

**GENERAL SYNOD 2011**

**REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

**Seconded by Ms Ruth Handy, Glendalough Diocese**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Over the years the Commission on Ministry has been very aware of the need to support all those who are active in delivering ministry to others so, in the past, we have examined the position of women priests, lay readers and those in the non-stipendiary ministry. As a partial way of recognising and thanking clergy who have devoted a large portion of their lives to the Church of Ireland and as a way of supporting them, in latter years we have run a number of pre-retirement courses for clergy and their spouses who are approaching retirement age.

Not everyone needs or wants a course to help them make the transition from full time work as a rector to the luxury of being retired but many people do find it useful to sit back and reflect on the changes they are likely to encounter and to share information with others in a similar situation. Indeed, there is a multiplicity of research findings which shows a strong correlation between pre-retirement planning and subsequent happy, healthy years spent in retirement. It is even suggested that you are likely to live longer if you do some planning in this area prior to retirement. So we have run a number of such courses which involve an overnight stay in a comfortable hotel and sessions on finance, pensions, health, psychological impacts of change and the spiritual aspects of retirement. We have found it works best if we deal with those preparing to live in the different parts of the island separately as the tax and welfare benefits differ. The next such course takes place at the end of this month in Dublin.

So, having looked at people who have served many years in ministry, and aware that the Theological Institute is serving the needs of those embarking on their careers, if I may call them that, we wanted to consider the issues facing those who have been ordained for quite a number of years – those who might be feeling a little burnt out or just tired. Some weeks ago Canon Neill mentioned in one of his articles in the Gazette how rare it is for a priest to sit in a pew and listen to someone else's sermon. How rare it is to be ministered

extending it to cover two nights and probably focussing more on some of the mid-vocation type issues.

One question we are struggling with is how to choose participants. It works best if people don't really know each other so are probably from different dioceses. At the moment we think we'll ask this year's participants to suggest some names of people who they think will benefit from the process while contributing to the thinking behind it. Ideally it will become a sort of self-sustaining, evolving sequence of events helping to create networks of peer mentors.

We may be totally wrong about all this and are very open to comments and suggestions. As a layperson, I have probably have no right to be pontificating about how people live out their vocations so don't hesitate to tell me that I have it all wrong, and to go away and shut up!