COMMISSION ON MINISTRY

REPORT 2012

1. **Membership**

House of Bishops	*Standing Committee*
The Rt Rev Kenneth Good (Chairman)	Mr Peter Hamill
The Rt Rev Michael Burrows	
General Synod - Clerical	*Pensions Board*
Venerable Gary Hastings	Rev Edward Woods
Rev Canon Terence Scott	
Rev Dorothy McVeigh	
General Synod – Lay	*The Representative Church Body*
Ms Ruth Handy	Mrs Lorna Gleasure
Mr Andrew McNeile	Venerable Leslie Stevenson
Mr Denis Johnston	
Director of the Theological Institute	*Honorary Secretaries*
Rev Dr Maurice Elliott	Mr Samuel Harper
Co-opted	*Director of Ordinands*
Mr Greg Fromholz	Very Rev Katharine Poulton

2. **Terms of Reference**

    The Commission on Ministry was established by the General Synod in 1996. In accordance with its terms of reference, the Commission makes recommendations concerning Christian Ministry, both lay and ordained. This includes the deployment of stipendiary and non-stipendiary clergy appropriate to the requirements of the Church of Ireland in the future. Matters relating to ministry may be referred to the Commission by the archbishops and bishops, the Standing Committee and the Representative Church Body.

3. **Summary**

    The Commission on Ministry concentrated on the following issues:

    ▪ The future of ministry;

- Retirement planning for clergy;
- Mid-career vocation programme for clergy;
- Ministry in the West of Ireland.

4. Purpose

To reflect on and propose changes to ministry training, deployment and support that will assist the Church to achieve its mission and sustain and nurture clergy already in the Church's care throughout their lifetime.

5. Aims for 2012 and 2013

a) To provide pre-retirement courses for clergy;
b) To examine best practice for diocesan and parish missional structures;
c) To structure and provide mid-career opportunities for clergy;
d) To give consideration to the in-service training of Bishops;
e) To collaborate with other Church of Ireland committees where areas of work may coincide;
f) To examine ministry development.

6. The Future of Ministry

At last year's General Synod, a paper entitled *The Future of the Church of Ireland* by the Venerable Gary Hastings was submitted to the General Synod as part of the Commission on Ministry report. Its thoughtful and challenging conclusions resulted in an equally stimulating debate at the General Synod.

The paper was further discussed by the Commission shortly after the General Synod and it was agreed that the questions posed by Archdeacon Hastings could not be addressed by the Commission on its own. To further the discussion, the Chairman of the Commission, the Rt Rev Ken Good wrote a further paper on how ministry might look if it were based on the Bishop's 2008 Mission Statement *Growth, Unity and Service* and to developing growing communities of faith.

In his paper, the Bishop articulates the case for older 'mother' congregations supporting the Church planting of newer congregations where the established congregation can gain from the creativity and innovation of the newer and the latter can benefit from the stability and steadiness of the former.

Discussing the paper, the Commission was supportive and emphasised the importance of an ecumenical approach and the necessity of collecting accurate statistical information to assist the evaluation of such initiatives.

The paper is included in the Appendix on page 347.

7.   Retirement Planning for Clergy

The Commission has continued with its popular pre-retirement courses for clergy. At the time of writing a further course is planned in Armagh for clergy approaching retirement age in Northern Ireland.

8.   Mid-Career Vocation Programme for Clergy

A further workshop is planned on mid-career vocation for clergy.

9.   Ministry in the West of Ireland

The Commission decided to postpone work on this issue.

10.   In Service Training for Bishops

The Commission plans to give consideration to the in-service training of Bishops. Presently such training is largely unavailable in Ireland and Church of Ireland Bishops seeking in-service training have had to travel to England or elsewhere.

11.   Acknowledgements

The 2012 General Synod will see the Rt Rev Ken Good step down as Chairman of the Commission on Ministry. Also stepping down are the Venerable Gary Hastings and Ms Ruth Handy. Each has made a valuable contribution to the work of the Commission and they leave with the Commission's appreciation. The Commission also wishes to record its gratitude to Ms Jenny Polden, who acted as Secretary of the Commission for several years.

APPENDIX

**SOME MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS
OF THE BISHOPS' MISSION STATEMENT, 2008**

THE PLACE OF VISION
Ministry, like other aspects of church life, ought to be shaped and directed by vision, by a picture of the future which inspires us because it is more in line with the values and realities of God's Kingdom than may be reflected in the current realities of church life. But the demands of each day often result in a situation whereby, despite our best intentions, ministry is shaped more by inherited custom, by people's expectations and by 'firefighting' the every-day problems, crises and issues with which the normal routine of parish life present us. At the end of a demanding day, or week, or month, or year, seldom are there sufficient resources of energy or imagination left to re-shape the way we minister in line with our vision of how things might be and ought to be.

