

Church of Ireland General Synod 2005.

Tuesday 10 May 2005, 12 Noon

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

**The Most Reverend Dr Robin Eames
Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of all Ireland**

Members of the General Synod, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

WELCOME

I welcome you to the last meeting of the Synod for our current triennium as we address the life and work of the Church of Ireland. May Almighty God bless and guide us as we focus on the trust given to us by others.

I also welcome the representatives of other Churches. We receive great encouragement from our engagement with other Churches within the Anglican Communion and I particularly welcome Mr Mark Russell from the Church of England. We also enjoy the friendship and dialogue that we experience with the other denominations in this island of ours and I take the opportunity to welcome from the Presbyterian Church, the Very Rev Dr Russell Birney and Mr Alan Foster, from the Roman Catholic Church, the Rt Rev Mgr Patrick Devine and Sister Catherine Kealy, from our Covenant Partners, the Rev Dr Brian Fletcher, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and Mrs Jill Cosgrove, from the Society of Friends – Rachael Bewley-Bateman, from the Moravian Church – Mr Derick Woods, from the Lutheran Church – Pastor Fritz-Gert Mayer, from the Salvation Army – Major Gordon Fozzard, from the Russian Orthodox Church – the Very Revd Archpriest Michael Gogoleff, from the Irish Assemblies of God – Mr Gary Davidson and from the Irish Council of Churches – Mr Michael Earle.

MORAL DEBATE

Members of Synod this has been a year where moral debate re-emerged as a significant influence in society. In the political sphere the UK election campaign threw up question after question about the values that underpin civil society. In the Republic people are conscientiously examining issues affecting care of the elderly, treatment of asylum seekers and calling on the government to address childcare, education and health issues. In the spring, the stark issues raised by the court battle in America over the right to life of Terri Schiavo were also reflected by several cases where the Courts of the UK had to make decisions on the termination of life. Once more Christians were confronted by questions about the nature of life – and the power of human beings to end it. Those questions were presented as the world was already being confronted by moral questions about the creation of life.

I ask myself, why, should issue after issue turn on the moral question when as a society we sometimes appear to have become desensitized to human or spiritual needs?

*Is it that we are rediscovering the value of the individual? Is it that we are finding a new importance for the value of the person? Is it that we are surrounded by people who are crying out to be treated with respect, who want to re-establish a value system that nurtures **people** as individuals? Above all – what do we as Christians understand about the nature of the great questions facing our generation at present?*

CHILDCARE

For many people, their recent experiences of 'progress' in Irish society is both dehumanising and demeaning. Too many families struggle with the daily commute to jobs in distant cities. Children are dropped with minders as early as six or seven o'clock in the morning and may not be reunited with

parents until twelve hours later. I hear of young mothers whose only waking time with the baby is when the little one wakes crying during the night before a working mother has to stagger back out on the commuter trail at an astonishingly early hour next morning.

I quote a comment from Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mr Seamus Brennan: "*A lot of my colleagues, and that includes the opposition, realised a number of things they hadn't known before these by-election campaigns - finding out that people are getting up at 5.30a.m. dropping the kids off at the creche before work and not getting home again until 7 p.m.*"¹

Members of Synod, these conditions would have struck our Victorian predecessors as totally unacceptable. Nor are they exclusive to the Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland, a similar situation has arisen with the creation of geographically spread development - but sadly, less geographically spread employment. I think the only thing that prevents Northern Ireland being quite so bad is the fact that our traffic still seems to flow with greater ease.

In both jurisdictions, I am glad to say that consultation on this issue has begun. I feel that the answer has to be more than just additional childcare places. *Will family life be improved if children spend 12 hours a day in care?* The problem is symptomatic and reflects the failures in infrastructural planning where families are forced further and further away from economic centres to find affordable housing. I urge government to start addressing the needs of real families as they try to earn a living and provide a home environment where children can be raised to become good members of society. I would call urgently upon the state in both jurisdictions to aim for solutions that enhance the experience of family for children - however that family may be composed. I look forward to the opportunity for a Church's response to the consultation on the future structure of Childcare which was launched by The Department of Employment and Labour in Northern Ireland entitled *Work and Families: Choice and Flexibility*.

