

GENERAL SYNOD 2009

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT

Proposed by Canon John McCullagh, Diocese of Glendalough

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace the length of the report of the Standing Committee to the Synod is at least that of a long novella or a short novel. It is unlikely to win the Booker prize for literature though the Jockey Club might well use it in place of lead weights for a handicap at Punchestown or Down Royal.

It is merely a summary of the work of the Committee which acts for the Synod between meetings of the Synod itself and anyone attending Standing Committee more the first time might well wonder how anything gets done. Visualise with me for a moment Boardroom 1 with the bishops gathered around the table (10), Yourself and his grace of Dublin (2) honorary secretaries (4) synod officer and assistant secretary that totals 18 but wait add 7 co-options and 4 representatives from each diocese, most of whom have their backs to the wall and the total stands at 73 and to avoid the odd number add in the Chief Officer. Isn't it a marvel and perhaps a tribute to the guidance of the Spirit that so much work gets done during the six meetings each year.

It would be easy to go on and create little word pictures of some participants and even to give an impression that the work of the Standing Committee is distant from the man and woman in the pew and from the average parochial cleric. But think of the prayers in your parish church each Sunday. You pray for peace in a troubled world and for those who are homeless, hungry and terrified and your prayers take concrete form in the work of the Bishops' Appeal most notably in the grant to the hospital in Gaza during the recent Hamas Israeli conflict. Not a political judgement but a reflection of Christ standing with the violated who live not merely on the margins of society but on the very edge of existence.

We pray too for the witness of the Church universal, a church driven by dissension and struggling to discern what God would have us do. The brief note on Lambeth and the ongoing work of the Covenant shows the Church seriously engaging with how best to express the core beliefs of faith in the context of evolving social conditions and new understandings of relationships. As a church we are privileged that the Archbishop of Dublin is one of those who have been striving to quarry out a statement, a covenant and code of practice to which, it is hoped, all Anglicans can commit in renewed fraternity. The Standing Committee has given much thought to the mode of reception of the proposed Covenant and has suggested how it might best be formulated with a “focus on conciliation” while providing for “effective mediation”. It is a glib statement that the first item on the agenda of any political movement is “the Split” but as a province we must strive not only to avoid schism which is a scandal in the face of Christ but to bring the flock into the one fold.

We pray for unity among Christians and such prayers for all Christian communities take positive form in the work of the Covenant Council which deals with the growing links with the Methodist Church. The work is painstaking and careful because we want that relationship to be realistically honest but above all fruitful and lasting to the glory of God.

Inevitably any report is a snapshot in time and the work goes on. The Legal Advisory Committee has now responded to the queries on p 167 and 168. I won't attempt to address the issue on the special bill as it will be addressed in that debate but it is important to welcome the firm response in relation to Safeguarding Trust. In the Republic we know the flaws of a two tier health system and we could not tolerate such a system for child protection – every child and every worker deserves the same care and security whether in a small or large parish and there can be no short cuts or an expectation of different standards.

The work of Standing Committee is a continuum and last year there was reference to the invitation to the bodies which report to the Synod to consider how they might operate

more effectively. Members will see that this has borne fruit with a proposal from three bodies – Church in Society, the Board of Social Action NI and the Board of Responsibility to restructure with a single overarching committee. This will provide for the Church to both express its social theology and its social action through a single body provisionally entitled the Board for Social Theology in Action. The proposal that will come before you is necessarily an interim one as one body is a limited company. It is to be commended, as in the past the Church has been inclined to spin off successful bodies as independent entities, whereas this proposal provides not only for synergy but also to build stronger links with independent groupings such as PACT.

The sense of theology in action also comes in the report of the Bishop's appeal which looks at its work in the context of an applied study of verses from the letter to the Ephesians and challenges us all, in thought provoking ways, as to how we can support the work.

A key part of the work has been the development of this weekend Synod and the encouragement for more focused debate. With that in mind I would express thanks to the honorary secretaries, acknowledging the indefatigable work of the Canon Ellis of the Gazette who stepped down from the role during the year and express gratitude to the overburdened staff which resources the work and commend the report to your consideration.