

COMMISSION ON CHURCH BUILDINGS

REPORT 2008

COMMISSIONERS

Mr WF Baker (Chairman)
Mr G Bradley
Rev Canon JR Howard

Rev NJ Hughes
Ven SR McBride
Very Rev JMG Sirr

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission on Church Buildings was established by statute of the General Synod Chapter I of 1986.

Section 3 of the Statute states:

- (1) The diocesan council of any diocese may request the commissioners to schedule for enquiry in regard to the number of churches used for public worship the whole or any substantial area or areas of such diocese, and the commissioners after consideration shall determine whether to accede to such request, and shall notify the diocesan council and the Representative Body of its determination.
- (2) Where a diocese or part of it has been scheduled under subsection (1), the bishop, the diocesan council, the parochial authorities, and the Representative Body on the request of the commissioners shall furnish to the commissioners any information which may appear to the commissioners to be necessary to enable them to consider and determine any matter referred to them by this statute for their consideration and determination.
- (3) The commissioners shall not exercise any of their powers under this statute in any diocese except upon the request of the diocesan council.

Section 6 sub-section 3 and 4 states:

- (3) The commissioners may recommend to the Representative Body, and the Representative Body may make, grants from the fund for the demolition of churches which have been closed, whether before or after the enactment of this statute and whether in accordance with the provisions of this statute or by other lawful means.
- (4) Without prejudice to the provisions of sub-section (3) above, the commissioners may also recommend to the Representative Body, and the Representative Body may make, grants from the fund:
 - (a) Towards the development of churches which remain open in a benefice following a final determination, provided artefacts used in such development come from a church which was closed subsequent to that final determination;

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- (b) Towards making safe ruined or redundant church buildings which are either of historic or visual significance in a local landscape.

2. COMMISSIONERS

Mr J Ashenhurst and Mrs DM Burns have resigned as Commissioners and the Commission wishes to record its deep appreciation of their work and dedication over many years.

The Commission noted with regret the death during the year of Very Rev TR Moore who gave long and faithful service as a Commissioner.

3. MEETINGS

The Commission held one meeting.

4. GRANTS

The following grants were approved:-

- (a) Ahamlish (Elphin) – grant of €15,000 towards the cost of the demolition of the Church to ground level and the removal of all debris from the site.
- (b) Fuerty (Elphin) - grant of €5,000 towards the cost of re-pointing the tower, treating ivy growth, capping the walls and pinning of the outer tower of the Church.

A grant of €3,500 approved in 2006 was not taken up for Castlerickard (Meath) due to the overall cost of the proposed works to the walls of the Church being prohibitive.

5. GENERAL SYNOD ALLOCATION

No General Synod allocation was made for the current year.

The amount to credit is €30,369.

6. RECOMMENDATION

In the light of questions raised at last year's General Synod; the future of the Commission was considered at some length. Its terms of reference and method of operation are set out in Section 1 above. Since its establishment, however, a very different statutory context exists and the stringent provisions of heritage legislation would now have a large impact on any future decisions regarding church buildings. The days of removing roofs and capping walls of redundant churches are gone, making it much more difficult to dispose of such premises and potentially presenting parishes and dioceses with much greater problems in the event of closure. Should the Commission ever be asked to act again, those concerned might reasonably

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expect a more comprehensive service, including advice as to the future of redundant churches rather than a simple recommendation for closure.

The Commission is also aware that heritage funding is sometimes applied for and granted in respect of buildings which have very small or, in some cases, almost no congregations and which could reasonably be regarded as not being essential for public worship or for the witness of the Church. A mechanism for overall Church liaison with heritage and grant-giving bodies would seem to be desirable.

In view of the radically changed circumstances and the fact that the Commission has not been asked to exercise its powers to review the number of churches required for public worship in any diocese since 1988, the Commissioners are of the opinion that its usefulness to the Church must now be called into question. Its terms of reference are now outdated and it seems unlikely that it would be asked to act again in its original capacity. Therefore it is recommended that the Commission be disbanded and a resolution to this effect will be brought to this year's General Synod. As a body established by Statute Chapter I of 1986, it will be necessary to bring a Bill to the Synod next year to wind it up and the Representative Church Body would be requested to take the necessary action in this regard. It is further recommended that the present grant-making powers of the Commission be carried out by the Representative Church Body, presumably through one of its committees, and that the unexpended allocation of €10,369 held by the Commission following the allocation of the above mentioned grants be transferred back to that body.

It is suggested that the matters referred to above relating to church buildings in general be considered by the Representative Church Body and that any action considered necessary in this regard be initiated.

7. RESOLUTION FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE GENERAL SYNOD

That the Report of the Commission on Church Buildings be received.

That the unexpended allocation held by the Commission be transferred back to the Representative Church Body and that the Representative Church Body be requested to present a Bill to the General Synod of 2009 to disband the Commission.

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