

GENERAL SYNOD 2007

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT

Seconded by Mr Leslie Johnston, (Armagh)

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your Grace

In seconding the report of Standing Committee I feel that it might be helpful to outline the structure under which this report is based.

For the benefit of those attending Synod for the first time and to remind ourselves of our remit which is driven by our mission statement

Church of Ireland, an authentic part of the universal Church of God, is called to develop growing communities of faith, in and through which the Kingdom of God is made known, and in which the whole people serve together as followers of Jesus Christ for the good of the world.

GROWTH - UNITY - SERVICE

The Standing Committee is the principal committee of General Synod and consists of the archbishops and bishops, the honorary secretaries, two clerical and two lay representatives

for each diocese or united dioceses and seven co-opted members. Its membership is 71.

The Committee meets six times a year in Church of Ireland House, Rathmines.

The Committee may deliberate and confer upon all matters affecting the interests of the Church of Ireland.

It has a duty to watch any legislation or proposals for legislation which may be brought forward in Parliament in the Republic, in the United Kingdom or in the European Union which may affect the interests of the Church of Ireland, and may take such action with respect thereto as it may deem necessary.

The Standing Committee makes all arrangements necessary for meetings of the General Synod, and represents the Synod when it is not in session. At all times in making decisions or adopting policies, the Standing Committee is conscious that it is subject to the ultimate authority of General Synod.

Last year this Synod approved a Bill to create posts of child Protection officers for Northern Ireland and the Republic to strengthen and take forward the important work of Safeguarding Trust. Ms Margaret Yarr has taken up her position last March to serve in Northern Ireland. In the words of the Rev Ian Ellis (the Secretary of the Board of Education) “the appointment makes a vital statement to parishes and parents alike that the Church of Ireland places the welfare of children as a top priority and seeks to ensure that

its Safeguarding Trust policy is always well resourced and supported by personnel with a high degree of expertise and experience”

In the Standing Committee report you will note that this year we have brought forward in Bill No 4 an amendment to the present membership of Synod thus making an adjustment to Chapter one of the constitution. This will in effect bring about change.

“Since changes are going on anyway, the great thing is to learn enough about them so that we will be able to lay hold of them and turn them in the direction of our desires”

Quote from John Dewey in his ‘Reconstruction in Philosophy’

We live in a world of change. History illustrates the manner in which society throughout the world has changed. The Roman Empire had been instilled with the simple virtues of self reliance, personal integrity, family cohesion and discipline. The Greek influence softened the ways of the Romans. The Industrial Revolution brought dramatic changes to the English scene, and reverberated throughout the world. The change from a domestic to a factory system of industry with its consequent drawing of workers from village communities into factory centered towns was massive. Change creates change. Rapid technological change of the twentieth century has spawned social and behavioural change, creating great social turbulence. Such change both affects, and is affected by, institutional or governmental change and by business adjustments to change. The technological breakthrough of the internet has resulted in tremendous

changes in behaviour through an extensive and immediate involvement of the average citizen in world events.

Change itself is neither good nor bad. It is the independent nature of change that reveals its importance to the Church of Ireland. The biggest task is to identify the kind of change most suited, together with consideration of the timing – how fast do we need change and how quickly can we accomplish change?

The inability to keep up with change is one of the reasons for failure in many organizations. But keeping up is not enough. To stay out in front, an organization has to create change and to do this well requires change creating mechanisms. If an organization is to survive it must be able to react to changing conditions by changing itself. An organization must in fact anticipate environmental changes by altering policies and structure in time to meet these new conditions as they arise.

The review of our committee structures will also bring about change. This review will come before the House of Bishops, which will identify the key areas of policy and vision for the next ten years.

Responding to the Consultation Documents

There are occasions when the Church of Ireland is asked to respond to consultation documents by the Government Departments of either Northern Ireland or the Republic. Standing Committee has been concerned that very often these documents are produced at the start of the summer season with very little time given for response. We have made our concern known to these ministries. However Standing Committee, which wants to have a Church of Ireland input, has set in place the following action plan.

- (1) A response may be submitted only when the Archbishops and the Honorary Secretaries deem it to be imperative that an official response be issued from the Church of Ireland prior to the next meeting of the Standing Committee.
- (2) Appropriate persons with expertise and experience in the particular area under consideration should be consulted.

Consideration might be given to encouraging greater involvement from Diocesan Synods to study consultation documents and reports and feed back to Standing Committee or General Synod. Provision could also be made for Diocesan Synods to refer issues which are of general interest to the Church and or to General Synod. A good example of this is shown in the explanatory memorandum on Bill No 4 before Synod brought up by Down and Dromore Diocesan Synod in June 06.

Disability Working Group

In March 2005 the Standing Committee established the working group on disability in order to address issues concerning disability that affect the Church of Ireland.

The challenge for the Church is to encourage dioceses and parishes not only to conform to the law in each jurisdiction but to implement a policy to make all aspects of church life and worship accessible to all. However the policy statement is under review and will be brought into line with further legislation. This is to be applauded. Also it is pleasing to report that a recent audit has been carried out with excellent responses from parishes.

A professional analysis of the questionnaires is almost complete and the results will be published shortly. Our working group will decide if further action is required to encourage parishes to facilitate people with disabilities to fully participate in the life of the Church.

Your Grace, in the report of standing committee there are many hours of consideration, work and prayer and I have pleasure in seconding the Report of the Standing Committee.