the inward-looking ministry to the members of our own Church, we must remember our out-reaching, caring ministry to all God’s people – including, in particular, those who may not realise just how much God cares for them.

One speaker at the second Summit described the Church of Ireland as a conservative organisation.

From my observation there was ample evidence of a vibrant present and of a strong commitment to take courage and to step forward into an adventurous future.