

COMMISSION ON EPISCOPAL MINISTRY AND STRUCTURES
REPORT ON INFORMAL DISCUSSION SESSION AT GENERAL SYNOD 2013

INTRODUCTION

There was a good attendance at the breakout session: the total number of responses was 421, with 159 Clerical blue forms and 262 Lay yellow forms returned.

I have collated the forms. I cannot reproduce everything but a brief summary and analysis are set out below. We must remember, however, that this exercise was not scientifically or statistically validated, so it cannot be taken as an accurate indication of Synod wishes or a reliable basis for making decisions. It has its limitations but it gives us food for thought - especially Questions 4 and 5, where in effect members were given (and took) the chance to make a short speech to their group.

QUESTION 1

People were asked to write down the first word they thought of in response to the “icebreaker” word “BISHOP”. Following discussion in the groups, they were then asked to write the word they wished they had come up with - their second word. Numbers for some chosen words are shown below, followed by a list of other words selected. I have not tried to analyse these responses.

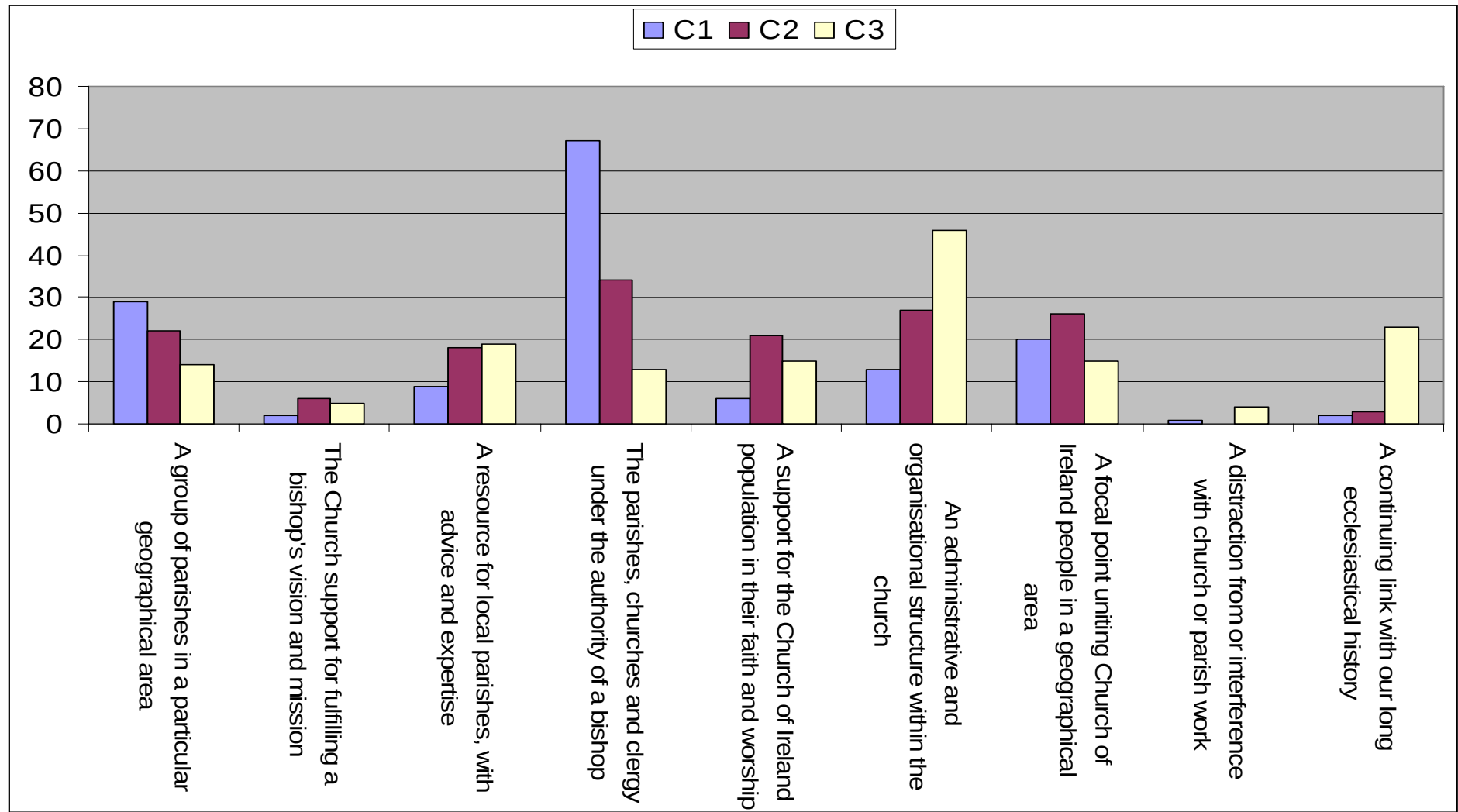
There are a few words clearly ahead, but then a wide range, in both first and second thoughts. The word that features most is “Leadership”, with the pastoral role stressed too and some identification with individual bishops. The value of this exercise was really in “breaking the ice” and getting people talking to each other and engaging with the subject. The buzz of animated conversation in both rooms showed that that was achieved.

