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Irish parliament could decide on abortion referendum by end-2017

Reuters (25.10.2016) - <http://reut.rs/2eFtksd> - Ireland's parliament could be in a position to decide on whether to hold a referendum to repeal restrictive abortion laws by the end of next year if a citizens' assembly recommends a vote should be held to widen access.

Regulations in the once stridently Catholic Ireland are among the strictest in the world and Prime Minister Enda Kenny this month called together 99 members of the public to advise government on the politically-divisive issue.

The assembly has been asked to deliver its report in the first half of 2017 and the government said on Tuesday that a parliamentary committee due to be set up to respond would be convened immediately and have six months to do so.

If a referendum is recommended, a vote would then be needed in parliament to set one up, potentially paving the way for a plebiscite in 2018.

Activists who marched in their thousands last month to seek the abolition of the eighth amendment of the constitution, which enshrines an equal right to life of the mother and her unborn child, have pressured the government not to delay a decision.

Abortion has long been a controversial topic in Ireland where a complete ban was only lifted in 2013 when terminations were allowed if a mother's life is in danger. Anti-abortion supporters demand no further changes to safeguard all life.

The timetable set out by the government on Tuesday was in response to opposition attempts to provide for a referendum immediately that threatened a split among the minority coalition government.

Women must play bigger role in church, Synod hears

Limerick Diocesan Synod hears call for lay-led liturgies without priests on weekdays

The Ireland Times (10.04.2016) - <http://bit.ly/1qHwwIP> - Women need to play a much more important role in the church, the first Synod in Ireland in 50 years has been told.

Some 400 delegates spent three days at the Limerick Diocesan Synod where they voted on 100 proposals to help map out the future of the church and how it serves the local community in a time of falling vocations.

A motion to establish a working group to explore and scope out how and where women can play a leadership role in the governance of the church received the highest number of priority votes at the Synod.

A proposal to develop and support lay-led liturgies and the celebration of sacraments was supported by more than 90 per cent of delegates.

Lay-led liturgies

Speaking at the Synod Fr Eugene Duffy, a lecturer in theology and religious studies at Mary Immaculate College, recommended that occasional lay-led liturgies without priests should be introduced on weekdays as a way of preparing for the reality of priests not being available to every parish in the years ahead.

“If we can get used to having lay-led liturgy on week days first then people will begin to appreciate it, understand it, grow in their own acceptance of it and see the value of it,” he said.

“In the absence of a priest that’s what they will have to do on a Sunday. We have to start by doing it on a week day and then people become familiar with it. The foundational thing that people have to do is to gather on a Sunday to worship, however we do it.

Fr Duffy also said that the Catholic Church can learn from the Church of Ireland in this regard.

“The Church of Ireland has readers who look after the liturgy on a Sunday if an ordained minister cannot be present. We are going to have to get used to this situation and have no option to prepare for it. Otherwise there is going to be a trauma some Sunday.

The role of women in the church was also discussed as part of the universal themes which could not be voted on but were discussed on the final day of the Synod.

Vincent Hanley, a delegate from Knockaderry/Clouncagh, Co Limerick, said the issue of women priests was a popular theme during the three-year listening process which took place before the Synod.

“Up to now we have been very pragmatic in our discussions but there are elephants in the room and especially the situation around women priests. This issue came up again and again in our listening process, in the questionnaires and our assemblies,” said Mr Hanley.

Marian Wallace, a delegate from Ardpatrick, Co Limerick, said women, in particular mothers, were tired of “religious apartheid”.

“Mothers are the backbone of the church, we teach our children we bring them to church but we are tired of inequality we are tired of religious apartheid,” she said.