

## **GENERAL SYNOD 2010**

### **REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE**

**Proposed by The Venerable Philip Patterson, Diocese of Down**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Your Grace, the Standing Committee Rules require the Standing Committee to submit to General Synod, for its approval, any action taken by the Standing Committee, not already sanctioned by the General Synod. That is the function of the report on page 203. The General Synod may agree and endorse the actions of Standing Committee or it may not and it is open to any member to propose an amendment to the resolution to receive and approve this report.

Your Grace, I wish, if I may, to draw attention to some of the activities of Standing Committee in this past year. I suspect few members are unaware of a crisis in the Anglican Communion. However I equally suspect many are not fully familiar with every twist and turn of what is involved. It emanates principally from the actions of The Episcopal Church of the United States in electing a Gay bishop in 2003 but also the actions of the Church in the States and Canada providing for the blessing of Gay partnerships. One response to all of this is a proposed Anglican Covenant. The Standing Committee appointed a working Group to examine section 4 of the Ridley Cambridge Draft of the Anglican Covenant (page 211 and appendix B). In turn the final form of the Anglican Covenant has now been received (appendix c) and the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue will bring forward a recommendation to next year's synod on how we may appropriately respond to it. We are indebted to the Anglican Covenant Working Group for their work on this and whilst we cannot anticipate what the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue will recommend; there are certain principles that we must adhere to. Quite apart from whether we consider the Anglican Covenant a redundant statement of no consequence to us at all, or view it as the only way of holding the Anglican Communion together, does not matter. In truth it is probably neither but it is an important document and our response to it will be important. We have approached the whole enterprise with integrity and thoroughness.

Nonetheless it is unlikely that the Anglican Covenant will have the status of a formulary of this Church. There are certain consequences that flow from that. I know there are those who fear a two tier Anglican Communion of those accepting the Anglican Covenant and those not accepting it. If the Covenant is not a formulary of our Church it cannot qualify the existing formularies, in particular the Preamble and Declaration, which already defines who the Church of Ireland is in Communion with. Not that we cannot alter the Preamble and Declaration but we might do so at our peril. The point surely of the Preamble and Declaration is not that we pick and choose who we are in communion with so much as we recognise who we are in communion with according to objective criteria. Communion then is a given, an ontological reality, a God thing - we discern it, we don't decide it. That does not mean we do not have any difficulties - when deeds do not reflect words, when promises given are promises broken, when restraint knows no limitation - we have the problem of knowing how to respond. Our formularies require us to, 'set forward, so far as in it lieth, quietness, peace, and love, among all Christian people'. It is no small task we have given to the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue.

The implementation of Charities legislation in Northern Ireland will have a significant effect on the Select Vestries of our parishes. Section 9 of the report on page 212ff outlines a busy year for the Standing Committee on this issue but more especially a busy year for Synod Services Department and the Finance Department of the RCB. For a whole variety of reasons the decision has been taken that in Northern Ireland the Church of Ireland will register as a charity at parish level. What could have been a very daunting prospect has been made much easier by the huge reassurance that has flowed down to parish level. Not least by the information evenings held across the Province. I want as a parish clergyman to place on record my thanks to Janet Maxwell and Adrian Clements for all their hard work – I know it has been appreciated by many. Inevitable there will be aspects of our reporting that will have to change, but they don't appear to be onerous. To be more publicly accountable is no bad thing – we want the world to know what it is we are about and what we are doing. And with the accountability also comes advantages like Select Vestries having the safeguard of being incorporated bodies if they choose.

The Statements of Charitable Purpose and Public Benefit (appendix H) will be put to the Synod as a resolution a little later, I have no hesitation in commending them to Synod. On Page 221 we have reference to the Interchangeability of Ministry Working Group along with appendices M, N

and O. Please note the last sentence of section 23 The Standing Committee commended the agreed principles of the interchangeability of ministry and requested that they be reported to the General Synod 2010 and encouraged the continuing of dialogue as a matter of priority for the Church of Ireland. Three cheers and another cheer too! It is wonderful at last to see the mists lifting, the fog clearing and some reality emerging. These principles show us a way forward that has integrity on all sides to enable us to recognise de jure what we all know de facto. Both of our traditions exercise episcopae even if we may do it somewhat differently and use different language. We do not want to diminish our heritage but equally we do not want to trample the Heritage of our Methodist brothers and sisters. I want to say publicly – I like bishops – in principle at least. No really some of these fellows are good friends, others are old sparring partners and there is always a great affection for sparring partners. Our attachment to bishops is often articulated in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, not a formulary of the Church of Ireland by the way, or even a document that this synod has ever endorsed. It speaks of, ‘The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in its methods of administration’. We hold to The Historic Episcopate – in the words of Prince Charles, ‘Whatever that means’! Historic means, noted in history. I worship in an historic building, I am rector of an historic parish they are both noted in history but they did not always exist. Nor did our local adaptation of episcopacy always exist – we won’t find it in the Bible. Our local adaptation of this Historic Episcopate is **our local adaptation**, it can be altered, it may come and go, it is not eternal we certainly won’t find it in heaven. The Interchangeability of Ministry Working Group has produced something of a break through, it is for the Churches to build on this to make a shared future (as the politicians would say) a reality.

Of course in some places there is a shared present with our Methodist friends, congregations sharing a building and in a few places joint congregations. These are exciting pioneering ventures but they operate with all sorts of ad hoc rules and structures. There is a pressing need to have provision for these joint congregations to be able to link to both parent bodies and to each other in an ordered and constitutional manner. You will note that in section 16 on page 217 this has been a concern in Standing Committee and they in turn note the intention of the Legislation Committee to bring a special Resolution forward next year leading to a Bill in 2012 to provide Ecumenical Canons, to regulate such congregations.

From time to time Government carries out consultations on prospective legislation. The Church may be specifically asked to provide a response and this falls to Standing Committee, or the Standing Committee following its brief to watch legislation may volunteer a response. If one were cynical, fortunately I don't suffer from that condition, one might think government times its publication of contentious legislation and the consultation periods to make it deliberately difficult for responses to be made. Typically publication is in late June with responses to be submitted by early September. The Standing Committee normally appoints small working groups to carry out this task. It is often dealing with complex issues against very tight time restraints. For a small number of people it can mean a quite intensive work-load and these are generally people who are already very busy. The Standing Committee is grateful to the working groups that prepared responses on its behalf. In particular to the Working Group on the Consultative Group on the Past, section 32 page 230 where you will find a link to the submission, and the Bill of Rights N I Working Group their response is appendix D on page 246. These comprehensive and insightful responses indicate the seriousness of our Church's engagement with society at large.

Your Grace, I have pleasure in proposing the Report of the Standing Committee be taken into consideration.