

General Synod 2022

Representative Church Body Report

Secunder: Archdeacon Terry Scott

Check Against Delivery · Embargo Until Delivery

Your Grace, Members of Synod,

It gives me great pleasure to second this year's RCB report – especially since we are meeting in what is my 'home-town.' I was 'born and bred' in this great city, growing up less than a mile and a half from this building, on what my wife continues to refer to as 'the wrong side of the Lisburn Road' – that's the side that doesn't intersect with Malone!

One of my earliest memories of this part of town goes back to Christmas 1968. At that time 'The Odeon' Cinema was just across the road (where the FitzWilliam Hotel and the extension of the Opera House now sit). The, what we would now call 'blockbuster,' film of that December was 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang'. As I was very, very young at the time I don't remember much about it! I do recall however that the song of the same name includes this refrain:

'Near, far, in our motor car - what a happy time we'll spend.

Bang Bang Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

Our fine four fendered friend.

Bang Bang Chitty Chitty Bang Bang

Our fine four fendered friend.'

Since we last gathered together 'in-person,' in Derry/Londonderry, just a fortnight short of three years ago, we've all spent much less time than we could ever have imagined, travelling here and there in 'our fine four-fendered friends!' How we as Church have met and worked has changed immensely. And maybe that's been not entirely a bad thing. As restrictions continue to ease there is a very real sense that we are slowly but surely emerging into a new future. The phrase 'back to normal' is one often used – however it needs to be taken with a bit of a health warning, as not everything about the 'old normal' was either good or healthy.

Over the past two years we've all become much more familiar with the wonders of technology. From recording and streaming 'Online' Services to conducting meetings and other events over Zoom.

We've learnt that we can do church in a different way. The staff of the RB have continued to serve parishes and dioceses with the same efficiency, effectiveness and renowned courtesy using the wonders of remote technology. At diocesan and central church level, committees have continued to exercise good governance, and a whole spectrum of meetings have taken place, without needing to jump into our 'fine four-fendered friends' to travel and be physically present on every occasion.

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Ultimately there is no substitute for being together ‘face to face’ in the same space. It’s how friendships and relationships are formed and deepened. But we’ve discovered that we don’t need to meet like that on every occasion. A ‘mixed economy’ of both ‘remote’ and ‘in person’ meetings is surely the way forward.

We have learnt that a degree of remote working brings with it benefits not just in terms of people ‘time and cost,’ but also has a positive impact environmentally. In that context the approval of the RCB Staff ‘Right to Request Flexible Working policy’ is surely a step in the right direction. It will allow staff to work up to four days a week from home, depending on role and department needs. The Executive Committee will receive a review of the operation of this policy in a year’s time – we hope that it will provide an effective alternative way of working, building upon the lessons learnt over the past two years, as well as reducing the environmental impact of the daily commute.

The ongoing challenges of the climate crisis continue to influence the decision making of the Executive Committee. In that vein we were delighted, through the Church Fabric and Development Fund, to support the ‘Irish Churches Creation Care Conference’ held at Dromantine last month. A link to view the various talks and contributions is currently available in the ‘News’ section of the Church of Ireland website and is well worth a visit. In addition to supporting events such as this the RB will continue to provide guidance and advice to encourage parishes to make responsible decisions as we all transition to a low carbon economy.

Finally, and wearing my parish rector’s hat, I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my gratitude and thanks for the initiative which saw each parish, the length and breadth of this island, receive a Covid 19 grant earlier this year. The impact of, and ongoing effects from Covid, will be with us for many years to come. Some are financial and in that context the funds received were most welcome. However, perhaps the even greater benefit was that here was an incidence of central church being able to help, albeit in a small way, every Church of Ireland community throughout this land. That sense of being part of a bigger family, bound together in love, can only be strengthened by such actions. Its ultimate value and worth went well beyond the actual monetary amounts received.

Yor Grace, it gives me great pleasure to second the report of the RCB.