

GENERAL SYNOD 2010

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT

Seconded by Mr Wilfred Baker, Diocese of Cork, Cloyne & Ross

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

It is customary for the proposer and/or seconder of this Report to point out that the Standing Committee is the General Synod is microcosm – that is, it carries out the work of the Synod throughout the year when the Synod is not in session. This bears repeating because, as such, the Committee deals with matters which are many and varied and its agendas are frequently long and the past year was no exception. The Archdeacon has dealt with items relating to the wider Church and I will refer to a few more domestic points.

Earlier today, under the Report of the Representative Church Body, we were given much financial information – not a very pleasant exercise at the moment. I wish to draw your attention to Section 20, on pages 219 and 220, which deals with the manner in which the Standing Committee handles its own finances. On page 332, in the Receipts and Disbursements Account, you will see that last year the Committee received €758,033 from the R.C.B., a decrease of €142,370 from 2008. While this is a relatively small proportion of R.B. expenditure, the Committee takes seriously its responsibilities with regard to the funds under its control and to this end a Budget Sub-Committee has been in existence for some years, charged with the task of reviewing and assessing applications for funding. In the nature of things, this Budget Committee is never the most popular, because virtually all of the applications under consideration are in respect of laudable undertakings and good works of all sorts.

Year by year considerable debate takes place as to how much, if any, additional money should be recommended for the budget requirements of the various organisations and whether some should be reduced. It has to be said that a certain amount of partisanship

inevitably shows itself from time to time in these debates – everybody has their pet project. This year the position was rather different. As the Report states, stern warnings were received from the Chief Officer and the Head of Finance, making it clear that not only could there be no increases but that an overall reduction of 20% needed to be made in disbursements. I'm glad to say that it was possible to achieve this, though not without considerable debate and consideration. As reported, a request has been made that the needs of those committees and organisations which submit requests for funding to the Standing Committee be re-evaluated to ensure that the Church receives value for the increasingly scarce resources at its disposal.

A body as large as the Standing Committee, which has a full compliment of seventy-one members, itself costs money to run. Travel to Dublin for meetings is a considerable expense but, in the interests of representation and democracy in the Church, it is difficult to see how this can be overcome. For smaller sub-committees tele-conferencing is now used to some extent and this constitutes a considerable saving. However, for larger bodies, such as the Committee itself, it would not be possible.

Referring to Section 17 on page 218. This year we are meeting in Christ Church Cathedral. I have to say that financial considerations had a bearing on that decision too. I am old enough to remember when the Synod first moved out of Dublin, to Belfast. All sorts of objections were put up that it would be a logistical nightmare. However, it was a success and in the intervening years the Synod has moved to various parts of the island with, I think, satisfactory results in all cases. The view was expressed that, after much travelling, there should be a return to Dublin. Investigation of possible venues revealed that costs in hotels in and around the city would be prohibitive and so some lateral thinking took place and here we are in Christ Church Place, ironically, adjacent to the former Synod Hall, in which and over which such debate took place in years gone by. The venue was agreed following long and intensive debate and, as you will see in Section 17, it was indeed 'a damn close run thing.'

We are extremely grateful to the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church for accommodating the Synod, an event which has caused much disruption to the normal running of the Cathedral. I also want to pay special tribute to the staff of the General Synod Office, Ms Jenny Polden and Mrs. Janet Maxwell, who have laboured long and hard to make this meeting a success. I hope that members find the facilities here adequate and convenient. We would be glad to receive reactions and might I suggest that you give your views either to the Honorary Secretaries – who are well used to taking flack and whose backs are very broad – or to your diocesan representatives on the Standing Committee. As always, there will be a review of the Synod at the June meeting of the Committee and it would be useful to know how members feel.

Just a few other points from the Report. In Section 8 on page 212 it will be noted that the work of the Internet Committee has been concluded. Members should not think that this indicates any downgrading of the importance of e-communications in any way. This committee did sterling work for many years, with Rev. Mike Graham as pioneer in the days when we were all less familiar with I.T., and the internet and e-mail were rather exotic and little known concepts. Some may remember little huddles around computer screens in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, at a time when very few of us had our own. Things in that area have changed and continue to change at break-neck speed and today's conditions require a new approach, which is under consideration.

Section 14 on page 216 refers to clergy tied housing. This is not a new subject of debate. In recent years many clergy have, happily, been in a position to provide for their own housing on retirement. However, in view of the current economic downturn and resulting freeze on clergy remuneration, it seems quite possible that there could be a return to the unfortunate position in former times when most clergy reached retirement without having acquired any property of their own. This is a situation which should not be allowed to develop.

Finally, Section 28 on page 224. As a result of the Bill passed last year, arrangements are now in place for payment of auxiliary clergy where their work-load justifies this. The

last stage of this process was approval by the Standing Committee, who made some amendments to the proposed Rules. As somebody who has been concerned about this matter for some time past, I am glad that justice has been obtained for a small group of people who unselfishly do so much work for the Church.

I have pleasure in seconding the motion that the Report of the Standing Committee be taken into consideration.