THE FAMILY

In the course of this year, the Republic addressed the definition of the Family in the Irish Constitution. A response to the consultation was prepared for the Standing Committee by a group including members of our Church in Society panel, representatives from the Marriage Council, clergy and laity and from the legal fraternity to whom we offer our thanks. This response was agreed to by the Standing Committee.

This response allowed us as a Church to address how we understand *'the Family'* in contemporary society. None of what is proposed in our submission undermines our belief in the ideal of a family where Christian marriage unites two people and children are nurtured in a Christian environment. It is important that the Synod understands that the Standing Committee did not question this fundamental to our teaching. Nor did it question the meaning of *'marriage'*. In fact it underlined the importance of Christian *'marriage'* as opposed to other relationships. But the last three decades have almost eradicated the old reality of parents, children, grandparents and close relatives all living in sufficient proximity to offer support to one another. Now, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, approximately one in three children is born to an unmarried, and often single parent.² Economic development frequently drives young parents to live at a considerable distance from the family support network as they seek employment or affordable housing.

The Church of Ireland panel also asked the State to embrace in its definition the reality of a family where two adults need to work in order to afford to buy, or indeed to rent accommodation - given that in many cases rents are as high as a mortgage might be. There has never been a time when it is more important for the Church to engage actively in public debate about the structure of our society and particularly in the debate of what the core values for family life should be. The traditional Irish family has changed radically due to circumstances which are economic as well as structural. *What now for the tradition we like to call 'the Christian family'?*

VALUES

¹ Brennan, S, quoted by O'Connor Alison, *Sunday Business Post*, 20.03.2005, p 1.

² Fahey T and Russell H. : "Family Formation in Ireland" 2001

I detect a subtle change in Irish life. Are we moving into a period when society is aware that it wants and needs positive values. We are particularly called to spell out the values that characterise a Christian community for the truth is positive values as understood by our changing society are not always Christian values as we have understood or proclaimed them.

Today society does not always speak of the Christian priorities of love and obedience. It speaks the language of rights and responsibilities. It speaks of conformity to patterns of behaviour which are utilitarian. When it speaks of human rights it does not always equate those rights with the traditional Christian norms of compassion, forgiveness or sensitivity to others.

I believe the Church has made a worthwhile contribution to the development of a vastly more equitable society. In the last thirty years, the European Union itself has taken up the torch of rights. However, and perhaps ironically, their concentration on the protection of individual rights through the Equality Directive leaves faith communities battling for their own right to maintain the ethos and discipline associated with our Christian belief. And we have seen evidence of the emerging tension between assumptions about correct behaviour based on religious beliefs and the rights of individuals in the Gender Recognition Act and the Civil Partnership Act in the United Kingdom. Similar legislation to the Civil Partnership Bill is being mooted in the Republic of Ireland. We also saw conflict emerge in the debate over euthanasia and assisted suicide in Lord Joffe's *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill*. The Select Committee at Westminster, which considered this issue, has called for their report to be debated in the next session of Parliament.

For Christians, this is an opportunity to engage society on the importance of Christian values. And not only in those areas where advances in medical technology or our understanding of human psychology present fresh challenges. More and more particular disciplines are having to respond to pressures from others. I cite as an example of this the growing number of cases in the NHS in the United Kingdom where Health Trusts are seeking legal advice in advance of the commencement of treatment. Only last week the question of positive discrimination on the basis of age where certain treatments are concerned has been raised again in the U.K. The moral issues in this whole field are immense.

