

GENERAL SYNOD 2018

Representative Church Body Report Seconder: The Ven Adrian Wilkinson

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

The popular writer and storyteller Jeffrey Archer was set a challenge by the editor of the Readers' Digest to write a short story with a beginning, a middle and an end in exactly 100 words, not 99 or 101 but 100 words. After several attempts, he achieved it! I read it recently. Like all of Archer's stories, it has a dramatic and clever ending.

My seconding speech today will not be 100 words, but it will be relatively short. Those of you who are here attending your first synod and recently received your Book of Reports might wonder why the first 272 pages are devoted to committees called the Representative Church Body and the Standing Committee. Surely one committee is sufficient to keep the administration, ministry and mission of the Church of Ireland working between General Synods?

Page 5 of the Book of Reports states that the Representative Church Body in law is the charitable trustee or trust corporation. Therefore, it is concerned with investments, property, stipends and pensions, the allocation of funds and the archives of the Church of Ireland. The Standing Committee is tasked with continuing the work of the General Synod between its annual meetings. It is concerned with the working and outreach of our Church and with addressing issues of importance to the Church and wider society as they emerge. It is not as simple as to suggest that one group is purely responsible for the relatively dull management and trust matters and with prudently trying to hang on to resources and the other group with the more exciting real work of the Church. That would be to do both committees a disservice. While each has a distinct role and responsibilities, they are two sides of the same coin. In recent years both have worked together in creative ways to free up resources for the mission of the Church. An example of this is the liberation of some funds from the Church Fabric Fund to be used on creative church projects at local level.

The membership of the RCB is to be found on pages 6 and 7. All sixty members are drawn from every diocese in equal measure. We are an all-Ireland Church and so this committee is

made up of all the bishops, as well as elected clergy and lay people from every part of our island. We sit, deliberate and work together, to provide resources in accordance with our responsibilities as charitable trustees, to further the mission and ministry of the Church of Ireland in all its activities.

All of us in this Synod are aware of the additional standards that are required of us, both north and south, in our daily lives. The new General Data Protection Regulation means that members who have been involved in sports clubs for many years now have to fill in new forms in relation to the data held on them by the club. Charities regulation has imposed new standards requiring all charities to be completely open and transparent in relation to their fundraising activities and the allocation of all funds raised by them. Schools and youth organisations have a host of policies and protocols in place to protect children. Groups who are involved in the life of vulnerable adults have the same requirements being placed upon them. Insurance concerns, health and safety statements, heritage legislation are important to any individual or group that has historic or other properties accessed by the general public. This is a fact of life. Increased regulation and supervision, though it places additional demands on us all, is so be welcomed. The Church, because of the nature of our activities, must consider all these issues too.

To this end the RCB has provided a comprehensive collection of parish resources, to help clergy and select vestries as well as any interested individual, to chart their way through these kinds of issues. There is a section specifically for select vestries and parish treasurers. We often have responsibility for historic buildings and churches, and so will find help and guidance in the 'Land and Buildings' section. HR issues, child protection matters and policies regarding legacies to the Church are also available. Since last year a new section has been opened called 'Hot Topics'. Currently under this section is information on the General Data Protection Regulation, environmental sustainability as well as other topics that are of current interest from time to time. I can only speak from my own experience, but as someone who comes up against a myriad of issues, which my predecessors as clergy would never have concerned themselves, I am very grateful for this resource section. It won't answer every complex situation, but it gives you a framework for addressing them. It has also been very helpful in providing guidance to people coming into the life of our Church who not cradle Anglicans, giving them the basic vocabulary of our administrative structures. Last year in my parish someone was elected to the select vestry for the first time. He grew up in another Christian tradition. The night after the Easter general vestry, he asked for information as to

what his new role and responsibilities were within the Church. I gave him the link to the Church of Ireland resource page which he found very helpful.

During the past year the RCB staff travelled to meet people in a variety of locations to run seminars on some important topics. I know that those who attended were very impressed at the professional and helpful presentations. I would like to thank the staff for all they did to facilitate these and to pay tribute to all 1,500 people who attended. The numbers involved are very large. It is clear there are people across every diocese who take their responsibilities seriously.

Jeffrey Archer had a limit of 100 words. I set myself a limit of ten times that. So I'll end now as I reach it exactly, at 1,000 words!