

GENERAL SYNOD 2015

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT

Proposed by The Venerable Robert Miller, Archdeacon of Derry – Diocese of Derry

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace,

This report of the Standing Committee before Synod today presents us with an opportunity to be thankful. The report represents many hours of service to Jesus Christ by members of this synod and others. The first few pages of the report illustrate the significant commitment of time, travel and cost given by the members of Standing Committee and their associated committees. As a General Synod I think it is important that we begin by saying, “Thank you,” to all those who have served over the past 3 years, and to those who are willing to serve in this new triennium. We especially we want to acknowledge, and thank, all those who have served over this past triennium and who will not be returning to Standing Committee.

Standing Committee has been presented with many challenges and yet I am grateful that this report illustrates how, as a church, we are seeking to address these challenges together. The work of Standing Committee makes a difference. Standing Committee plays a strategic part, in shaping the church God wants us to be in the long-term future, and in seeking to make a difference in the world. This is especially true where there is the potential for conflict, pain and distress.

Last year this synod was presented with a challenge to picture the Church of Ireland in twenty years: **Long-Term Church**. It was not so much a challenge asking what we want the church to look like but rather to consider what God is calling us to become. In **Section 23 on Page 178 & 179** the report refers to three Bills before synod this year.

'The Dignity in Church Life Charter' is the first of the three Bills. I would like to highlight the area of **Conflict Resolution**, which is addressed by Bill number 1. The call to love one another is never more challenging and needed than when there is conflict, and when relationships break down. The charter will help the church to recall the Christian principles that underpin our relationships, especially when seeking to address the pain and hurt of conflict and resolve it.

In relation to the Bills Procedure, which you will have experienced in part earlier this afternoon, **Section 6 Bills Procedure P172 and Appendix B on P189** set out the basis of a more streamlined procedure. The synod's comment on this would be particularly helpful. Perhaps the flowchart on **P192** will be of some assistance. A full consideration of how we can better use our time, and work more effectively without sacrificing thoroughness, is key.

In **Section 7 on P172 and Appendix C on P193 The Bishops' Appeal Advisory Committee** sets out how they are continuing their commitment to respond to people living in dire poverty and suffering. Such **Compassionate Generosity** remains important in the life of our church. It calls all Church of Ireland parishioners to be generous in the compassion they show in caring for the needs of the wider world. One method that has been proving very effective in meeting the challenges that face the Bishops' Appeal is through dioceses specifying a project to support over a one to three year period. **You can see some examples of this on P 196.** What these 5 diocesan examples illustrate is that when a parish or diocese gives leadership and is intentionally inspiring others to act, the impact is multiplied. The section of the report dealing with the Bishops' Appeal illustrates that we are a church motivated by our love, by our charity.

This brings us to another important area of engagement with our society: **Charitable Purpose.** **The Charities Legislation Section 11 P174 & Appendix E P217** has addressed this. In the past it would have been a surprise that anyone in society would question whether the church was charitable in her ministry and mission: and yet we are ministering in a society (North and South of the border) that is now asking that very

question. In **The Charities Registration Monitoring Group Report on page 217** it is encouraging to see that we have defined ourselves clearly to those who are asking. It is important that we haven't responded defensively rather we have sought to communicate our mission and ministry in the world using '*The Statement of Charitable Purpose*' and '*The Statement of Public Benefit.*' These equip us to communicate better our mission and ministry to the wider society and helps the Church of Ireland to understand herself more clearly. The charitable purpose of the church is rooted in the love of God, and far from being a collection of words to satisfy bureaucracy, these statements bring some clarity to our mission and ministry.

The Monitoring Group is further enabling the Church of Ireland in her parishes and dioceses to understand and comply with government legislation.

Such charity and love never exists in isolation. If the long-term shape of the church will be moulded by compassion, charity and in addressing brokenness through conflict resolution we must better co-operate with one another, and collaborate with our brothers and sisters in Christ. **Section 22 on P178 and its associated Appendix K on P237** draws our attention to the important work of **Cooperative Action** to build peace. Since 2012 The Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP) has been an ecumenical collaboration to encourage engagement with the problems particular to our island home. In the **Appendix on P237** we are reminded that, 'The underlying theme of forgiveness is at the core of the work of ICPP and its vision for *a peaceful and stable society, with a shared and better future for all.*' The project has concluded as PEACE III funding has finished. The Standing Committee has appointed Rt Rev John McDowell and Mr Trevor Douglas to represent the Church of Ireland on a new working Group to prepare a fresh application under PEACE IV. Important lessons have been learnt in the work of the Irish Churches Peace Project. Perhaps one of the most important is the reminder that we need **Cooperative Action** in building peace, requiring people at every level of our society to be actively involved.

The **Historical Centenaries Working Group, section 19 on P177 and Appendix I on P233** remind us of the importance of how we handle history. Ted Carr was an English Historian who said, “By and large the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation.” As we seek to build peace in a society emerging from years of conflict we need to contribute to how society remembers so that we might address our own history and shape our future. Any journey towards peace cannot ignore the past: shared events with different histories. The season of **Commemorative Centenaries** in which we find ourselves offers an opportunity to learn from the successes and failures we find there.

This Working Group is an important support to our parishes and dioceses as we approach this season of centenaries; their work enabling the Church of Ireland to contribute her voice. This season has a potential of fomenting discord, this ‘Working Group’ can help us transform this to unity.

I hope you can see that what is before you is but the tip of the iceberg of the work of Standing Committee:

- Conflict Resolution;
- Compassionate Generosity
- Charitable Purpose;
- Cooperative Action;
- Commemorative Centenaries

These are some of the notes that contribute to the voice of the Church Ireland that is heard in the life of the Standing Committee.

I’ll end with a final ‘C:’ **Central Communication**. In **Section 10 on P174 & Appendix D P206** we can see how the Central Communications Board, and the associated Broadcast Committee and Literature Committee, have been seeking to improve communication both within the church and in the church’s communication with the wider world.

The development of better engagement through social media and internet, including the development of an 'ebulletin' has been a positive area of work by the committee. We have also seen over this year how some of the **key initiatives on P207** have been facilitated and enhanced through the support of the Central Communications Committee.

Standing Committee want the 'voice' of the Church as the Body of Christ to be heard clearly. *Let your light so shine before men and women that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.* That is our motivation: God's glory.

The message of this report, I believe, is that Standing Committee can and does play a significant role in making heard the voice of the Church of Ireland. A voice that is compassionate, purposeful and effective.

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