I want to emphasise to Synod the Gospel imperative to address that most vulnerable part of society – children. *Members of Synod*, I was deeply struck by a recent report by Save the Children on the subject of Severe Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.³ This report highlighted the grim reality that 8% of all children are severely poor in Northern Ireland. That represents 32 000 little souls, one in five of whom do not have fresh fruit and vegetables or meat in their diet and one in seven of whom do not have three meals a day. A further 42 percent of children in Northern Ireland were classified as living in poverty, bringing the overall total to some 50% of children. These figures are markedly worse than the overall figure for Great Britain and are deserving of our special attention.

In 1999, the Labour government pledged the eradication of child poverty by the year 2020 and in 2003 (some four years after the objective was announced) the UK Department of Work and Pensions at last began to consult on how child poverty should be measured. I wonder just how much real progress can be achieved by 2020 at this pace?

Nor is the picture in the Republic of Ireland satisfactory- even though Ireland is now rated as one of the most prosperous countries in Europe. One recent study by Simon Rooke of the Children's Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin indicated that the number of children living in damp, crowded and dilapidated housing **actually doubled** between 1991 and 2002 to some 50,000.⁴ In fact, according to a UNICEF report published this year, Ireland's children overall experience among the worst levels of child poverty in Europe apart from Italy with 15.7% of children living below national poverty lines.⁵

INITIATIVE : “DE-CODING THE CULTURE”

³ Monteith & McLaughlin *The Bottom Line: Sever Child Poverty in Northern Ireland*; Save the Children; Belfast; 2004

⁴ Rooke, S, *Housing Problems and Irish Children*, Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, 2004. For a full discussion of this paper see the CORI Justice Commission www.corl.ie/justice

⁵ UNICEF, *Child Poverty in Rich Countries 2005*, Innocenti Report Card No 6 (Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, 2005)

From the Christian stand-point this situation is intolerable. The Church cannot stand by and do nothing more than draw attention to this tragic picture. I am therefore taking the initiative later in the year of inviting interested parties to share together in a forum on the question of children and poverty in Ireland. I will be inviting Government and Church representatives, aid organisations and charities to join me. I have called this project "*De-Coding the Culture*" and I hope it will be one effort to look honestly at a situation which contrasts so sharply with the picture of an affluent Ireland. The Christian conscience demands that more is done for Irish children who are enduring the poverty-trap in their earliest years.

In the last decade most would conclude that things are looking up economically in Ireland. More people are employed. More people have houses. But these studies tell me a different story. They tell me that our good fortune has not been enjoyed by all. They tell me that those who have enjoyed good fortune have a greater responsibility than ever towards those who have not. This notion of the enjoyment of rights being balanced by obligations to others is deeply embedded within our culture.

In the early 19th century, Ireland was riven with difficulty over the relationship between rights, land and power and the 1830s in particular was a turbulent decade in which reformers battled with issues that we would find familiar. *Are we now compelled to ask serious questions again about moral aspects of rights, land and power in contemporary Ireland?*

As I look at this island this morning I am struck by how comfortable many people feel. In the last decade, many of us have enjoyed a spectacular rise in the value of our homes, we have levels of employment that twenty years ago we would only have dreamed of, and consequently we have acquired a host of responsibilities of which, sometimes, we seem unaware. The question is : *what has Christian Ireland to say to secular Ireland about this?*

We are now a society in which the Good Samaritan is possessed of the wherewithal to help the beaten stranger. We are a society, able to provide hospitality to friend and stranger in the name of Christ.

