

Commission on Ministry Report

Proposer – Ven Barry Forde

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Chair, members of Synod,

It's a pleasure to present the report of the Commission on Ministry. It is a short report and I shall do my level best to honour that with a succinct speech.

Notwithstanding this the range of work that has been considered, and could be undertaken by the Commission is vast, and so I wish to draw your attention to some areas of focus.

First, three Bills are before Synod this year arising out of the work of the Commission. As this is recorded before their first and second readings I have no way of knowing how they have been received. However, the intent behind the Bills is good, aspiring to improve practice relating to Boards of Nomination. It seems obvious to the Commission that a diocesan lay nominator should not sit on a Board as a diocesan representative when it is their parish seeking to appoint a new Incumbent. Further, it seems obvious that the Constitution as it currently stands is somewhat archaic in terms of the timeliness of communication to those nominated and those not nominated as the case may be. We hope that Synod agrees.

It also seems obvious that having a gender balance on the Board through the composition of parochial nominators will be to the betterment, in particular, of representing the needs of the parish, and in meeting potential incumbents who may be male or female. Once again, the Commission hopes that Synod agrees.

Second, Synod will take some comfort in knowing that the Commission has not assumed for itself the power to reshape the Christian year and in fact the fourth Advent Retreat was held online on 28th November 2020 (and not 28th September as in the Report). The impact of Covid has, in some instances, proved the idiom that necessity can be the mother of invention, and this year saw an increase in attendees, numbering 50, as perhaps those who in previous years felt they could not travel to such a retreat, took the opportunity to engage online. The feedback was very positive and we look forward to facilitating a further retreat, once again online, with the Rev Ruth Patterson of Restoration Ministries returning to lead those who will virtually gather.

Third, in the time that has passed since the Report was prepared, the Commission has lost the services of Canon David Gillespie, who has stepped down from his role as Central Director of Ordinands. Along with Archdeacons Terry Scott and Leslie Stevenson, whose terms of membership have come to an end

and to whom the Commission extends its gratitude, I wish to take the opportunity in particular to thank Canon Gillespie. The work of nurturing and encouraging the call to ordained ministry is critical across our parishes and dioceses. One feature of Canon Gillespie's tenure in particular was the 'It's Your Call' video to promote vocations, and that remains available on the Church of Ireland YouTube channel. The Commission commends it to DDOs, dioceses and parishes in promoting vocations, and looks forward to engaging with a new Central Director of Ordinands once appointed.

Finally, under future work members of Synod will see a list of potential activity that bears all the hallmarks of an infinity loop! The Commission has set time aside in January of next year for a residential to map out its work and priorities in the years that lie ahead. We have, for quite some time, been exploring the highly delicate issue of how to address situations when there is clearly a breakdown in relationships between rector and parish. When it might be said that the goal achieved at a successful Board of Nomination when the minds of the cleric nominated, parochial and diocesan representatives, and bishop all meet with one accord, no longer remain in accord. Unresolved conflict is to the detriment of all concerned. We have spent quite some time in conversation on the increasing compliance demands on parishes and clergy, as it seems that more and more time is consumed by administration rather than the ministry for which clergy are ordained and the mission to which parishes are called. In this past year we have reflected on the impact of Covid on parishes and those in ordained ministry. It has been a highly stressful time for all – bishops, clergy, parishioners, central church administrators.

We have been thankful for the faithfulness of so many people, inspired by new found creativity, but are also cognisant of the stresses caused. Isolation. Financial concerns. Undertaking risk assessments. Being unable to undertake pastoral visitation in person. These have weighed heavy, and whilst the Commission will reflect on this further, we are very aware of our own limitations as such things get worked out person-to-person, within and across parishes and dioceses. Being mindful of the faithful work of so many in parish ministry, we are also keen to support and help shape how the Church of Ireland might encourage existing and yet to be discovered new ways of being and doing ministry. For some time the Church has spoken of and used the term 'pioneer', and we look forward to seeing pioneer ministry and pioneer ministers – lay and ordained – grow and play a full role in the life of the church.

A short report. A lot of work. A speech that hopefully introduced the former and did not feel too much like the latter.

Chair, members of Synod. Thank you for listening.