In facing an impasse or in coming up against a road-block we come to doubt that in our parish things will change or improve substantially. And so our expectations are lowered, our hopes are weakened, our belief that things could be better is diminished, and we settle for the status quo. We reluctantly accept that this is our lot and we feel powerless to do anything much about it.

John Ryan, of the Centre for Creative Leadership, suggests that effective leadership involves (at least) three critically important skills: first, an inspiring vision of how things might be; second, effective communication of that vision; and third, the exercise of wise and courageous judgment in implementing the vision, especially when tough calls need to be made. Ryan argues that to lead an organization effectively, especially through today's economic turmoil, mastering these three skills is vitally important.

THE BISHOPS' VISION STATEMENT
In 2008 the Bishops of the Church of Ireland issued a brief mission statement which focused on the three themes of Growth, Unity and Service.

This Statement was offered to the Church, with each diocese and parish being encouraged to use and implement it, as appropriate, in their own setting and context. Questions remain about the extent to which dioceses and parishes have really grasped the vision and have sought to apply it, and also whether central church structures (such as the General Synod, Standing Committee, the various central Boards and Committees and the Selection Process for training for ordination)could or should operate with greater reference to the visionary emphases of Growth, Unity and Service.

This paper seeks to offer some initial reflections on the ministerial implications of shaping church life more intentionally around the Bishops' Mission Statement, focusing primarily on the theme of Growth.

GROWTH…OR DECLINE?

Last year, Archdeacon Gary Hastings presented to the Commission on Ministry a sobering paper on the future of the Church in Ireland, which was later printed in the General Synod Book of Reports, 2011. His paper, as well as his introductory speech, provoked a lively Commission on Ministry debate at General Synod, stimulating an honest and realistic appraisal of the likely trends if things continue as they are.

In summary, it would be true to say that decline rather than growth was envisaged as the more likely trajectory of the Church in many parts of Ireland. Average age ranges of those involved in church are older than we would like. The majority of younger people are not being attracted to the traditional model of church life, their allegiance is not being sustained. The consequent decline is a slow hemorrhaging rather than a rapid disintegration, but decline it is, nevertheless.

The Bishops' Mission Statement of 2008, which appeared two years before the Archdeacon's paper, was unambiguous in stating that the Church's calling is to develop growing communities of faith:

'The Church of Ireland, as an authentic part of the universal church of God, is called to develop growing communities of faith, in and through which the Kingdom of God is made known, and in which the whole people serve together as followers of Jesus Christ for the good of the world and the Glory of God.'

If the bishops are advocating growth and urging the Church to pursue it, how does this vision fit with the Archdeacon's analysis of what is happening on the ground? Is growth merely a vague aspiration? Is church growth at all likely to take place?

If church growth is to become something more than a vague aspiration, then greater clarity is needed about where and how that growth might realistically be expected. A compelling vision must be developed more cogently and communicated more persuasively if it is to be implemented more effectively.

CLARIFYING THE VISION

An initial point of clarification which might be of help could be to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative growth, the former usually being a prerequisite for the latter. All churches, no matter what their size, can experience qualitative growth. They can grow, for example, in welcome and in commitment. They can grow in prayer and in worship. They can grow in compassion and in generosity. They can grow in interest in mission and in community

engagement. They can grow in their care of children and of older people. In these and in many other qualitative respects, every church can be encouraged to grow and can experience growth.

For these kinds of qualitative growth to take place, deliberate and intentional efforts are often required on the part of church leaders and church members. To build up the Body of Christ in these ways will usually involve a ministry focus which includes specific teaching, training, mentoring and encouraging that leads to these growth outcomes. Qualitative growth in any of these aspects of church life will need to be worked towards and planned for with intentional and purposeful ministry.

MEASURING GROWTH

Within the terms of the Bishops' Vision Statement, qualitative growth is certainly a valid part of being a 'growing community of faith'. Therefore, not only should parishes be encouraged to develop in a whole range of areas of church life but, where possible, they should be offered some means of measuring or quantifying such growth when it occurs. Measurement tools for this purpose do exist. One example is Natural Church Development by Christian A Schwartz - an approach which enables churches to quantify their progress in eight key characteristics which are recognized by many researches as being crucial to church growth.

It can often be the case that when significant qualitative growth becomes evident in a church, quantitative (or numerical) growth can follow. Fresh signs of purposeful involvement and authentic community within a church can arouse the interest of others on or beyond the fringes, drawing them in to find out what is happening. There are Church of Ireland churches in which qualitative growth is taking place and there are also some where numerical or quantitative growth is evident, too.