I am reminded of a wonderful riposte from Thomas Drommond to the magistrates of Tipperary in 1838: *"Property has its duties as well as its rights, to the neglect of those duties in times past is mainly to be ascribed that diseased state of society... chiefly in the better and more faithful performance of those duties, and the more enlightened and humane exercise of those rights, that a permanent remedy for such disorders is to be sought."*⁶

THE ELDERLY

During this last year, the Irish Government confronted the issue of payment for care for the elderly and commissioned the Travers Report. The consequences of the report dealt primarily with the issues surrounding payment for care - but for me the key thing was what was revealed about the state of elderly care in general. Too many of the situations revealed were inadequate and in some cases, shocking. *Surely, an improvement in standards of care for the elderly ought to be a high priority for Ireland if we are truly a caring people?*

I am aware of a number of housing schemes, care homes and sheltered accommodation that are run under the ethos of the Church of Ireland in Northern Ireland and the Republic. *Do we concern ourselves with them? Do we note what is needed? Or, in our minds, have they receded into some fuzzy area where they are part of the 'semi-state sector'?*

I foresee that care of the elderly is an area that will in future require positive thinking in terms of ministry and practical support as more people require access to care in their latter years, and state provision becomes more and more stretched.

I commend to you the work of our Church of Ireland Retirement Trust in Northern Ireland.

⁶ Letter to Tipperary magistrates, 23 May 1838, I.S.P.O.Misc, Unregd. Papers, C.S.O. 1838/314.

I would draw your attention to two schemes under development in the Diocese of Dublin to provide a residential home on the north side of the city as well as a further house in Kilternan.

I would commend these and the others to you, I would ask you to take an interest in them, I would ask you to continue to support them in the future, as you have in the past, with your time, your fund-raising talents and with your financial support. I would encourage you to take a conscious interest in this area of work - for Christ's sake.

There are other issues in health and education mentioned in our Book of Reports which must be part of the moral debate I seek to encourage this morning. One item to which I would draw your attention, is the positive response by government in the Republic of Ireland in terms of provision of services to special needs children in schools. You may remember that our Board of Education made extensive representations over the last few years. This is an ongoing response for which we would express appreciation.

PRIORITIES AND BISHOPS' APPEAL

Tomorrow we will give thanks to God for 25 years of the Priorities Fund.

To date eleven million, one hundred and ninety-three thousand, four hundred and sixty Euros have been allocated to projects, programmes and areas of need. This is by any standard a remarkable achievement. I well remember working with colleagues on the Report '*First of All*' which proposed the setting up of this fund in the 1980s. Our main objective was to remind the Church of Ireland that its first priority was spiritual not material. How well the Priorities Fund has translated this ideal into practice. Over the last 25 years we acknowledge those who have guided the Fund : Bob Byers of Connor, Bristow Stevenson of Derry, Elydyr Cookman of Raphoe, Canon Condell of Limerick and the present Chairman Wilfred Young of Armagh, and the Organisers – Michael Coote of Dublin, Jim McGaffin of Armagh and Sylvia Simpson of Dublin.

Equally this morning I pay tribute to the Bishops' Appeal for World Development. This fund allows us to respond to the emergency needs of the world as well as contributing to development programmes. A recent example of this essential work was our response to the Tsunami tragedy in Asia which raised 566,602 Euros and £309368 from the Church of Ireland – over a million Euros. We must add to that the one and a half million sterling raised by the Dean of Belfast at his sit-out.

THE PEACE PROCESS

Over the years this Synod has had to address many aspects of '*The Troubles*' in Northern Ireland. Today that phrase is replaced by other words : '*The Peace Process*'. While so often issues of violence centred on Northern Ireland, what is happening now involves the whole island. No one in either jurisdiction should be able to say: *It has nothing to do with me*. All of our people are and must be ingredients of the process of peace. What goes to make a lasting peace with justice, understanding and reconciliation is not a matter for the north alone – it is a challenge for **all** of Ireland. Nor is it just about violence. Our project '*The Hard Gospel*' is a sobering reminder of the problems in both parts of Ireland. It is about attitudes, relationships and understanding.

Two aspects of the current situation call for our consideration.

First, the renunciation of violence.

