

FORWARD IN FAITH 2014 NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

GRATITUDE AND CONFIDENCE

Speech by Fr Edward Martin

I beg to move, on behalf of the Council of Forward in Faith:

‘That this Assembly thank the Catholic Group in General Synod, and especially those of its members who served in the Facilitated Conversations and on the Steering Committee, for their faithful witness, and for securing provision that enables us to go forward with confidence.’

It is true to say that ‘a lot can happen in a year’ – but that has rarely been true of the Church of England! But when you think back to October 2013, when the legislation had yet to be published, you can appreciate that an awful lot has happened since then.

In many ways it has been a frustrating time. We have been asked to be patient, to temper our politics a little, to pray, to hope and tentatively to trust in a new process that has sought to resolve the issue of women in the episcopate by consensus and co-operation rather than by ‘knife-edge votes’ in the General Synod. It has not been easy for us.

More than ever, we have had to sit tight and put our future within the Church of England into the hands of those who represent us. We owe a huge debt to the members of the Catholic Group on Synod who, together with our bishops and other key individuals from our constituency, have engaged in this process and have secured for us both provision that we can at least work with and recognition that our position is both authentic and legitimate – not only within the broad spectrum of Anglicanism, but also within the teachings and practice of the Church Universal.

Now, that is not to say that we have got everything that we wanted – far from it. But while the legislation agreed by the General Synod falls short of our ideal, it is much more likely than the previous failed legislation to give us the hope of flourishing as catholic Christians in the Church of England.

The House of Bishops’ Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles set the issue of the ordination of women within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God. They ensure that pastoral and sacramental provision will be made for us without a time limit and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion.

Furthermore, the Disputes Resolution Procedure and the Independent Reviewer, together with the requirement of a two-thirds majority in Synod to change the Declaration, offers us more security than we had under the previous Act of Synod.

The motion before you expresses gratitude to the Catholic Group for their actions on our behalf and for their courageous witness in voting against the main legislation because it embodied the principle of ordaining women as bishops.

And should anyone think that the strength of our position has somehow been diluted in this new era of co-operation, they would be wise to note that 23% of the House of Laity still

voted against at Final Approval – a clear indication of the support for our position and the need for lasting provision.

With that in mind, I am sure that we would all wish to register our thanks to Fr Simon Killwick for his careful leadership as Chairman of the Catholic Group and his participation in the Facilitated Conversations, together with Fr Paul Benfield and Dr Lindsay Newcombe. And we should also recognize the contribution of the Bishop of Chichester who, along with Fr Benfield, served on the Steering Committee that drafted the legislation.

A lot can still happen in a year!

The closing of this particular chapter in the life of our constituency (and in the work of Forward in Faith) begs the question, where will be we twelve months from now? The events of the last year bring into sharp focus Fr Sam Philpott's call to us to get 'off the battlefield and onto the mission field'.

We have the Sacraments, we have the Scriptures we have the teachings and the traditions of the Church. We have everything we need! We have now been given the possibility of flourishing. What will we make of this opportunity?

Let us resolve to build on the achievements of this last year and use them as a platform from which we can continue to bear witness to catholic truth in the parishes and communities where God has placed us.

With gratitude and confidence, on behalf of the Council of Forward in Faith, I move the motion:

'That this Assembly thank the Catholic Group in General Synod, and especially those of its members who served in the Facilitated Conversations and on the Steering Committee, for their faithful witness, and for securing provision that enables us to go forward with confidence.'

Mrs Anneliese Barrell, Vice-Chairman of the Catholic Group, thanked the Council of Forward in Faith for its support to the Catholic Group; the past and present Directors, Stephen Parkinson and Colin Podmore, for their advice; and the members of Forward in Faith and the other Catholic Societies for their trust and their prayers. She also paid tribute to the quality of the leadership shown by the Chairman of the Catholic Group, Fr Simon Killwick.

The motion was passed *nem. con.*