

GENERAL SYNOD 2015

Representative Church Body Report

Seconded by The Right Revd Alan Abernethy, Bishop of Connor

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I do enjoy the story of the grandmother who was putting her six year old granddaughter to bed and was surprised but pleased when granddaughter announced "Granny you are very like God." Granny thought that was a nice thing to say then she made the mistake of asking why? The reply came, " you're both very old."

There is no doubt that some of our structures and processes are very old and we have had to constantly catch up with so many changes in our society. There have been changes with health and safety, safeguarding trust and recently the charity registration for all parishes. We are grateful to the help gained through the RB and the staff there and also the staff in Church of Ireland House Belfast.

It was also good news for many parishes when the UK government announced a church roof grant and I gather there may be some more to come, important for those parishes that were unsuccessful the first time.

The RB archive of the month has been fascinating as we are able, well some can remember better than others, what happened in a different era and time frame.

There are four bills before synod that have been at the request of standing committee and the representative body. Dignity in Church Life Charter, the duty of care in cases of long term sickness of clergy, to broaden the scope of the severance fund and statements of

charitable purposes and objects for use by bodies governed by the laws of the Church of Ireland.

These bills are self explanatory but I would draw your attention to bill number one. The Dignity Charter recognises how important relationships are throughout church life but also recognises that conflict is something difficult to avoid. The Bill will empower the R. B. To develop policies, regulations and rules to give effect to the charter and for Standing Committee to approve these. The ultimate authority to amend these will remain with General Synod. I believe this is a very important and helpful way to proceed on these issues and they will help bishops, clergy and parishes as we seek to maintain healthy relationships in parishes. They will help clergy and give boundaries and support to all who are volunteers within our church life.

As we look to the future there are other issues that we will need to address. Mr Neill has raised this question about investing in the future now rather than keeping for the future. We have many assets from church buildings, silver and land. As I have oversight over parts of Belfast that are struggling because of conflict, population shift and ongoing paramilitary and sectarian division some of our assets are becoming huge burdens for parishes finding it difficult to survive. The various rules and regulations place many limitations on how these resources can be used limiting the potential for reimagining church in areas where there will not be communities of faith unless we do. These are issues focused in cities like Belfast and Dublin but the rest of the church may not be that far behind. This is urgent and critical and would be life giving for Church and community and I welcome the RB's willingness and desire to help give a lead on these issues. How can we use our assets to help us develop mission and ministry in ways that can build new communities of faith and continue our involvement in communities that can often feel forgotten and isolated. I know in conversations with the RB that there is a willingness to discover how we can use our assets to liberate and free up new opportunities for mission and ministry. These are more questions concerning our structures and regulations that need to be reviewed as we look to the future with hope and purpose.

I would also want to record our thanks to the volunteers who gave of their expertise and time to serve the church and for all they have done to help us in very difficult financial times and yet they have kept their eye firmly on building for the future. Our thanks also to the staff who have continued to offer us service and commitment of a very high standard. THANK YOU TO ALL WHO SEVE US IN ANYWAY.

It gives me great pleasure to second the report of the Representative Church Body.