

# **GENERAL SYNOD 2016**

## **Report of the Standing Committee Proposer: The Ven Adrian Wilkinson**

**Embargoed Against Delivery  
Check Against Delivery**

### **Introduction**

The Standing Committee carries out the work of the General Synod between sessions. It meets up to six times during the year. The list of representatives and their attendance record is on pages 169-171.

### **Thanks**

The Standing Committee is very much supported in its activities by the Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod and the Synod Officer. On page 166 you will note that Mrs Ethne Harkness stood down as one of the Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod in June 2015. During her time in this position, her commitment, attention to detail and professional legal expertise was very evident to us all, both at General Synod and at meetings of the Standing Committee. While her involvement continues in other spheres of church activity, we thank Ethne for all she has done to further the work and witness of the Church of Ireland through her role as an Honorary Secretary of the General Synod. We congratulate Mr Kenneth Gibson who was elected to the vacant position as an Honorary Secretary. He is already making a very valuable contribution to our meetings and work.

You will also note that Mr Garrett Casey resigned as Synod Officer in September 2015. His organisational and administrative skills, work ethic and outgoing cheerful disposition meant that for those who needed help to navigate the workings of the General Synod, he was always an obvious port of call. We wish him well in his new career in the legal profession. We welcome Dr Catherine Smith who has taken over this position in the RCB and is bringing her own considerable skills to the role.

In your Book of Reports, you will see that the Standing Committee report stretches to 87 pages and so I and the seconder, Mrs Pauline High, will only highlight a few items. Later we will go through this report page by page and you can address those sections which have not been alluded to.

## **Charities Legislation**

Legislation surrounding the governance and activities of all charities has been the focus of attention in recent years both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. As this is being addressed in detail as part of the report of the Representative Body, I will not deal with it here except to make one point.

No doubt many of you as members of the General Synod, are also involved at parochial level on select vestries, at diocesan level on various committees and boards and may also be trustees of charities. If so, you can never read the middle paragraph on page 214 often enough.

The Working Group has identified several concerns relating to the position of local trustees where activities may be in breach of new standards and potential difficulties in the particular case of charitable companies. These are clearly listed for your information. Please read and take note.

## **Historical Centenaries Working Group**

The membership and activities of the Historical Centenaries Working Group can be found in Appendix G on page 227. The year 1916 is one etched in the consciousness of all Irish people, whatever their political views. For some it is inextricably linked to the Battle of the Somme when on the 1st July, the first day of that battle, there were 5,500 casualties from the 36th Ulster Division. Later that year, in a continuation of the same battle, the 16th Irish Division, made up largely of men from the three other provinces had 4,330 casualties. In the horror of war, men from both traditions in this island, fought, supported one another, suffered and died together.

Anyone of my generation who attended primary school in the Republic of Ireland will remember seeing a framed copy of the 1916 Proclamation on display in the classroom. These were issued to schools in 1966 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising and may be still visible in some schools today. The report on pages 227 and 228 outlines some of the events that were organised to contribute to reflection, discussion, education, debate and commemoration over the past year. Of course these important events should be seen alongside a host of smaller local initiatives held in parish halls, schools, and other venues. We in the Diocese of Cork, in partnership with University College Cork, held a very successful public lecture in January in the Aula Maxima at the College, at which there was standing room only. Book launches, exhibitions, lectures and tours have proved to be very popular

across the country and have contributed to a more mature and considered reflection on the complex nature of the history of this period. The Church of Ireland, as it straddles two political jurisdictions and holds together people of differing political viewpoints in its membership, has a very valuable role to play here. The presence of An Taoiseach Mr Enda Kenny TD, the British Ambassador to Ireland Mr Dominick Chilcott, and the First Minister of Northern Ireland Mrs Arlene Foster MLA, at a special event in Christ church Cathedral in Dublin referred to at the bottom of page 227, is perhaps confirmation of that.

Recently a special liturgy was written to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising. The Bidding Prayer included in that service states that “in remembering the events of one hundred years ago, we, the Church are called to give voice to shared suffering, silenced and untold stories, the many and nuanced narratives, bravery and heroism, and commitment to ideals that were underpinned by shared and common aspirations”. Obviously considerable challenges lie ahead as we in this part of the Ireland prepare to mark the centenary of events that occurred during the Irish War of Independence. I suggest that the wording of this prayer may be a useful template for our reflections. Given the work of the Historical Centenaries Working Group to date, we can have confidence that we are in good hands as we chart our way through some complex historical waters.

### **The Priorities Fund**

The allocation of grants in 2015 from the Priorities Fund can be seen on page 177-182 and accounts are presented in appendix K. The Priorities Fund arose from a recommendation of the ‘First of All’ report published in 1979. The report envisaged that the fund would be set up to provide resources for growth within the Church of Ireland and the wider community. In the thirty-seven years since the inception of the fund, over €17 million has been distributed in grants. Projects currently supported by the fund include:

- Training for ordained and lay ministry, youth and children’s ministry and student chaplaincy.
- Christian education including RE and adult education.
- The fund seeks to encourage creative and innovative projects which reach out to the community and supports church plants and missional areas.
- Under the heading ‘Innovative Ministry in a Rural Context’, grants are made available for creative and innovative ministry projects in the sparsely populated areas of the country, in rural or village settings.

The membership of the Priorities Fund Committee is to be found on page 171. Those who serve on it take very seriously the responsibility placed upon them, to be wise stewards of the resources placed at the disposal of the fund through the generosity of parishes, the length and breadth of the island. Not every application can be successful as the money is limited but every application is examined in detail and where possible, background research is done and site visits are carried out. If members of the General Synod are involved in projects which fit the broad criteria as outlined and which have a link to the Church of Ireland, then please talk to Sylvia Simpson at the display stand outside and she will guide you on the process of lodging an application for financial support for the forthcoming year.

### **The Church and Society Commission of the Church of Ireland**

In appendix E the activity of the Church and Society Commission is outlined. This group serves the General Synod and the wider church well in the responses and contributions it makes to a whole host of topical issues. I was interested to note that it has responded to the papal encyclical *Laudato Si*. This document, issued almost a year ago, begins with the subtitle 'On the care of our common home' and it contains many useful paragraphs on the environment. I found myself quoting it in a sermon on Rogation Sunday recently! The sheer breath and range of topics addressed by the Commission is very impressive and we thank them for their proactive and reactive contributions.

### **The Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Human Belief**

Finally, please note that the work of the Select Committee on Human Sexuality in the Context of Human Belief, mentioned on page 182 can be found, not as an appendix to the Standing Committee report, but at the very end of your Book of Reports. A resource pack and guide has been published by this committee which it hopes will be used widely by parishes and diocese in the autumn of this year to assist in 'listening, learning and dialogue'.

I will now hand over to Mrs Pauline High of Connor Diocese to second the report of the Standing Committee.