The Commission on Ministry and the Council for Mission, and others, have for some time been arguing the case for the gathering of statistical information from every parish and diocese in order that trends of growth or decline could more accurately be discerned. Anecdotal guesswork is not sufficient, real figures are what is needed in order to know where we really stand and where we are heading, if trends were to continue as they currently are. Any serious attempt to pursue growth, as the Mission Statement urges us to do, will require carefully designed information-gathering systems in every parish and diocese.

CAN TRADITIONAL CHURCHES GROW NUMERICALLY?

The picture painted in Archdeacon Hastings' paper would appear to indicate that numerical growth is not, in fact, the experience of many of our existing parishes. Some Church of Ireland churches are experiencing quantitative growth, but really significant growth in numbers can be pointed to in quite a limited number of cases. The Archdeacon's view is that it seems unlikely that most Church of Ireland churches, as they currently operate, will see more than a moderate increase in numbers and it also seems likely (though not inevitable) that

many other churches will continue to decline in membership. The impact of these twin realities is that overall numbers, at best, may remain constant or that, as appears more likely, the cumulative picture may be one of overall decline, not of growth.

It must be acknowledged at every stage of this exercise, however, that church growth and the question of people coming to faith is a spiritual venture in which the ways and purposes and timings of the Holy Spirit cannot be organized, controlled or even assumed on the basis of previous or current indicators. The wind blows where it wills, and we can look foolish, in retrospect, when attempting to be prescriptive about what will or will not happen in the spiritual realm!

Nevertheless, it is also the case that we do well to seek to discern what God seems to be doing elsewhere in places where churches are growing and to apply what lessons we can to our situation.

CHURCH PLANTING
One approach which warrants mention in a discussion about church growth concerns what can broadly be termed 'church planting.' Rev Tim Keller, a Presbyterian leader and author from New York, in a recent article, 'Why plant churches?' has summarized the arguments in favour of traditional churches engaging proactively in this activity. Keller goes so far as to say that not only do traditional churches in the Western world face inevitable and irreversible decline unless they plant churches, but that the planting of new churches is the key to reinvigorating older established churches in a way that will renew the whole Body of Christ.

It would be true to say that 'church planting' does not have very good reputation in the minds of many Church of Ireland people, particularly clergy. It is negatively perceived because of experiences in which groups or individuals have come into parishes with evangelistic zeal, establishing new churches without any meaningful discussion or communication with existing churches about what they were seeking to do, or why. Furthermore, some of these groups have conveyed the impression that only they have an authentic understanding of the gospel and that the beliefs and practices of the traditional churches and clergy are suspect or defective. Some very unfortunate experiences and unhelpful behaviours have given church planting a bad name.

Negative experiences and poor behaviours in the past, however, should not prevent us from looking again to see if there might be some merit in the arguments of Tim Keller and others, who claim that, 'The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for (1) the numerical growth of the body of Christ and (2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches.' We may also need to acknowledge that there can be some truth in Keller's contention that traditional churches, on occasion, have

been resistant to appropriate church planting because of an overly possessive or defensive desire 'to protect our turf'.

VARIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF GROWTH

Church planting can evolve in various manifestations or expressions, some of which are already operating effectively in Church of Ireland parishes. One of the more familiar examples of what could be deemed to be a church plant is where a parish, in addition to its traditional 11.30am service in the Parish Church, starts a new 'service' in the church hall at 10.00am for young families.

There are several places where this approach has resulted in significant numerical growth in the worshipping population in the parish, more than doubling the numbers in some instances. The reality seems to be that a sizeable number of people who do not seem interested in attending a traditional church service are willing and even keen to attend a more informal family-friendly 'event'.

Legitimate questions can be asked about how the people coming at 10.00am do and should relate to those attending at 11.30am, and vice versa. What about the unity of the body? How liturgically balanced is the 10.00am service? While these are important questions, they raise problems to do with growth rather than with decline. They are secondary to the primary reality that the church is growing and people, not least younger people, are drawn to faith and to worship.

Another manifestation of church planting is when a parish decides to establish a new 'cell' or 'group' or 'church' at some other location within its parish boundaries in order to attract people who do not appear to be drawn to the traditional expression of church. Some parishioners offer to become the nucleus of the new group and with the assistance of an effective leader, they set up their base in a home or a school or a community centre or a pub and invite people to join them. The focus of the church plant can be on a specific age-group or interest-group or can be more general. Sometimes it works and numbers grow, on other occasions it may not prove to be effective and the project finishes.

RESISTANCE TO CHURCH PLANTING

Keller's experience is that the most common responses of traditional church people to the idea that they should plant churches are as follows:

A. "We already have plenty of churches that have lots and lots of room for all the new people who have come to the area. Let's get them filled before we start building any new ones."
B. "Every church in this community used to be more full than it is now. The churchgoing public is a shrinking pie. A new church here will just take people from churches that are already hurting and will weaken everyone."
C. "Help the churches that are struggling first. A new church doesn't help the existing ones that are just keeping their noses above water. We need better churches, not more churches."

