

GENERAL SYNOD 2009

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE

Seconded by Mr Peter Hamill, Diocese of Connor

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Recently Brian O'Driscoll the Irish rugby captain was quoted as saying 'Knowledge is knowing that the tomato is a fruit, but wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad'

The members of Standing Committee bring both a great deal of knowledge and wisdom to make their decisions. As my colleague has already mentioned there is a lot to read in the Standing Committee report and I wish to touch on some key issues.

Standing Committee has recognised the need for supporting children's ministry in parishes, and to this end, there is a meeting at the end of this month to begin to explore the issues relevant to this. It is at the Church's peril that it ignores children's ministry. If we fail to support parishes' work with children we do not have a church for this generation of children. The Church of Ireland has, quite rightly, put resources into youth ministry but also needs a strategy to centrally support children's ministry. We have put resources and energy into ensuring children are safe, and the work of the education officers and their teams has been invaluable in the church. We must find fresh resources and ideas to support children's ministry and enable our churches to be child-friendly places of worship, and communities that promote family life. The economic climate may dictate the rate of progress in putting financial resources into children's ministry but we

must still have it as a priority. I remind the house of the much used phrase “The Church is only one generation from extinction”

Standing Committee has welcomed the final report of the Hard Gospel project, *‘Living with difference a reality check’*. Although the main project has come to an end, it is hoped that it will mark a new beginning in the way the church works. Evidence of the report’s implementation can already be seen in the restructuring of committees. The spirit of the project continues through the Hard Gospel Implementation Group. As a church we must lead the way in society in promoting equality and celebrating difference. The Hard Gospel project has challenged us across all levels and Standing Committee looks forward to enabling its proposals to be taken forward.

Over the past few years, in the North in particular, Government funding for new initiatives has tended to be short-term, and the issue for funders has been how to ensure that a project is sustained for the long-term. Standing Committee initially supported the Parish Development Group for three years and due to the success of this programme the project has been extended for a further two years. We recognise that there is no quick fix for issues, especially when undertaking change and development in a parish. Any significant change in the church will be over the long-term. Twenty-five parishes are now part of the development programme. We must learn the lesson from this that nothing will happen unless we ‘have a go’, step out in faith and experiment with new ideas.

Standing Committee is keen to enable growth in the church and once again, through the Priorities Fund, has approved a large range of grants throughout the Church. Standing Committee was encouraged by the depth, variety and creativity found in the projects proposed for funding by Priorities. Standing Committee acknowledged the skills required in putting forward a proposal to Priorities Fund and would encourage those undertaking projects from the Church to seek funding through this mechanism in the future. The Priorities Fund committee reported the need in applications to clearly express the outcome of the project. They would encourage those who wish to apply for funds for renovation projects to not only look at the impact on the building being renovated but also on the impact of the work on the life of the parish and wider community. In times of financial hardship it is encouraging that churches are showing new initiative and are not afraid to seek funding. We may have less money to work with but that should not stop us working at all.

In the Standing Committee report there are a range of groups represented and these include the disability working group, the parish development group, the broadcast committee, the internet committee, and the Bishop's appeal. The point is that the Church of Ireland is a wide-ranging body and in order to maintain and further develop such a body we need structure and a common purpose. Standing Committee is a body of action and also one that encourages others to action. I am sure some will have their disagreements with aspects of this report and they are entitled to them, but is it not encouraging that the Standing Committee is moving forward and making decisions.

Finally as a member of Standing Committee and a member of a Church wanting to change the world through the gospel of Christ, I would like to quote from the great philosopher of the 21st century, George W Bush.

"People that are really very weird can get into sensitive positions and have a tremendous impact on history."

Your grace, I have great pleasure in seconding the report of Standing Committee.