

GENERAL SYNOD 2014

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT

Proposed by Mr Glenn Moore – Diocese of Clogher

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace

As members of Synod will observe, the report of Standing Committee commences on page 189 and, including appendices, runs through to page 284 in the book of reports. In the interest of ensuring members don't lose the will to remain awake, I don't plan to go through each page in detail, but instead will highlight a few aspects of the report. I am sure Synod will appreciate however the wide range of business undertaken on it's behalf by Standing Committee, and the range of that work is reflected in the breadth of reports which are now before you.

The Church of Ireland is fortunate to have a number of individuals who give of their time and contribute as members of Standing Committee and various sub-committees, people from diverse backgrounds who bring with them a broad range of experience and skills, invaluable to the life and witness of the Church.

I am sure members of synod would wish to acknowledge the important contribution both Archbishops make in chairing Standing Committee, and also to acknowledge especially the considerable amount of time and energy which is put into to both the Standing Committee and General Synod by the Honorary Secretaries: Archdeacon George Davidson, Mr Samuel Harper, Mrs Ethne Harkness and the Revd Gillian Wharton, to whom we are indebted. It would be remiss of me however not to acknowledge the contribution made over a number of years to the position of Honorary Secretary by Archdeacon Robin Bantry-White who retired in March, and I am again sure members of synod would agree with me in wishing him God's blessing in his retirement.

The work of the Honorary Secretaries is made all the more achievable thanks to the dedicated and hard-working staff of the RCB who undertake much on behalf of Standing Committee, especially the Chief Officer and Secretary General Mr Adrian Clements, Assistant Secretary Mrs Janet Maxwell and Synod Officer Mr Garrett Casey, to name a few. And to them we offer our thanks.

One of the important areas of work undertaken by Standing Committee is to engage with issues in society, and offer into such discussions a Christian, and hopefully at times, a prophetic voice. Various issues are outlined in the report which the Standing Committee grapple and engage with, and these are quite often topical, but also sensitive.

In continuance of the Church of Ireland's engagement with other denominations, a number of representatives attended the Irish Council of Churches annual meeting in Arklow Presbyterian Church in April, when the Revd Dr Donald Watts, Clerk of the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, was elected as President of the Council. I'm sure synod would like to take this opportunity to wish Dr Watts well in that role, and I imagine we could all take note of Dr Watt's words at his installation, when he encouraged *Christians to walk confidently and joyfully towards a future determined by Jesus*. And I hope with confidence and joy, we can also congratulate the Bishop of Clogher on his election as Vice-President of the Council; we look forward to when he assumes the presidency in 2016. I am sure we would also wish to acknowledge the contribution of the immediate past president of the council, the Revd Fr Godfrey O'Donnell of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

One area of work through which the church plays a vital role in supporting those with whom we share this planet, but those who are often trying to live out their Christian faith, or simply trying to survive as living beings in very unfortunate circumstances, should it be as a result of natural disasters, war, or poverty, and that is through the work of Bishops' Appeal. Many of us will have witnessed from media reports the plight of the Christian minority in Syria, especially the number of refugees emerging from that conflict, and I am sure members of synod will be pleased to learn how Bishops' Appeal have been helping in this situation. The alleviation of poverty in the present and the empowerment for a better future runs throughout the work supported by Bishops' Appeal. The numbers are impressive, 120,000 direct beneficiaries and half a million indirect beneficiaries, impressive because as a Church we have been able to contribute towards helping these fellow humans in their time of need, but depressive that so many and so many more suffer daily, with countless numbers experiencing persecution as they live out their Christian faith.

The ability of the Appeal to respond to disaster relief is significant, but as we heard earlier, sadly there are a number of forgotten projects that often have much merit but are overlooked due to financial constraints. However it is great to see an increase of €191,000 in contributions to the Appeal compared to the previous year, this has enabled grants to be increased by €181,000 to work undertaken across the globe in four

continents. I imagine synod would wish to record its thanks to Bishop Michael Burrows for the energetic commitment he has given to the appeal for over a period of 22 years. Our thanks must also go to Canon Ian Poulton for the service he has given in the past as Project Advisor, and to Lydia Monds, Education Advisor, for the work she continues to undertake on behalf of Bishops' Appeal.

For those who dread bureaucracy, I'm afraid to say it is about to get a lot worse! The long awaited implementation of the Charities Legislation in Northern Ireland has started to become a reality. Useful dialogue has been taking place between the Charities Commission for Northern Ireland and the Church. The work of the Charity Registration Monitoring Working Group will prove invaluable, as will the contribution made to the process by the pilot programme in the Diocese of Down & Dromore and the parish of Annalong. Diocesan secretaries are being kept abreast of developments by the RCB, and I think we should express our thanks to the staff of Church House for their proactive and detailed work in this area. The introduction of the Charity Legislation has begun a process which will have implications for every parish in Northern Ireland, there will be an impact, but one which the Church centrally and at diocesan level are preparing to manage in a way which eases the burden placed upon those with administrative responsibility in parishes. There will be an agreed naming system, parishes will be assisted through group registration, and the process will be made simpler as many of the relevant documents will be pre-registered by the church. As the implications unfold, parishes will have a number of important considerations to make, not least in areas such as the appropriate vesting of church owned property and the importance of Trustee Liability Insurance for Select Vestries. And this isn't just important in Northern Ireland, but also in the Republic as the experience in Northern Ireland will be invaluable as similar legislation is on the Books in the Republic and will be commenced in due course. It is important to ensure that parishes and dioceses are fully up to speed in order to ensure compliance, and to assist this the RCB offers advice on the vesting of property and the creation of deeds of trust.

As we move further into the decade of centenaries, the Historical Centenaries Working Group continues its work, this year marking the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the 1st World War in August 1914. Of more local significance, this year also marks the centenary of the passage of the third Home Rule Bill. The past century has brought much change and also sadly much tragedy, but it was pleasing to observe the improved relations between the UK and Ireland evident during the state visit of President Michael D Higgins to the UK, and the reception he was accorded by Her Majesty The Queen.

Your Grace, I am pleased to propose the report of Standing Committee.