Violence in different forms has marked Ireland's history. We have reached a point where despite disappointments and set-backs Irish society now possesses the opportunities to address grievance without resorting to violence. The structures of democracy are in place and the admittance to those structures is available to all. There is now no excuse for any form of violence to be used to make political statements. There is no excuse for violence to be the resort of those who feel alienated from society. There is no justification for any group to feel violence is the only way to influence events. If I may coin a phrase *never before has Ireland had less reason to talk about 'voiceless' communities or individuals*. This is in itself a remarkable achievement. Structures are now in place when if a voice or opinion is unheard the fault lies not in the structure but in the individual.

That is the reason why I believe this Synod can and must make a united call for the end of any violence from any source as a means of influencing public opinion in Ireland. To put this another way – violence must now be solely relegated to criminality. Criminality is a problem for any community. It raises its own issues for society. But for the present let us call it for what it is – *criminality*.

Before the General Election the President of Sinn Fein called on the Provisional IRA to consider its position. Its value will of course be judged by the response of the IRA – and by its actions. In the light of what I have just said about the structures of Irish society that statement acknowledged something had changed which has long been a grievance of nationalist and republican Ireland - that access to the powers of influence are now available to all. That is an interpretation of the Sinn Fein statement which must be noted. But if politically motivated violence is no longer, if it ever was, excusable then now criminality in any form when linked to political doctrine is totally unacceptable. This too is a moral issue ...

Secondly, the Peace Process has got to touch every aspect of Irish life.

Racial hatred, racial prejudice and racial alienation is the latest challenge to Irish normality and democracy. Let this Synod state clearly that there is no place on this island for attacks or injustice towards any person because of their colour, class or creed. Immigration is now a regular feature of life in both jurisdictions of this island. The Church of Ireland is playing a key role in confronting the issues of settlement, incorporation and acceptance of people from other nations. We cannot talk of an Ireland at peace with itself if we do not recognize that racialism is as much a threat to stability as any other cause.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

More than once in this Address I have asked the Synod to reflect on the relationship of privilege and responsibility to moral issues.

Surely nowhere does this relationship assume greater importance than in relation to Northern Ireland this morning.

In politics as in much more power is a privilege which carries with it moral responsibility.

As a result of last week's General Election the D.U.P. and Sinn Fein have been given clear political power to influence life in Northern Ireland. They have been afforded the privilege of power. *But how will they use that power and how will they address each other?* A polarized society has spoken. The moral judgment will turn on how that power is used. Time will tell. It would be unwise and unhelpful to prejudge what lies ahead. But as a Church which has a high proportion of its members living in Northern Ireland we must remember before God all who have been given political power and urge them to move the process of reconciliation forward.

Peace and justice remain more important than any single party. History will not judge kindly a reluctance to use political power to make society on this island safer, more stable and just.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

No one will doubt the significance of the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II. The world recognised the passing of a man of peace who had played a key and influential role in the overthrow of Communism in eastern Europe. Representatives of the world's religious traditions recognised the end of an era for the Roman Catholic Church. The presence of so many of the leaders of the nations at his funeral symbolised the impact and integrity of the late Pope's life on successive generations for over a quarter of a century. So much has been written about the Pope's life in which he inspired by his words, his actions and his travels. His stature appeared to grow even as his physical frailty increased. It was said on more than one occasion that the most vital homily he preached was his manner of dying. In the weeks of his final illness I was reminded of the words of a former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, that the Christian faith not only teaches us how to live, but how to die. Today I again convey to the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland the sympathy of the Church of Ireland.

As the new chapter for the Roman Catholic world commences in the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI it is natural that other Churches reflect on their hopes for the inter-Church world. During the last Pontificate Anglicanism felt encouragement as well as disappointment in its official relationships with Rome. We recognised the value of the Vatican's continued involvement in the work of ARCIC, the international Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission. We valued the achievement of the Vatican's agreement with Lutherans on justification by faith. We valued the conversations between successive Archbishops of Canterbury and the late Pope. We were encouraged to see the world's Church Leaders gathering at Assisi, first in 1986. There was much to encourage as Pope John Paul II engaged in Muslim-Christian and Jewish-Christian dialogue. But we have to be honest about our disappointments. There were times when during the pontificate of John Paul II his understanding of other Churches including the Anglican Communion was not as we understood ourselves. Perhaps above all it was the publication of *Dominus Jesus* with its unacceptable description of ourselves and other Churches as '*ecclesial communities*' which symbolised this cooling of expectation and hope.

