

**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

**REPORT 2020**

**1. Membership (March 2019)**

<i>House of Bishops</i> The Rt Rev Michael Burrows (Chair)	<i>Standing Committee</i> Rev Stephen Farrell
<i>General Synod - Clerical</i> Ven Terence Scott Rev Ruth Jackson Noble Rev Anne Skuse	<i>Pensions Board</i> Ms Judith Peters
<i>General Synod - Lay</i> Mrs Ruth Galbraith Mrs Heather Carson Captain George Newell	<i>The Representative Church Body</i> Ms Hazel Corrigan Ven Leslie Stevenson
<i>Director of Theological Institute</i> Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott	<i>Honorary Secretaries</i> Rev Canon Gillian Wharton
<i>Co-opted</i> Rev Barry Forde Vacant	<i>Central Director of Ordinands</i> Rev Canon David Gillespie

**2. Terms of Reference**

The Commission on Ministry was established by the General Synod in 1996. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Commission makes recommendations concerning Christian ministry, both lay and ordained. This includes the deployment of stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy appropriate to the requirements of the Church of Ireland in the future. Matters relating to ministry may be referred to the Commission by the archbishops and bishops, the Standing Committee and the Representative Church Body.

**3. Summary**

The Commission has concentrated in the last twelve months on the following topics:

- nurturing vocations;
- complaints, disciplinary procedure, and the resolution of disputes;

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- lay ministry and lay spirituality;
- Boards of Nomination membership and procedure;
- support for non-parochial posts and posts other than incumbencies.

### **Commission on Ministry retreats**

As reported to last year's General Synod, the Commission is exploring and facilitating the demand across the Church for retreats for both clergy and lay people. In November 2019, the Commission on Ministry held its third Advent retreat. "Restoring the Woven Cord" was led by Canon Michael Mitton, in Dromantine, near Newry, over three days, and consisted of reflective talks, periods of silence, times of sharing and social interaction. It was attended by clergy and laity from different parts of the island of Ireland, and from the UK, with attendance slightly higher than last year. Responses from participants indicate that this time for prayer and reflection is valued and restorative. The organisation of the Advent retreat feeds into the Commission's work on nurturing vocations, encouraging lay ministry, and responding to lay spirituality. The Commission will run its fourth Advent retreat in November 2020, in Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre, in Co Laois.

### **Nurturing vocations – Vocations Sunday and Vocations Retreat**

The Commission held its first "Vocations Sunday" on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2019. Funding was generously provided by the Church Fabric & Development Fund and the Priorities Fund Committee. As reported last year, this day was designed to prompt reflection on the wide and evolving forms of ministry, and to lead people to identify vocations in members of their congregations, or perhaps in themselves. The Commission's leaflets and Vocations video (available to watch on the Church of Ireland's YouTube page) received very positive responses, and are resources that will be used this year and in the future.

In February 2020, the Commission ran an Exploring Vocations Retreat, in Dromantine Conference Centre. Twenty-two participants from ten dioceses attended the retreat, which was designed to allow participants to hear others talk about their experiences, to learn what vocation might mean for them personally and practically and, above all, to allow God to speak to them. Those attending were at various stages of exploration of God's call in their lives: some had embarked on the first step of the pathway to stipendiary ministry, others were exploring Ordained Local Ministry, and others were seeking initial advice and support as they begin to consider their vocation to serve God. The Rt Rev Dr John Perumbalath, Bishop of Bradwell, led several of the sessions. The Bishop has years of experience of helping others to discern God's

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call: through his ministry as a priest in various contexts, he has served as a Vocations Advisor or an Ordinations Advisor or Bishop's Examiner for ordinands, and accompanied many candidates from the parishes he served in their vocational journey. The Bishop was an inspired choice as leader, and helped the group to cohere in friendship and exploration of vocation. Members of the Commission and staff from the Church of Ireland Theological Institute and Church of Ireland House spoke at other sessions, and led question and discussion sessions. The agenda included time for silence, prayer, and personal reflection, and for conversation with the Retreat chaplain, Rev Danielle McCullagh (Diocese of Connor). The responses and feedback received on the Retreat was overwhelmingly positive, and the Commission hopes that such an event will become a regular occurrence in the life of the Church.

Vocations Sunday 2020 will celebrate particular forms of accredited lay ministry, and the Commission on Ministry is in the process of producing a second Vocations video and other resources with that focus, and with reference to Ordained Local Ministry, generously assisted by the Church Fabric & Development Fund (an application has also been made to the Priorities Fund).

### **Lay Ministry and lay spirituality**

The Commission has begun to explore ways in it may address the challenges of helping Church members with intentional discipleship, and with celebrating lay ministry. At its residential meeting in January, there was an enriching and lengthy pooling of ideas about lay ministry and ways in which it may be encouraged. This work continued at its March meeting, and has provided the Commission with a clear agenda for its next triennium to concentrate on celebrating and empowering lay ministry and its rootedness in baptism. This will form a significant part of its report to Synod in 2021. As mentioned above, accredited lay ministry will be the emphasis of Vocations Sunday this year.

### **Boards of Nomination Procedure**

The Commission has explored ways in which best practice may be recommended for Boards of Nomination. This work is now brought to the General Synod in the form of two bills – one on the necessity for gender balance on the Board and one to ensure that the diocesan lay nominator cannot serve on the Board of Nomination for the parish in which s/he lives or is an accustomed member (i.e. there must always be a supplemental lay nominator). The Commission has also produced a set of guidelines. These are aimed at making the Constitutional process for appointments consonant with the modern courtesy of timely communication and encouraging, where possible, the holding of meetings at appropriate times to facilitate those nominators who work full-time in paid employment. In addition, some concern has been expressed to the

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Commission about the present three-month absolute timescale for making a nomination. The Commission will consult with the House of Bishops about these guidelines during the autumn.