BISHOP: FIRST WORD (CLERGY 159 FORMS)		BISHOP: SECOND WORD (CLERGY 159 FORMS)	
LEADER/LEADERSHIP	21	LEADER/LEADERSHIP	28
PURPLE	19	PASTOR/CHIEF PASTOR	27
PASTOR/CHIEF PASTOR	18	SHEPHERD	14
OVERSIGHT/OVERSEER	9	OVERSIGHT/OVERSEER	10
BOSS	9	AUTHORITY	5
AUTHORITY	9	FACILITATOR	5
CHRISTIAN/SURNAME	9	FATHER/MOTHER IN GOD	4
SHEPHERD	6	FRIEND	4
FRIEND	4	UNITY/UNIFIER	4
FATHER IN GOD	3	TEACHER	3
CHESS	3	CHRISTIAN/SURNAME	3
		DISTANT/REMOTE	3
CROZIER PRIEST POWER DIOCESE		OH NO! FACILITATOR RESPONSIBILITY	
DISTANT/REMOTE OH NO! UGH!		PRIEST APOSTLE COLLABORATOR WHY?	
WHY? APART PERSONABLE		PROTECTOR DOWN TO EARTH COST	
BROTHER OR SISTER CHALLENGE		DETACHED BROTHER OR SISTER DIOCESE	
ROBES EPISCOPAL HEAD		OPPORTUNITY DEPENDS WHO PERSON IS	
ORDINATION HATS WELCOME!		HEAD INSTITUTIONAL MANAGER CHIEF	
SUPERIOR APOSTLE NON-STOP		SERVANT INDECISION ROLE MODEL	
TEACHER IMPOSSIBLE UP THERE		SUPPORTER REPRESENTATIVE BOSS	
RESPECT FACILITATOR CAUTION		CEO OF DIOCESE	
UNCERTAINTY GREAT UNITY MAN			
SHARED RESPONSIBILITY ENDURANCE			
WHAT SORT? DIGNITY USEFUL			
DISAPPOINTMENT PIOUS			