As this new Pontificate opens for our Roman Catholic friends and neighbours let us recognise that inter-Church relations at the local level often contrast sharply with official statements or perceived dogmatism. As I reflect on my years of Ministry in Ireland I see a quiet revolution in inter-Church relations. At the parish level situations exist in Ireland today which would have been unthinkable 40 years ago. Understandings, agreements, co-operation and genuine friendships contribute to an island and of growing religious tolerance and equality. May this General Synod express the prayerful hope that at the start of the new Pontificate of Benedict XVI we will see agreement especially through a renewed commitment to the original methodology of ARCIC and a fresh emphasis on an ecumenical pilgrimage of genuine understanding.

The Church of Ireland stands firm in its generosity of spirit towards all Christian traditions. The Church of Ireland wants to reach out to others in the strength and joy of the will and purpose of God for His Church.

SEXUALITY : ANGLICANISM

As we look out across the Anglican Communion this morning we see a Church family in crisis. Divisions over attitudes to sexuality have captured the headlines for the past few years. Those divisions have threatened our communion with each other. I have been privileged to Chair the Lambeth Commission which produced the *Windsor Report* with its recommendations on ways the structures of the Anglican Communion could address the divisions which have emerged. Since its publication I have been encouraged by the way its proposals have been addressed across the Anglican world and by the positive signs of reflection among the Churches. There are no easy answers to these problems. Diversity has always been a characteristic of the Anglican Communion. There has never been perfect or complete communion in Anglicanism. It is not differences which are the priority – but how we work out ways of maintaining the highest degree of communion. Above all, as we were reminded at the recent Armagh conference organised by CMSI we must not lose sight of the real task of the Church. Mission to a sad world is the real priority : the Church which loses sight of that is destined for the wilderness.

When I am asked – how does the Windsor Report relate to the Church of Ireland I have two responses. First, that Report asks us to reflect on how important we view our connections and relationships with Anglicans in other parts of the Communion. The Church of Ireland has long extended the hand of hospitality, friendship and support to all parts of the Anglican Communion., Such attitudes must transcend diversity.

Second, the Report spells out suggestions how autonomy can relate to communion. My experience has shown me how jealously individual Provinces of Anglicanism seek to protect autonomy. The Church of Ireland is no exception. Unfortunately total autonomy can lead to excessive provincial parochialism. The Windsor Report asks us to be aware of that danger.

The House of Bishops has recognised the diverse attitudes which exist within the Church of Ireland on the question of sexuality. The House has engaged in a period of listening and consultation which is commensurate with Resolution 1.10 of the last Lambeth Conference.

This Synod will receive a Communication from the House of Bishops which will not only indicate our engagement with this issue but also inform the Church of our plans to further the process.

DEATH OF FORMER DIOCESAN BISHOPS

During the past year three former diocesan bishops passed away.

The Right Reverend Robert Heavener, the Bishop of Clogher from 1973-1980 died shortly after celebrating his hundredth birthday. Many members of the General Synod will recall his faithful years of ministry in Clogher diocese from his ordination in 1929. Robert was widely known and respected throughout Monaghan and Fermanagh. His parochial service and his contribution as Archdeacon fitted him so well as he became a bishop in 1973. We rejoiced with him as he reached his 'centenary' only to be saddened by his passing so shortly afterwards.

The Right Reverend James Moore, Bishop of Connor from 1995 to 2001, died after an all too short period of retirement. In his later years he had experienced ill health and this he had borne with his typical cheerfulness and absolute faith in the providence of Almighty God. To visit Jimmy, as we knew him, at his home in Bangor and in hospital was to be ministered by him such was his personality and deep spirituality. We remember his episcopate in Connor and his service as priest and Archdeacon in Down with gratitude to Almighty God. Those of us who were his friends and colleagues will long recall his wonderful 'down to earth' attitude and undying faithfulness to his Ministry. We extend to Mary and his family our love and sympathy.