Keller is very clear about the vital importance of traditional churches and of the crucial and steadying role they play in a community. Traditional churches will always appeal more to a certain section of the population. But his answers to these objections to church planting, when it is managed wisely and sensitively, are persuasive:

It is not a matter of choosing between church renewal and church planting. In reality, one of the best ways to revitalize a traditional church is for it to plant a new church.
Older congregations have a stability and steadiness that many people thrive on and need. This does not mean that established churches cannot win new people. In fact, many people will be reached only by churches with long roots in the community and the marks of stability and respectability.

Church planting helps an existing church best when the new congregation is voluntarily birthed by an older "mother" congregation. Often the excitement and new leaders and new ministries and additional members and income wash back into the mother church in various ways and strengthen and renew it.

But the average new church plant will bring in six to eight times more new people into the life of the body of Christ than an average older congregation will.

Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60–80%) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshiping body, while traditional churches gain 80–90 per cent of new members by transfer from other congregations.

Although there is some pain in seeing good friends and valued leaders go away to form a new church, the mother church usually soon experiences a surge of high self-esteem and an influx of new, enthusiastic leaders and members.

Younger adults have always been disproportionately found in newer congregations.
Long-established congregations develop traditions (such as time of worship, length of service, level of emotional responsiveness, sermon topics, leadership style, emotional atmosphere, and thousands of other tiny customs and mores) that reflect the sensibilities of longtime leaders from the older generations who have the influence and money to control church life. The automatic maintenance of such habits does not reach younger generations effectively.
As a congregation ages, powerful internal institutional pressures lead it to allocate most of its resources and energy toward the concerns of its members and constituents, rather than toward those outside its walls.

New congregations, in general, are forced to focus on the needs of nonmembers, simply to get off the ground. Because so many of a new church's leaders came very recently from the ranks of the unchurched, the congregation is far more sensitive to the concerns of the outsider. There is, however, no better way to teach older congregations about new skills and methods for reaching new people groups than by planting new churches. It is the new churches that have freedom to be innovative, so they become the Research and Development Department for the whole body.

In older congregations, leaders emphasize tradition, tenure, routine, and kinship ties. New congregations, on the other hand, attract a higher percentage of venturesome people who value creativity, risk, innovation, and future orientation. Many of these men and women would never be attracted or compelled into significant ministry apart from the appearance of these new bodies.

Often older churches "box out" people who have strong leadership skills but who cannot work in more traditional settings. New churches thus attract and harness people whose gifts would otherwise not be utilized in the work of the body. These new leaders eventually benefit the whole body of Christ in the community.

In general, the success of new churches often challenges older congregations to evaluate themselves in substantial ways. Sometimes it is only in contrast with a new church that older churches can finally define their own vision, specialties, and identity.
Sometimes a new congregation can partner with an older church to mount ministries that neither could do by itself.

Older churches have feared the competition from new churches. Mainline church congregations, with their centralized government, were the most effective in blocking new church development in their towns. As a result, the mainline churches have shrunk remarkably in the last twenty to thirty years.

A MORE REALISTIC CHALLENGE
Keller helpfully places the initiative for church planting with the traditional churches, not with evangelizing groups who come in from outside, operating without any meaningful communication with existing, established churches. In fact, he argues that continued and widespread communication between church leadership at all levels is an essential foundation if church planting is to be effective. His approach to planting churches could present the Church of Ireland with a much more realistic and inspiring challenge than the negative view we previously held about unwelcome intruders who arrived uninvited 'on our turf' to steal our sheep!

MINISTERIAL IMPLICATIONS

If the Church of Ireland were to decide that there is, indeed, merit in Keller's approach and if we were to see dozens of parishes attempting to plant new congregations in cities, towns and communities throughout the country, what might be the ministerial implications of such a decision?

For several years, the Commission on Ministry has been dealing in some detail with the identification and training of 'pioneer ministers', those who have a particular apostolic gift for initiating new churches. We would need to revisit those discussions and recommendations and could face a very exciting period of church life which would present us with issues to do with growth and development rather than of contraction and decline.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this paper reference was made to the view that effective leadership requires three essential elements: first, an inspiring vision of how things might be; second, the effective communication of that vision; and third, the exercise of wise and courageous judgment in implementing the vision, especially when tough calls need to be made.

On the subject of growing churches and the Church of Ireland, it could be argued that more work needs to be done on all three. Our vision for growing, (as well as unifying and serving) churches needs to be developed, refined and clarified. Our communication of that vision needs to be more effective and more persuasive. And our decision-making about how and where churches can grow needs to be courageous and wise.

+Ken Good
January 2012