BISHOP: FIRST WORD (LAITY 262 FORMS)		BISHOP: SECOND WORD (LAITY 262 FORMS)	
LEADER/LEADERSHIP	50	LEADER/LEADERSHIP	73
CHRISTIAN/SURNAME	34	SHEPHERD	32
PASTOR	26	PASTOR	19
PURPLE	22	NAME	11
BOSS	14	AUTHORITY	5
AUTHORITY	13	OVERSIGHT	5
DIOCESE	10	PURPLE	4
CROZIER/STAFF	7	BOSS	3
CLERGY	6		
SHEPHERD	6	APPROACHABLE	INSPIRING
CHIEF	4	HEAD OF FAMILY	
OVERSIGHT	3	CLERGY	CARING
MAN/MALE	3	EPISCOPAL	CHURCH
WHICH ONE?	3	VISION	
		PRESSURE	KNOWS
		FLOCK	HUMAN
		FLEXIBLE	
		SAYS	HELLO
		HEAD OF CHURCH	OVERWORKED
		POWERLESS	COMMUNICATION
		MEDIATOR	
		TRADITION	FOLLOWER
		RESPONSIBILITY	CROSS
		HUMBLE	CONFIRMATION
		RELIGIOUS	CHIEF
		RESPECT	SERVANT
		CROZIER	WHO?
		WHY?	
		LONELY	PROCLAIMER
		UNDERSTANDING	
		TRAINING	SUCCESSION
		ASIDE	FOCUS
		GODLY	
		CHRISTIAN	CLEVER
		POWER	ABSENT
		DIRECTOR	FATHER
		IN GOD	STRUCTURES
		ORGANISER	MANAGER
		ADMINISTRATION	
		DREAMER	FRIEND
		CO-ORDINATOR	SYNOD
		WISE	VANITY
		APPOINTMENT	HELPER
		ENCOURAGEMENT	INFLUENCER
		A PERSON	
IN CHARGE	CROSSBROTHER	SEE	HOUSE
CONFIRMATION	COLLEAGUE	TOP	TABLE
HEAD OF CHURCH	ALOOF	CHURCH	COST
POWERFEAR	PRIEST	ABSENT	STRESSED
MITRE	CHESS	MANAGER	FRIEND
OLD	HEAD OF DIOCESE	MANAGEMENT	
COMMUNICATOR	LORD BISHOP	INTEREST	
POWERLESS	NEW...KNOWS	FLOCK	VISION
GREAT!	SUPPORT	ADMINISTRATOR	OH!
INTEGRITY	VITAL	RESPECT	FORCE
SMILE	UM	TRAINING	PRESIDENT
CLEVER	BUSY		
RULER	APPEAL	HELPER	ELEVATED
VARIANT	FACILITATOR	PRIVILEGE	
MORE WORK	TOO MANY	EPISCOPAL	
IMPORTANT	VANITY		

QUESTION 2 – Clergy Responses

People were asked which of the statements below most closely fitted with their understanding of the word “DIOCESE”. The top three choices for Clerical (159 responses). There was also an option for ‘other’ suggestions, addressed below.



CLERICAL RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2 USING “OTHER” BOXES

One chose as top option - the diocese is a means of sharing a common vision.

One saw diocese firstly as opportunity for the local church to partner with others in sharing resources to advance God’s Kingdom in an area.

One put first grouping of diverse churches and people in geographical area.

One said the body of Christ in a particular geographical area.

One stressed structure for fulfilling of a vision uniting people.

One saw it as both a support for clergy and inspiring vision.

One said it was an organism helping parishes and people in unity to fulfil the Great Commission.