The Right Reverend Edwin Owen was ordained in 1934 in the Diocese of Dublin and became Dean of Killaloe in 1957. From 1972 to 1976 he was Bishop of Killaloe and Bishop of Limerick and Killaloe from 1976 to 1981. In retirement he and his wife Peggy lived here in Dublin. I personally recall his many acts of kindness to a young bishop in 1975. He had a life-long interest in Church music stemming from his years as a choir boy in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh and his pastoral ministry in his widespread diocese in the South-west enabled him to touch the hearts of many.

We thank God for every remembrance of three faithful leaders and servants.

RETIREMENT

Members of Synod, during the past year Dean Herbert Cassidy retired as a clerical honorary secretary of the Synod and Standing Committee. For the past 14 years he has given loyal and faithful service on many central committees as well as contributing much to our work here. He was always an objective contributor to our business with a wry sense of humour. I know he was extremely pleased that his last Synod as an honorary secretary was held in Armagh. On behalf of the Synod and not least on behalf of the honorary secretaries and our staff I extend heartfelt thanks to the Dean for his many years of faithful service and wish Herbie and Ann good health in the years to come.

THE BISHOP OF ST ANDREWS

There was much delight in the Diocese of Down and Dromore at the recent appointment of Archdeacon David Chillingworth to be Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane in the Scottish Episcopal Church. The Archdeacon contributed much to the life of his diocese and the whole Church owes him a debt of gratitude for his patient leadership of the *Hard Gospel* project. This appointment further strengthens the ties of the Celtic fringe of Anglicanism and I know we all wish David and Alison much happiness in Scotland.

THE REVEREND BRIAN PARKER

At the end of March last the Reverend Brian Parker retired as Church of Ireland Press Officer. During his years of service many in the media conveyed their sincere appreciation for his quiet, reliable and expert service on behalf of this Church. Brian brought to his work that calmness and sure-footedness of a man who knew the demands of the press and broadcasting world. On behalf of us all I thank him for his help and guidance and wish him well as he continues his work as a non-stipendiary priest in Down diocese.

I would also take this opportunity of acknowledging the wonderful service of our assistant in the Belfast Press Office, Mrs Jenny Compston. Jenny has quietly and efficiently supported that work

since 1998 and her supply of *press updates* has become a regular and much appreciated feature of our work.

CANON J. L. B. DEANE

In the past few weeks what I term "*the end of an era*" in lay involvement in the life of the Church of Ireland has taken place. Canon J.L.B. Deane has retired as Chairman of the Church of Ireland Pensions Board. This position was the last of a long list of special responsibilities stretching back over the years in which 'Barry' Deane gave unique service to this Church. So much more could be said about '*the Canon from Bandon*'. This morning I say *thank you* to him for a lifetime of faithful and inspired service to the Church of Ireland.

THANKS

There are many worthy of our thanks this morning. In particular you would wish me to acknowledge the Honorary Secretaries of the Synod, the Head of the General Synod services, Mrs Janet Maxwell and her colleagues, Mr Derek Phillips and Ms Lucy Connolly, the Reverend Michael Graham for his work with communications, the Chief Officer of the Representative Body, Mr Denis Reardon and all our staff at Church House, Rathmines.

NEXT YEAR

Next May the General Synod will convene in the city of Armagh. The diocese of Armagh looks forward to welcoming members to the hill of St. Patrick once more. We recall the general welcome the Synod received in 2004 to Armagh and I can assure you all that you will be warmly greeted.

So we turn to our business. May Almighty God guide us, may the presence of His Spirit remind us of our responsibilities – but also of our privileges as a Church.

God bless you all.

Ends