

GENERAL SYNOD 2013

Standing Committee Report

Proposed by the Very Revd Raymond Ferguson, Dean of Kilmore

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace and members of General Synod

It's a great, but doubtful, privilege for me to have been asked to be the Proposer of this important Report today. I do want, at the beginning to acknowledge the commitment of Standing Committee to such a wide range of business undertaken on behalf of General Synod when it is not in session. You will see something of the range of that work in the Report before you. I'm sure that I speak on behalf of all when I say that the debt of gratitude we owe to our Honorary Secretaries; to our supporting staff, Janet Maxwell, Garrett Casey and Sandra Massey; and to the Archbishops, as our usual chairmen.....is an incalculable debt. Their grasp of the issues involved and their meticulous preparation for Synod and for all our meetings is an example of commitment to Christ and to His Church at its very best! We are deeply grateful to them all.

It's important to draw attention to item No. 16 which speaks of next year's General Synod in 2014. It's impossible to find the perfect venue for General Synod and to please everyone (there is a reference to this from the Working Group on Disability on page 277! I do promise that their advice will be taken into account as far as possible)– but the Hon. Sec's have recommended that next year's Synod should take place in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin; Standing Committee has accepted that recommendation and so Synod will (D.V.) take place in Dublin from 8th – 10th May next year.

Item 22 – “Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief.” This subject in its various forms has been exercising the whole Anglican Communion. Within our own context this has been part of Standing Committee’s brief since last General Synod. A year ago Synod adopted a resolution asking Standing committee to progress this work in certain ways, including bringing to you proposals for a Select Committee – that will be done later in our proceedings. Also, Standing Committee, at its January meeting, approved a recommendation that each Diocese should discuss the issue and then join in a tripartite inter-diocesan conference in the autumn. I understand that the planning of those conferences is well in hand. You will see the Diocesan groupings in your Book of Reports.

The Irish inter-church Peace Programme: I draw attention to Item 24 which is fairly self-explanatory but which is ground-breaking in inter-church relationships. After initial discussions between the Presbyterian Church, The Church of Ireland, The Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Irish Council of Churches, based upon a desire of these churches to contribute to the wider peace process: the Presbyterian Church lodged an application for funding to the Special EU Programmes’ Body ; this was successful, and grant aid was offered up to the sum of £1,317,052. This aid is under Peace 3 and lasts for three years. It will be exciting to see how this develops. At its November meeting Standing Committee appointed the Bishop of Clogher and the Rev. John McClure as its representatives on the steering committee.

Thinking of inter-church matters, Item 26 in the Report may have interesting and far-reaching inter-church consequences. Reference is made to a letter from the Rev. Robert Hopcroft Chairman of the Provincial Board of the Moravian Church of Great Britain and Ireland. (This came to Standing Committee through the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue.) It’s not every day that a letter seeking talks about full communion and full inter-change of ministries between two churches is received. This came to Standing Committee in April and was received there with great interest. You will see that Standing Committee has initiated discussions, and in consultation with our Archbishops

and Bishops suggestions are to be brought back through the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue. We await developments with interest and hope.

The subject of abortion continues to be a very live issue in both jurisdictions, but perhaps particularly in the Republic - over very recent days - as a result of sad events in Galway. Circumstances explained in Item No. 3 arose between Standing Committee meetings whereby the Primate or his representative was invited to give evidence on behalf of the Church of Ireland to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children. The Archbishops and Honorary Secretaries approved a submission and in the event this was presented to the hearing by the Archbishop of Dublin and Mr. Sam Harper. Their contribution on that occasion was deeply appreciated and we thank them for representing us so ably. The Standing Committee has appointed a working group to consider the implications of the new legislation. Sometimes we may be asked to give an account of what the Church of Ireland does believe and teach on this subject. I can do no better than direct Synod to page 216 of the Book of Reports and to Appendix B and the Addendum on page 220. We wish the Working Group well in their deliberations and look forward to the Paper which will be produced as a result of it.

The work of the Central Communications Board could not be over-emphasized as it is so significant in the Church's work of spreading abroad the Good News. Getting the message out and encouraging people to receive it is after all the Church's Great Commission. We commend the work of the Broadcasting and Literature Committees. The Press Office and its staff have indeed had a busy year and we thank them for their sensitive handling of events. We encourage clergy not to 'go it alone' with the media, but to seek the expertise and advice of Dr. Paul Harron and Mrs. Jenny Compston. That is readily and helpfully given.

Much of the Church of Ireland is rural with parishes set in the countryside. This fact is often raised at Standing Committee meetings – not least in connection with the Single

Farm Payment Scheme. A working Group presented its Report to Standing Committee in June 2012 and that can be found on page 261 Appendix I. As a Synod we would need to express appreciation for all the work that went into its production; and for the way in which the profile of farming issues has been raised through its work. The farming community continues to be in a state of considerable crisis not least because of unseasonable weather over the past year. The whole Church needs to reach out to that community pastorally; and with great love and understanding. A sentence from the working Group's Report should be a 'wake up' call to the Church and particularly to those with pastoral responsibilities: "Clergy should be able to understand what is happening in rural communities in order to respond pastorally." That is still true a year later