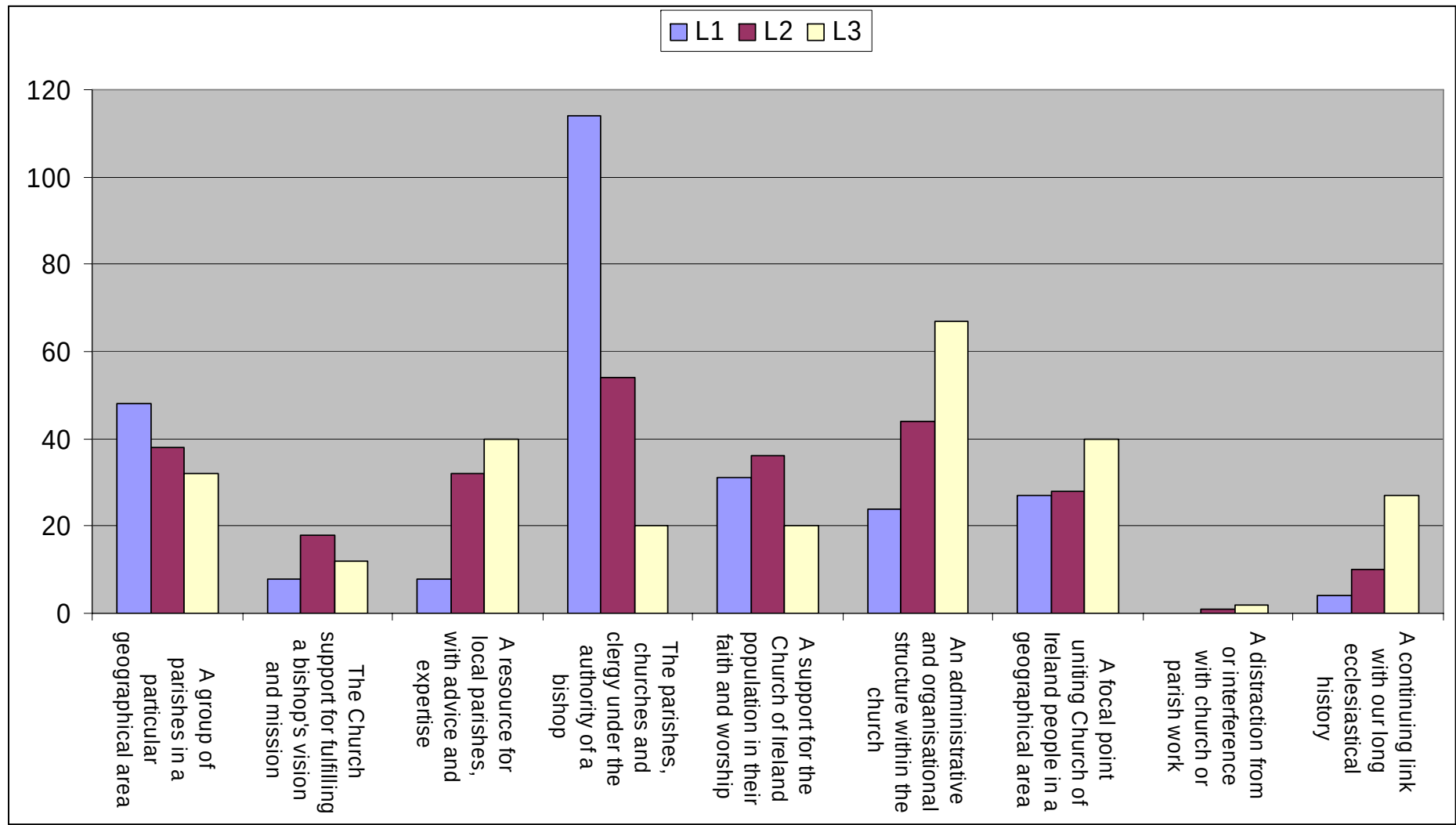
One saw it as the primary unit of the Church.

One put as second option the basic unit of the Church.

One put as third option seeing a diocese as part of Province.

QUESTION 2 – Lay Responses

People were asked which of the statements below most closely fitted with their understanding of the word “DIOCESE”. The top three choices for Lay (262 responses) are shown in the graph. There was also an option for ‘other’ suggestions, addressed below.



