

### **Motion No.3**

**Proposer: Ms Nuala Dudley**

#### **Embargo Until Delivery • Check Against Delivery**

It gives me great pleasure in seconding Motion No.3 regarding the Solemnisation of Marriages in Secular Venues.

God is present everywhere. His presence isn't confined to any church building, even for special occasions like weddings. In Jeremiah 23 v.23-24 God declares: 'Am I a God who is near and not far off? Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' There is no place where God is not. The presence of the Holy Spirit is referred to in the Introduction to the Marriage Ceremony. 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?' to quote from 1 Corinthians 3 v.16. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit within ourselves. So in whatever setting a wedding takes place, we have the assurance of God's presence with us.

According to the Central Statistics Office which I appreciate only covers the Republic of Ireland, the number of Church of Ireland marriages solemnised in the last ten years has decreased by more than fifty per cent. I understand in Northern Ireland the trend is similar. Meanwhile civil ceremonies are growing in popularity: Approximately one third of all marriages now in the Republic of Ireland are civil ceremonies. Contributing factors to this rise include declining religious affiliation, personalisation, venue flexibility and cost considerations. The widening gap between church and contemporary culture is increasingly evident.

I believe this motion has the potential to provide the Church with an opportunity to engage with those who are currently beyond our church buildings, to offer to those who have fallen out of the way of regular churchgoing, an opportunity once again to engage with church, within a more suitable setting for them. It also offers the Church potentially, a relationship with couples that might otherwise have decided on a civil ceremony, if using a church was their only option. Is our Pioneer Ministry not about engaging people where they are, instead of them coming to us? Are we not about trying to be alongside people and finding new ways of doing things?

We live in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic society. The nature of families has become more dynamic. Couples choose their wedding venue for all sorts of reasons as already stated. The choice of wedding venue may prove a sticking point for some couples and their families, for example those entering inter-church marriages. The option of using a secular venue where

### **Motion No.3**

**Proposer: Ms Nuala Dudley**

**Embargo Until Delivery • Check Against Delivery**

some may feel more at ease would allay some concerns and yet at the same time allow the Church present her powerful liturgy and outreach, while demonstrating her pastoral care.

I consider myself fairly conservative. I was brought up in the Church and I like our traditions. One of the things I value most about the Church of Ireland is the liturgy. But the Church is nothing without people and we need our young people. In passing this motion, the option will be to continue the solemnisation of Christian marriage in churches as well as the option to have Christian marriage solemnized in other contexts.

We will be preparing to provide ourselves with a significant opportunity to reach out, another tool in the armoury as it were, to attempt to meet those on the periphery of our Church. As Canon Robinson has said, in proposing the establishment of a working group to prayerfully and carefully consider this issue and report back to Synod in due course, we will avoid a knee-jerk reaction when a vote is required without enough time for due consideration.

Therefore I have pleasure in seconding the motion: *‘That the Standing Committee establish a working group (to include members of both the House of Bishops and the House of Representatives) to investigate the possibility of allowing Church of Ireland clergy to solemnise marriages in secular venues as part of the church's outreach, and that this Working Group brings its final report and recommendations to the General Synod of 2027 at the latest.’*

Thank you.