### **Disciplinary procedure**

During the year, a sub-group of the Commission (which includes members with legal expertise) has carefully considered some ways in which the processes provided for by Chap. VIII of the Constitution, and the relevant section of the Dignity in Church Life Charter, may be adjusted to assist dioceses, parishes, and clergy that find themselves in situations requiring a process of conciliation or mediation, and those situations in which reconciliation is not possible. The work of the sub-group emphasises a need for transparency and for timeframes to be introduced to the process; this will help the diocese, the clergyperson, and the parish involved. The Commission is aware that difficult situations may arise for clergy because of the behaviour of members of a parish, as well as for a parish because of the behaviour of the member of clergy. In either case, if reconciliation fails, it is desirable to have a clear timeline for the Complaints Process. The Commission's work also involves careful and judicious attempts to explore and define what "neglect" of duties means for an office-holder, as some measure of appropriate clarity will assist clergy and parishioners in the relatively rare situations where difficulties arise. The recommendations of the Commission will be brought to the Standing Committee and the House of Bishops in the summer for advice and feedback, and a further report will be made to next year's Synod.

### **Support for and definition of non-parochial posts**

At last year's General Synod, the Commission reported its introductory conversations about the lack of Constitutional framework for non-parochial posts. The lack creates several tensions for the holders of such posts, from lack of proper inclusion in Church life by means of representation on synods, to difficulties with safeguarding, charity registration, and other requirements of governance. Such lack of inclusion may also affect the sustainability of new forms of ministry. The Commission's work in this area has been overtaken by its focus on the complaints and disciplinary process, but those involved have identified that chaplaincies, and posts concerned with Covenant relationships, are particular areas in need of regulation. The Commission on Ministry will continue its work on the topic over its next triennium, in conjunction with the work of other bodies, such as the Pioneer Ministry Working Group, and will have recommendations to make at the General Synod of 2021.

### **SEARCH on Ministry**

As reported last year, members of the Commission participated in the SEARCH colloquium on ministry at Trinity College Dublin, in March 2019. The autumn and the

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spring volumes of SEARCH explore the topics raised there, with a contribution by Rev Barry Forde (“Beyond the Parish: affirming new models of ministry in the Church”) in Vol 42.3.

### **Mid-ministry vocation programme for clergy**

This residential event is provided every second year. Unfortunately, in 2019, several attendees had at short notice to withdraw, and this led to the cancellation of the event itself. The Commission wishes to thank Ven Terry Scott for his hard work and care in organising the event in 2019 and in previous years. It has been agreed that the Commission will re-consider the programme, which, perhaps because it has been well-attended in previous years, has now reached the majority of clergy at whom it is aimed. The Commission will carry out research into what clergy want from such an event, will consider feedback from those who have attended, and will run it again in a future year with a new focus – perhaps on sustaining and re-invigorating vocation.

### **Retirement planning for clergy and spouses**

The Commission, with the support of the RCB, runs a pre-retirement course every second year. The 2020 event will take place in the City North Hotel, Co Meath on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> May. The course addresses practical issues for clergy and spouses, and enables reflection on the sustaining of intellectual and spiritual life in retirement.

### **Membership**

The Chair of the Commission on Ministry, the Rt Rev Michael Burrows, and two of its General Synod Clerical Members, Ven Terry Scott and Ven Leslie Stevenson, have served for three triennia, and, thus, are not eligible for re-appointment. The members wish to acknowledge the generous and inclusive chairing with which they have been provided by the Bishop, and to thank him for his commitment to the Commission. Sincere thanks are also offered by the members to the two Archdeacons for their valuable contributions and their hard work and energy: Archdeacon Scott, in particular, for his work in running the mid-career courses, and Archdeacon Stevenson for his exploration of what became OLM. The Commission also wishes to thank Mr Philip McKinley, who stepped down from its membership to focus on his full-time training for stipendiary ministry, and Rev Anne Skuse, whose new role in chaplaincy has led to her decision not to be re-appointed to the Commission. Their contributions to the work of the Commission have been very valuable.

To fill the vacancies in its membership for clerical members of General Synod, the Commission is bringing a motion to Synod to ask for the election of new members from among a short list of clergy who are interested in its work and able to attend its meetings. Both lay and clerical Synod members may vote to fill the three vacancies.

### **Previous triennia of work**

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In looking back over its work in recent years, the Commission is thankful for an enjoyable and productive period, in which some of the ideas that began in its midst have been taken up by the wider Church and have begun to bear fruit. It has been an enjoyable and productive period for the Commission. In addition to the topics mentioned previously, the Commission has explored Ordained Local Ministry, carried out some early work on Pioneer Ministry, improved (through General Synod) the conditions of part-time ministry, has considered a ministerial development review, investigated the challenges and opportunities of rural ministry, and, as reported last year, has looked at tenure, its work on which the Chair has reported to the House of Bishops.

### **Thanks**

The Commission offers its thanks to Dr Catherine Smith for her work as its Secretary. It wishes sincerely to thank Ms Antoinette Doherty (Legal Department, Church of Ireland House) for her time and advice given to its work on the Disciplinary Process. Thanks are also due to Mr Eddie Hallissey (HR Manager, Church House) for his continued reports to the Commission.