LAY RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2 USING “OTHER” BOXES

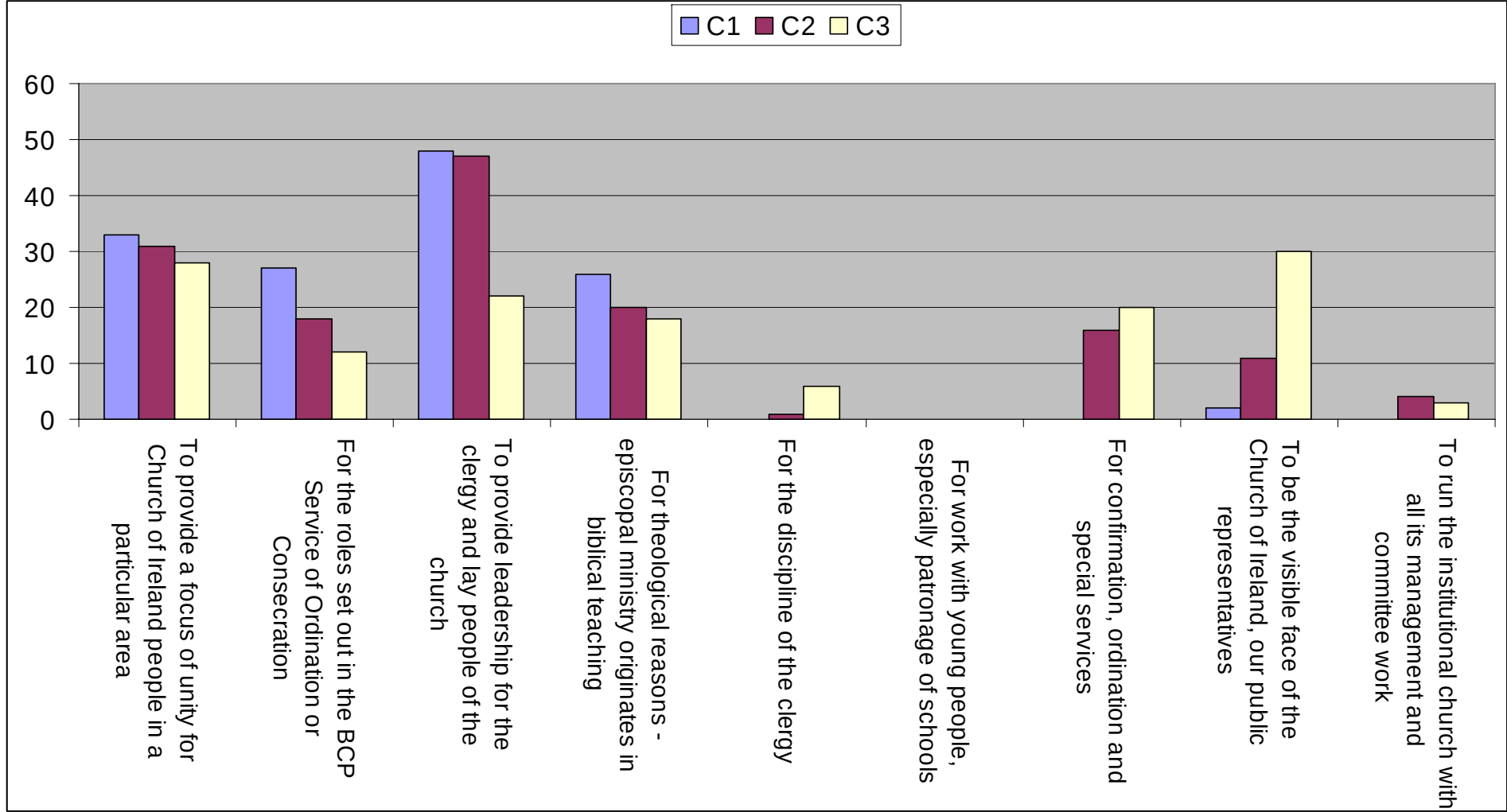
Without choosing the “other” boxes, there were a few comments in the margins. One lay person mentioned technology as a way of making geographical boundaries less important. Another saw the diocesan role in overseeing a dispersed community led by both clergy and laity.

COMMENTS ON RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2 –HOW MEMBERS UNDERSTAND DIOCESES

The statements offered were intended to stimulate discussion. By far, the most popular choice was “The parishes, churches and clergy under the authority of a bishop.” That has the idea of people and clergy led by a bishop, possibly or presumably working together, which is not explicitly present in the more abstract runner-up option “An administrative and organisational structure of the church.” Third in the overall figures was “A group of parishes in a particular geographical area.” Those three together dominated the responses. None of these leading formulations, however, pays much attention to ideas of mission or vision. Indeed, one person commented that “it is all to do with administration”. The concept of a Bishop’s vision is second last, albeit well ahead of the very negative view of the diocese as a distraction or interference. On the other hand, around 30% of respondents valued the diocese as “A support for the Church of Ireland population in their faith and worship.” A similar number saw the diocese as “A resource for local parishes, with advice and expertise.” Geography is important and in these responses history is not so much of a priority, except at the third level.

