

**COMMISSION ON MINISTRY**

**REPORT 2023**

**Membership (March 2023)**

<i>House of Bishops</i> The Rt Rev David McClay (Chair)	<i>Standing Committee</i> Ven Barry Forde
<i>General Synod - Clerical</i> Ven Elizabeth Cairns Very Rev Paul Draper Rev Rob Jones	<i>Pensions Board</i> Ms Judith Peters
<i>General Synod - Lay</i> Captain George Newell VACANT VACANT	<i>The Representative Church Body</i> Ms Hazel Corrigan Very Rev Nigel Crossey
<i>Director of Theological Institute</i> Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott	<i>Honorary Secretaries</i> Rev Canon Gillian Wharton
<i>Co-opted</i> Rev Emma Carson	<i>Central Director of Ordinands</i> Very Rev Lynda Peilow
	<i>In Attendance</i> Dr Nicole Gallagher

**Membership**

The sincere thanks and appreciation of the Commission goes to Mrs Ruth Galbraith and Mrs Heather Carson, both of whom stepped down from their membership of the Commission towards the end of this past year.

Thanks must also be paid to Dr Catherine Smith who acted as secretary to the Commission during her time as Synod Officer and who left this position during the year to take up a new role at the Church's Ministry of Healing: Ireland. The Commission wishes Dr Smith well in her new position.

**Report**

The following represent some of the topics that the Commission is currently exploring, and on which it would be glad to hear from members.

**Advent Retreat**

The Commission's sixth Advent retreat, 'The Light Shines in the Darkness', was held from the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> November at Mount Saint Anne's Retreat Centre, outside Portarlinton in Co. Laois. This was the first 'in person' Advent retreat to be held since the pandemic. It was facilitated by the Church's Ministry of Healing: Ireland and the speaker was Ms Carol

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Casey. After a number of last-minute cancellations due to illness, ten people attended and feedback was very positive. Owing to the success of the 2022 retreat, the Commission has asked CMH:I to facilitate the next Advent retreat in 2023.

### **Nurturing Vocations**

In January, the Commission organised a vocations retreat for those exploring a call to ordained ministry. It was held in the Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre outside Newry and the guest speaker was the Rt Rev Dr Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster. Thanks to the Very Rev Lynda Peilow, the Central Director of Ordinands, and Mrs Judy Peters for their efforts in organising this retreat and to Bishop McClay for organising the speaker.

### **The Burden of Compliance and Administration on Parishes**

Over the past year, the Commission has become increasingly aware of the burden of compliance that is currently being placed on parishes around the entirety of the Church of Ireland. It is felt that the majority of this work often falls on the shoulders of the clergy who already find themselves stretched from an administrative point of view. Therefore, in November, a sub-group from the Commission met with Mrs Janet Maxwell to voice their concerns and it was agreed that this is a conversation which needs to be heard more widely and that the issue of the difficulty of parishes meeting all compliance needs would be put on the agendas of the House of Bishops, the Representative Body and Standing Committee. It is the recommendation of the Commission that the Representative Church Body put in place a central compliance officer and that Diocesan Councils put in place a diocesan compliance officer, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, to support parishes in matters of compliance. The Commission also requests that the central Church makes parishes in the republic of Ireland aware of the fact that the Charities Regulator and other private companies are available to hire by parishes to ensure they are totally compliant.

### **Clergy Wellbeing**

The subject of clergy wellbeing has become a frequent feature on the agendas of the Commission on Ministry this past year. The Commission was delighted to be joined at their November meeting by the RCB HR Manager, Mr Eddie Hallissey, who provided the group with information on the central supports which have been set up to support clergy including the Clergy Assistance Fund which has been set up to provide support to clergy and their spouses who may be struggling with their mental health, the Clergy Permanent Health Insurance Policy and the Clergy Parental Sabbatical Policy. While these schemes are proving to be very successful and are welcome supports to those who fit the criteria, the Commission is continuing to discuss ways in which more support can be given to, not just members of the clergy, but also to other groups such as diocesan employees, for example.

The wellbeing of part-time stipendiary clerics has also been a topic of heavy discussion over the past year. The Commission realises that sometimes unrealistic expectations are placed on part-time clerics, both by their diocese and by the parish in which they serve. Therefore, the Commission on Ministry urges each diocese to ensure the fair remuneration of their part-time stipendiary clerics and that parishes, dioceses and clerics maintain realistic expectations of what is expected of part-time clergy.

