

**GENERAL SYNOD 2010**

**REPORT OF THE REPRESENTATIVE CHURCH BODY**

**Seconded by the Ven. David Pierpoint, Archdeacon of Dublin**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Your Grace,

In proposing the report of the RCB, Mr Gamble has highlighted the financial deficits in the 2009 accounts and the crisis faced by the Church in the coming year and into the future.

Who knows what may lie ahead? But for many here this morning his speech made for uncomfortable listening.

As members of General Synod, each one of us here has a duty to ensure that according to the opening paragraph of the RCB report (page 14 “Mission and Responsibility”) quote .....

An awesome responsibility indeed and one which I believe the various committees, which include Stipends, Allocations, Property etc., have taken seriously and for which they should be congratulated in taking the necessary steps especially in these financially challenged times, to ensure the future of the Church and the benefits which particularly we as clergy have enjoyed for many years. The Pensions Board as a committee of General Synod and for which the RCB is trustee, is also to be commended

for their valiant efforts to stabilise the Pensions Fund. But more of that in the report of The Pensions Board which follows later.

We are indebted to the many lay people who voluntarily give of their time and expertise to manage the financial and other resources of the church for all our benefit. Thank you to all who have contributed to this report and the other committee reports this year.

I do not wish to dwell on financial issues but I would like to point out one typo in the book of reports on page 28 dealing with Episcopal costs. The total gross figure for 2009 under the Republic of Ireland section should read €1,321,356 and not €21,356. Whether that needs to be corrected before the adoption of this report is taken I'm not sure, perhaps your assessor, archbishop may advise us on this matter?

Your Grace, most people in the C of I (elected members of General Synod or not) believe that every decision made on behalf of the Church is taken by the RCB as some executive power. This is far from the truth. There are certain legal constraints which are not always seen by others in the Church and that is why we meet as a Synod to enact policy and adopt decisions put forward by the various committees. The RCB is not free to do whatever it wants but is always subject to each one of us as elected members of our respective dioceses.

Back in 2002, Bishop Colton in seconding this report suggested that *“good administration with properly managed time, under-girded by adequate resources is*

*fundamental to the fluid working of a Church such as ours. Such creative use of administration, far from being a hindrance, can liberate us and our time for priorities of ministry, and facilitate us, therefore, in responding to God's call".* Well, with all due respects to Bishop Paul, and being a relatively new kid on the block (that's probably why I was landed with seconding this report) I disagree.

As far back as 2001, the General Synod book of reports stated that a temporary residence was acquired for the Bishop of Kilmore while the future of the Old See House and the purchase of a possible new one was being discussed. In 2002, we were informed it was hoped to reach a consensus as to the best use of the property. By 2003 further discussions were ongoing with the possibility of using the See House as sheltered accommodation which the 2004 report confirmed was going ahead subject to planning and grant aid, while in 2005 we were informed that there was insufficient support for such a project to proceed and that discussions between the diocese and the RCB would resume. In the 2006 report we were advised that it was hoped a final decision could be reached on the future of the property. Moving swiftly on to 2007, agreement was at last reached to sell the property sometime during that year! Well, low and behold it was sold during the autumn of 2007 and this was reported on in 2008 with plans for a new See House on a green field site to be developed that year. The 2009 report which is the subject of this year's discussion advises us that plans have been approved by the RCB and the application for planning permission for the project is in progress. Your grace, we have waited almost a decade and only now is something beginning to happen, maybe! I take my hat off to Bishop Clarke for his patience! Had we acted as agreed back in 2001

the diocese I believe, would have received a considerably greater amount for the old See House and quite possibly have had money over to invest after the new See House was built. I hesitate to even mention the See House in Armagh.

Our system of decision making (meeting as we do four times a year) is archaic and needs radical transformation. This is clearly seen in the process of determining clergy stipends which end up being based on figures that are out of date and irrelevant at the time of fixing our stipends each year. Clergy stipends for each year are AGREED AT GENERAL SYNOD of the previous year based on the appropriate figures for NI and R of I reflecting annual cost increases for the year ending the previous November! In other words, our stipend for this year 2010 was worked out prior to General Synod in 2009 and in normal times would have been based on figures to reflect cost increases for the year ending in November 2008. A time lag in excess of one year. However for 2010, the figure arrived at did NOT take into consideration the inflation between 2007 and 2008. Instead, in view of the current situation, the stipends were frozen. Personally I have no objection to a freeze on my stipend as I believe it could be perceived by the general public to be a little excessive in today's economic climate if clergy were to receive a pay increase especially as they are expected to minister to parishioners who are taking pay cuts or worse still losing their jobs, but I wonder how fair this is on those who are due to retire shortly. The problem is that the time lag does not allow for a scene that changes quickly, and places the clergy out of step with their parishioners. Surely it is about time that policies were put in place to rectify this anomaly and allow for some realistic figures

upon which our stipends and ultimately our pensions are based. One system of fixing the Minimum Approved Stipend has to be found and then adhered to strictly.

I know many here today were concerned at the payment for duty by those in the auxiliary ministry (previously known as the non stipendiary ministry) as enacted last year. Page 31 suggests that payment can be given to persons in the auxiliary ministry at the bishop's request. In contrast however, Page 99 of the book of reports outlines the very detailed ways payments are to be made to such persons. I would draw synod member's attention to the fact that a bishop cannot enter into any contract with an auxiliary clergyperson unless either the appropriate Select Vestry or the Diocesan Council has agreed that payments will be forthcoming for services rendered. A lot of hard work has gone into ensuring that this is a fair system and to those who drew up such rules governing remuneration etc., I say thank you on behalf of those who perform such a vital ministry in our Church.

Churchyard and churchyard walls receive a brief mention on page 33 of the report. I would normally glance over this and move on except that this year, I am conscious that in the diocese of Dublin and Glendalough where I serve, this has caused extreme difficulty to one of our largest parishes, namely Whitechurch whose boundary wall collapsed during 2009. I have to say that no matter how vigilant parishes are, because our church buildings and subsequently churchyard walls are so old, it can be difficult to prevent walls collapsing. In the case of Whitechurch parish, although only 12 feet of wall collapsed, a further 30 feet had to be demolished for safety reasons and the only sure

solution to their problem was to replace the whole wall at a cost of €260,000. So I urge members of synod to be as vigilant as possible.

Page 150 of the report lists contributions and bequests to the parishes and dioceses. It would be remiss of this synod not to acknowledge those who have kindly donated in one way or another such generous financial gifts. You know that little two inch square ad that appears in various church publications..... “Don’t forget your Church in your Will”, well it seems to work!

Finally, on behalf of everyone who has occasion to visit the offices of the RCB in Dublin, I wish to say how blessed we are as a Church to have such wonderful staff in Church House. I pay tribute to all our staff for the ever efficient way they assist each diocese and parish as the need arises. The list is too long to mention everyone by name but from the senior staff, to those who work at front of house and those behind the scenes, you are most courteous, kind, friendly and helpful and I thank you all very much for your continued support.

Your Grace, I beg to second the report of the Representative Church Body to General Synod for the year 2010.