QUESTION 3 – Clerical Responses

People were asked why it was essential for the Church of Ireland to have Bishops. The top three choices for Clerical (159 responses) are shown in the graph. There was also an option for ‘other’ suggestions, addressed below.



CLERICAL RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3 USING “OTHER” BOXES

Most of these drew attention to the “pastor of the pastors” role.

Another said a Bishop was essential to “Empower a diocese to proclaim the Good News”.

Other choices were to promote Biblical teaching, to teach and preserve the faith, spearhead mission.

One saw need for someone to blame - a lightning rod.

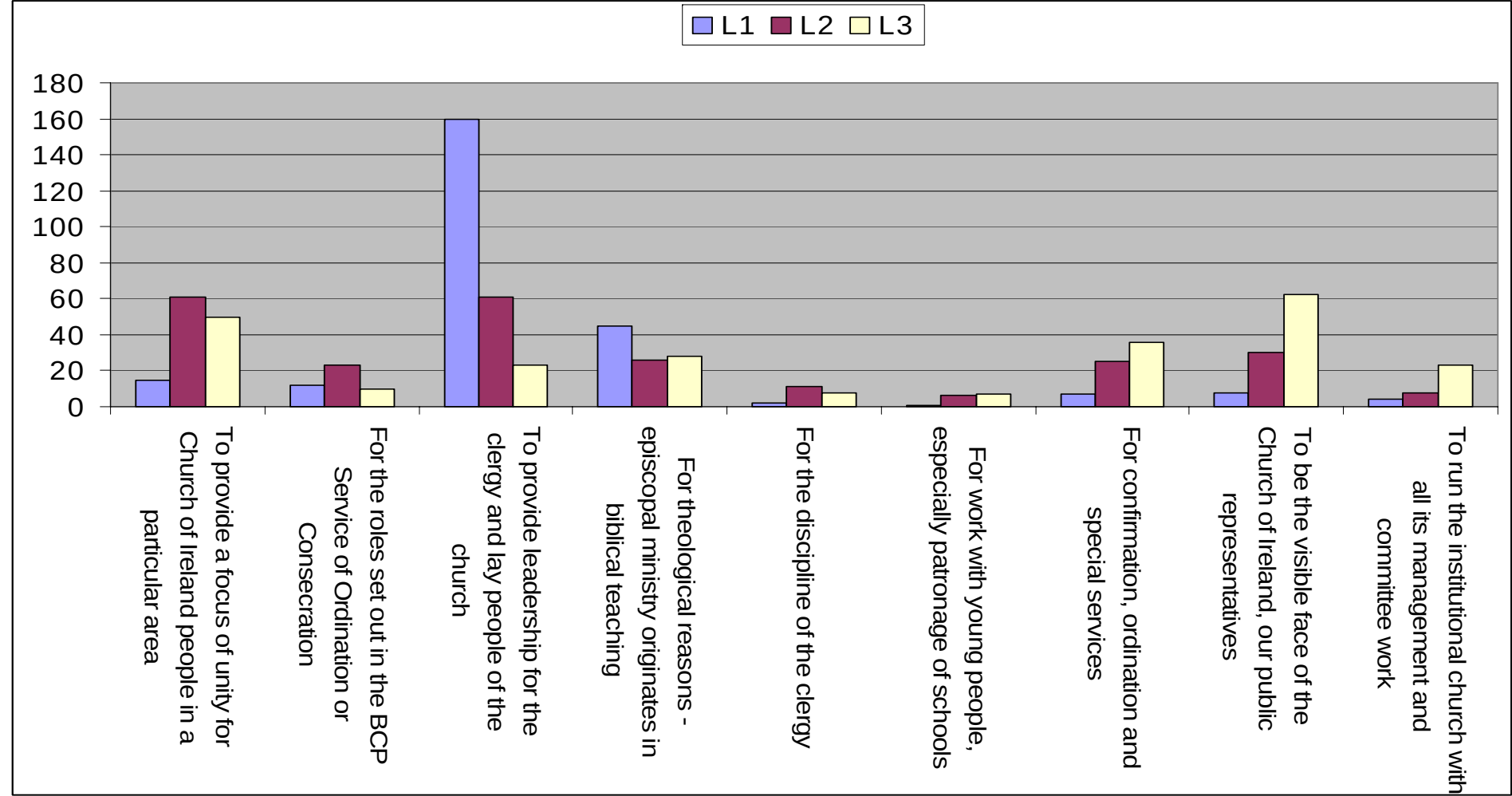
Another essential was to link with episcopal ministry of the universal historic church.