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The Commission has also had a number of discussions regarding the benefits surrounding clerical sabbatical leave and research was undertaken regarding sabbatical policies in place in the various dioceses as well as in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Given that some dioceses do not currently have a policy in place for sabbatical leave, the Commission recommends that every diocese establish such a policy which should then be reviewed regularly. The Commission also encourages diocesan bishops to encourage clergy to take time off at a certain point of their ministry to attend retreats or mid-career courses as a source of continual professional development and spiritual/emotional refreshment.

### **Pioneer Ministry**

After a considerable number of years spent laying a solid foundation to take forward the work of Pioneer Ministry across all the Church of Ireland, Pioneer Ministry was given an official launch at a special service in St Patrick's Cathedral on Sunday 5th February. The Pioneer leadership team, led by Rev Rob Jones, was also commissioned at this service.

### **Rural Ministry**

The subject of rural ministry has been on the agenda of the Commission on Ministry over the past year. The Commission recognizes that, although some clerics who serve in a rural context face the challenge of isolation, ministering in a rural context also opens the door to the exploration of team ministry. It is the hope of the commission over the next year to engage with clerics who minister in rural communities so that they can speak about their ministry and how they feel they could be better supported.

### **Tenure**

The Commission on Ministry has expended considerable time and energy on the issue of clergy tenure, particularly in those difficult situations whereby it is clear to all that an intractable breakdown has occurred (see Commission on Ministry Report to General Synod 2018). It is the view of the Commission that:

- (a) There is insufficient clarity on the definition of offences under VIII.25 and
- (b) There is insufficient clarity on the processes to be followed to address potential offences prior to a formal disciplinary process (VIII.19).
- (c) Further, there is no process prescribed to address the particular circumstances when it is apparent to the bishop, diocese, and parish that a potentially intractable breakdown in relationships has occurred, but where it is neither appropriate nor desirable to make a charge based on an 'ecclesiastical offence'. The nomination process requires all four parties – bishop, diocesan nominators, parish nominators and clergy – to make an appointment on the premise that this is for the good of all. However, when potential intractable breakdown arises the Constitution appears to secure the tenure of the clergy over and above, or even against, the will and interests of all other parties – bishop, diocese, and parish.
- (d) Conversely, nothing is prescribed that would indicate that any person other than the member of the clergy might be deprived of any right, role, or position within the church, even if they bear considerable responsibility for the impasse.
- (e) There is a lack of confidence that the formal processes, once enacted, will attend to the complaint in a timely and productive manner.

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The Commission offers the reflections and overview contained in this Report to the proposed Select Committee to Review Clergy Tenure the following tentative recommendations:

- a) That the Select Committee keep a narrow focus on the grounds and processes relating to those specific cases of offence and breakdown, acknowledging that wider issues may exist in relation to CPD, Ministry Review, and even tied housing.
- b) That clear processes, with timelines, be established as steps or stages for ‘pastoral resolution’.
- c) That consideration be given to the relationship between stipend, office, and duties, along with a clearer understanding of duties.
- d) That definition be given to the range of Ecclesiastical Offences under VIII.25.
- e) That the potential for confusion that exists whereby a complaint is also grounds for a Dignity in Church Life issue be addressed.
- f) That an alternative process be established to address situations of pastoral breakdown in which recourse to disciplinary processes on the grounds of ecclesiastical offence are not appropriate.
- g) That the matter of licenses with a specific duration of tenure for other roles (chaplain, priest-in-charge) be made more explicit, confirming that tenure will cease at the end of the licence, and that said roles are also subject to the disciplinary processes of Chapter VIII.
- h) That consideration be given to what redress or sanction be applied to parties who bring a complaint where such complaint is not substantiated yet causes considerable harm to the member of the clergy.

The Commission wishes the Select Committee well in its deliberations and will offer its support should it ever be required.

### **Legislation**

The Commission is bringing a motion to General Synod this year on foot of work delegated to the Commission following a review of the Commission on Episcopal Ministry and Structures (CEMS). One proposal that arose out of CEMS was that the appointment of an Archdeacon might be tied to that of the Bishop. The Commission canvassed the views of Bishops and Archdeacons on a number of options and now seeks to offer members of Synod the opportunity to give an indication of the option or options they might prefer should formal legislation be brought to Synod. The ‘mind of Synod’ will not be binding on any future Synod or proposal, but will offer an opportunity for open discussion without a ‘final decision’ at this Synod, and will direct the future work of the Commission. The options for consideration are:

- 1) Linking the tenure of an Archdeacon to that of the appointing Bishop;
- 2) Having the tenure of an Archdeacon be a standard fixed term;

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- 3) Having the tenure of an Archdeacon agreed upon between the appointing Bishop and his/her new Archdeacon at the time of his/her appointment;
- 4) No change necessary and no further action required.