

Mr Michael Johnston
Presentation Speech: Dignity in Church Life Policies
Embargo Until Delivery • Check Against Delivery

Your Grace, in 2015 synod passed the statutes adopting the Dignity in Church Life Charter authorising the Representative Church Body to develop policies, regulations and rules to be approved by Standing Committee of General Synod, with these policies, regulations, rules or amendments to be presented to the next General Synod.

It is my pleasure to present two new 'Dignity in Church Life Policies' to synod.

The first policy is the Clergy Permanent Health Insurance policy with associated guidelines. The current Clergy Illness Policy which was approved by General Synod in 2015, states that:

“Members of clergy who are absent from office due to a long-term illness shall be paid their full stipend for a period of 12 months while they are unable to perform the duties of office. Thereafter, the member of the clergy may receive payment based on Permanent Health Insurance (PHI) and/or membership of the Clergy Pensions Fund.”

Since 2015, the clergy who are members of the closed Defined Benefit Clergy Pensions Fund have been able to avail of the ill-health provisions set out in Chapter 14 of the Constitution but there is no ill-health protection for clergy who are not members of that pension scheme. The Clergy Permanent Health Insurance policy seeks to address this lack of cover by making this new policy applicable to clergy who are members of the Clergy Defined Contribution pension schemes.

So how will it work? The application process will begin in the dioceses, and from an RCB perspective will be managed by the RCB HR Manager. A member of the clergy who seeks to avail of the scheme will undergo a medical assessment, a redacted copy of which will be received and reviewed by a clergy PHI panel consisting of the bishop of the diocese, the chair of the Stipends Committee, and the Chief Officer. Once a member of clergy is accepted into the scheme then they will resign their incumbency, vacate the rectory, and then be licenced within the dioceses. It is important that they be licenced in the diocese in order that they can continue to contribute to the Defined Contribution pension scheme and hence retain their death-in-service entitlements.

During the term of their illness and until normal retirement age, the cleric will receive 80% of the relevant Minimum Approved Stipend less pension contributions and other deductions.

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The funding for the payments will come from the Clergy Ministry and Protection Fund which is itself funded by the Clergy Ministry and Protection Fund levy.

An Implementation Oversight Committee has been tasked with monitoring this policy as it rolls out. I expect that as a result of this some minor amendments are likely to be presented for approval of the Standing Committee and subsequently, if approved by Standing Committee, they will be presented to General Synod in 2024.

The second policy is the Clergy Parental Sabbatical policy with its associated guidelines. This policy introduces three new sub-policies to support clergy on the birth or adoption of a child.

- Maternity sabbatical of up to 26 weeks
- Paternity sabbatical for up to 2 weeks, and
- Adoptive sabbatical for up to 26 weeks.

During these periods of time, the member of the clergy continues to receive their full stipend and allowances and will continue to live in their glebe house.

The diocese will arrange appropriate cover during the period of the sabbatical and the RCB will reimburse the dioceses, subject to agreed limits, from the Clergy Ministry and Protection Fund.

The RCB will be preparing policy and guideline documentation for inclusion in the Dignity in Church Life folders, and will provide clergy briefings over Zoom, prior to the expected implementation of the policies on the 1 July this year.

I acknowledge that some dioceses have already provide a level of support similar to these policies but I believe that these new church wide policies will bring these benefits across all dioceses.

In conclusion I would like to thank the many people who have been involved in creating these policies. The RB staff for their work in drafting and redrafting and to those from a number of committees who have taken the time to review, discuss and then provide constructive input to create the policies that we are reviewing here today.

I therefore propose that these two new Dignity in Church Life policies be adopted by General Synod.