Others said to share in the governance, mission and vision of the whole Church, to discern and give God’s vision and lead into growth and spiritual development.

One said essential because we are Anglican. But one or two questioned the need for bishops.

QUESTION 3 – Lay Responses

People were asked why it was essential for the Church of Ireland to have Bishops. The top three choices for Lay (262 responses) are shown in the graph. There was also an option for ‘other’ suggestions, addressed below.



LAY RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3 USING “OTHER” BOXES

Again there was reference to “pastor of the pastors”.

Some said Bishops were essential to give spiritual leadership, to show Christian values on the world stage, to develop and facilitate vision, to lead evangelism, to be a link with the wider church.

One said they were essential “As a collegiate group of different views, to consider the difficult issues the Church will face and provide guidance.”

COMMENTS ON RESPONSES TO QUESTION 3 – WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO HAVE BISHOPS?

Well in front, dominating these responses, was leadership – 361 responses across the three options. Second came the need for bishops to provide a focus of unity, followed by theological reasons, mentioning the Biblical origins of episcopal ministry. A visible face is important at the third level of choices. We don’t know how much detail members of Synod know of the BCP Service of Ordination or Consecration, but the Question may prompt some to re-read it.

QUESTION 4: What should the Church of Ireland expect from its Bishops today and in ten years' time? Each Group Reporter was asked to note key points from their discussion.

TODAY:

Points were mainly repeating words used in Question 1 - see those responses on characteristics, qualities and skills.

There should be a clearer Church of Ireland witness in wider society.

There should be an outward focus.

Bishops (and the whole Church) should be willing to take risks.

There should be more decisiveness – get things done.

Discipline of clergy is necessary.

More theological reflection from Bishops would be welcomed.

We need to accept diversity and change – starting now.

TEN YEARS' TIME:

Women Bishops and Archbishops.

More flexibility. Need to be counter-cultural. Ability to collaborate. Team work. Shared episcopal oversight. Less constrained by Constitution and structures.

Instigating change eg closing parishes, planting churches.

Bishops trained to be leaders.

Release from administration, chairmanship, public representative roles.

New centralised human resources and management structures.

Have a vision for new models of parish and ministry. Bishops serving as parish priests. Bishops returning to parish ministry. Limited period as Bishop. Don't stay too long.

Release from confirmation duties. Rethinking confirmation – it is now exit point.

Maintaining and encouraging Church of Ireland ethos in schools and beyond.

More transparency especially about appointments.

Fewer Bishops better resourced.

Team leadership in the mission of the Diocese.

More equal division of work and responsibilities among Bishops.

Better use of gifting identified in his or her calling – not to be lost in administrative requirements.

Question 5: Participants were invited to make additional comments if they wished to do so.

CLERGY COMMENTS

Uphold and promote Biblical teaching. Above all, be a man of God. Martyrs if need be. Integrity in doctrine and life. Good character. Stamina. Proactive not reactive. Charisma. Courage. In touch. Communication skills. Role of Holy Spirit.

Bishops should be pastors with less emphasis on academia.

Need to rebuild confidence in House of Bishops.

Most people have no clear understanding of role of Bishops. We need to take episcopal ministry more seriously.

Rural diocese different from urban. More collaborative ministry.

Diocesan structures should be based around major cities or centres of population.

