

General Synod 2022

Commission on Ministry

Proposer: Ms Hazel Corrigan

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Again, over the last year we were disappointed that the Commission on Ministry's activities were somewhat curtailed by the pandemic, but now that restrictions have been eased, we look forward to an eventful year ahead.

The Commission's fifth Advent retreat, "One Step Too Far Away – One Breath Too Near", was held online last September and was led by the Rev Dr Ruth Patterson of Restoration Ministries. We were delighted with the warm feedback which was received from the 40 attendees who joined from not only Ireland but from Canada and the United States

The Commission would welcome feedback and responses from members of the General Synod on two aspects of its work over the last year.

Firstly, rural ministry which is a new project that the group has started focusing on. We are very aware that the struggles of an aging congregation and a decline in volunteers are not only having an impact in rural parishes but also in urban areas. The challenges that parishes have faced over the last two years will also have financial ramifications that will be with us for some years to come.

And while we acknowledge there are challenges the Commission is also aware of the many positives of rural mission and ministry, the out-of-the-box thinking to ensure ministry was relayed to everyone's homes during the most severe lockdown of our lives to the superb church buildings and associated graveyards located throughout the country, to the ministry of clergy, OLM and readers in rural areas who are from time to time invited to every local community event from ploughing championships to the opening of a supermarket.

Secondly, we are asking for feedback on the Report on Women in Ministry, and I draw your attention to the report on page 340. We were very enthusiastic when the Standing Committee referred this work to the Commission. This is a ministry which is important to every area of our church and therefore this subgroup was established and report back to the Commission on its work. The group heard a presentation from Emma Purser who was competing some research for her masters. She surveyed 50% of women in ministry and explored the experiences that they attributed to their gender.

The group have also had discussions on part time ministry and supporting women in training for ordained ministry.

Mr Eddie Hallissey also met and informed the group of policies which the RB are in the process of drawing up relating to maternity leave, paternity leave and adoptive leave.

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Another area that is being exploring is the burden of compliance and administration on parishes as we all struggle with an overload of paperwork. The Commission continues to work on ways that clergy and parishes can receive support to cope with the ever-increasing procedures. Many parishes speak of the lack of expertise and time that is available to them to ensure that these issues are complied with at the required standard.

The Commission recommends that this administrative burden cannot continue to be handed down to parishes or dioceses but advises that greater assistance and expertise will be required going forward.