Process of appointment needs attention. Too many colleges fail to come to decisions. Candidates for episcopal ministry should have track record in leadership and central church. Greater diocesan say in appointments. More openness about colleges. Advertise posts openly. CVs. Interviews.

Dioceses must be viable and self-supporting.

We have too many Bishops. Ten not twelve.

Keep all our Bishops but redefine their role.

Bishops' own needs often overlooked.

Appropriate support needed. More support staff needed. Enhance role of Archdeacons. High powered Archdeacons. Auxiliary bishops. More delegation.

Women Bishops needed – but one person said not all were in favour of that.

Training for Bishops needed.

Current Bishops need team building to create corporate leadership.

Need constitutional restraints removed to allow Bishops to exercise discipline.

Thank God for our Bishops and let us pray the Lord will equip, protect and use them to His glory and the extension of His Kingdom.

Armagh and Dublin suffer from double-jobbing. What about a Suffragan to help Armagh?

Bishops don't need to be on Committees relating to Finance, Property etc but focus on mission and ministry.

Important to split managerial from spiritual. Less focus on buildings.

Bishop should not be a job for life. Bishops should agree some time to go back to parish ministry.

Stop overpaying Bishops so encourage them to return to parish ministry after a time. Limited or fixed term appointment say 7-10 years then return to parish ministry.

Bishop would be more grounded if had a small parish at same time.

Let Bishops get back to being Bishops – too many demands from parishes and clergy.

LAITY COMMENTS

Clergy should be more supportive and respectful of bishops.

Archbishop of Armagh has mammoth work load and needs assistance.

Transfer administrative roles to Diocesan Administrative Leaders – either lay or clerical with no cure. Be a leader not an administrator. Use co-workers.

Need preparation and training for the role and mentoring after appointment.

Please say "thank you" to our Bishops.

Start rationalisation and streamlining of dioceses and administration.

Take control of diaries. Find time to pray and study. Take time out.

We need appraisal processes for clergy and bishops. We need clergy contracts. We need a "job spec" for bishops too.

Bishops should think beyond their dioceses and Ireland. Bishops for the Church not the diocese.

Look at Scottish Episcopal model for appointments.

Bishop presence in isolated areas must be maintained.

WHAT DID SYNOD MEMBERS THINK OF INTRODUCING BREAKOUT SESSION TO GENERAL SYNOD?

Comments made to me were all favourable – but I wonder if others heard to the contrary. Some people added largely positive comments on their forms. They welcomed the opportunity to talk to Synod members from other dioceses, the informal atmosphere, and the chance to give their views. They said they wanted more of this format at Synod.

The organisation worked well and we are grateful to Janet Maxwell, Garrett Casey and the Tellers for their help with that. Our two CEMS facilitators – Mrs June Butler and Rev Andrew Forster - were excellent.

Some people stressed the need for feedback, communication and consultation. We have that issue on the agenda for our meeting on 20 May.

Ethne Harkness

14 May 2013

ADDENDUM

Our guest from the Moravian Church joined a discussion group and spoke to me and to Synod on this topic. Here is what she wrote on her Response Form:

"I can't really answer Question on dioceses because we don't have dioceses and our Bishops are not limited by geographical boundaries – it has no meaning for me in my church practice and in many places where I have worked it has led to problems, partially when diocesan boundaries are not the same as local authority areas - when I worked in West Yorkshire all the "free churches" followed local authority boundaries but the Anglicans and Catholics had completely different boundaries which led to real ecumenical problems and problems in relating to the civil local authorities.

I don't know Bishops are essential in a meaningful Gospel way – many churches manage very well without them and yet retain their ecclesial integrity and faith perspective. Moravians have Bishops and we value them. They are useful and desirable but essential is something different.

As a Moravian, I expect wisdom, inspiration, spirituality, teaching and pastoral care from Bishops. Our Bishops are elected at Synod, with no electioneering but a silent prayerful ballot, and usually the people elected are surprised. The Holy Spirit gifts the people so elected – they grow in grace in the post. By the way, our Bishops are not paid more than other clergy."