

R.B. Report

Seconding Speech: Very Revd Nigel Crossey (max. 10 minutes)

Nigel Crossey, Dean of Kilmore in the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh.

Your Grace, it is my privilege to be one of the clerical members of the RB Executive Committee, and today I am grateful to have the opportunity to second the RB report.

Firstly, I would like to thank Mr Lyndon MacCann, who has been the Acting Chair of the RB Executive Committee in recent months, to thank Mr McCann for his comprehensive report of the activities of the Representative Church Body for 2023. He has already made reference to the performance of the RCB and parish investments, the allocation of funds, changes to clergy pensions and the strategic focus of the Representative Church Body.

As Lyndon has mentioned, the RB Executive Committee, who act as the charity trustees of the Representative Church Body, held eight meetings during 2023 and we reported to each meeting of the full Representative Body of the Church of Ireland. This reporting gives an opportunity for members of the full Representative Body to ask questions and indeed to challenge any of the proposals which come through the RB Executive Committee. This provides a comprehensive and transparent governance framework which allows the RCB to report full compliance with the Charities Governance Code.

Each year, the members of the Executive Committee and the Chief Officer meet to discuss the strategy and priorities for the RCB. Last year the committee met at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. During this full day of discussion and debate we confirmed our mission to “support the mission and ministry of the Church of Ireland”, with the vision to be “well structured and resourced to support the current and future needs and ambitions of the church.” The Executive Committee then considered its priorities, some of which have been mentioned already, these included: the funding of curacies, chaplaincy, integrating pioneer ministry, and developing a comprehensive property and library strategy.

In setting these priorities, there has been a noticeable shift from maintenance towards mission, from preservation towards outreach. Now it would be wrong to allow finances to be our sole consideration but the challenge for any organisation is how to adequately support new initiatives within the limited resources available. And that does mean the setting of priorities.

So, for example if the RCB allocates significant funding towards Pioneer Ministry that may mean an impact on those resources available for training for ordained ministry; or if the church invests in chaplaincy that may well draw people away from parochial ministry. As you can see, this is not simply a matter of the careful allocation of finance but rather the interaction between different but complementary forms of ministry. I would ask that you as members of the Church and as members of this Synod, that you remember the Executive Committee in your prayers, that they may have wisdom in their decisions, especially those in relation to the support of the mission of the Church.

I want to highlight just a few areas of the RB Report

One of the significant and exciting initiatives that the RCB will be supporting over the coming years is **Pioneer Ministry**. We have received presentations from the Pioneer Ministry National

Leadership team in terms of their mission and the finances that are required to support pioneer projects, training, and mentoring. The original budget proposals included financial funding from the RCB to support three new pioneer initiatives per year, but during 2024, a revised budget to provide funding for five pioneer initiatives per year has been approved.

Pioneer Ministry is an initiative to establish new ministry communities and church. Training for pioneer ministers is to be provided by the Church Army through the Church of Ireland Theological Institute. Pioneer ministers are supported by the Pioneer Ministry National Leadership team, with oversight by the Pioneer Ministry Council, and funding is provided by the RCB. It's an initiative intended to enable and invigorate the mission of the Church.

We have also recognised that there is a need to provide support for parish ministry. It is parochial ministry which is and remains foundational to the life and witness of our Church, the mainstay or bedrock of our Church. And it is an important development that during the last year the Executive Committee have been considering the provision of grants to support **curacies**. A workgroup headed by Mike Johnston has been working with Bishop Andrew Forster to develop curacy protocols and an RCB grant scheme.

I would ask for a moment for Synod's indulgence, but this year, in just a few weeks time, I will be marking 40 years since my ordination along with a number of other confederates. Yes, It is exciting to see new creative and inventive developments, and we must be open through the prompting of the Spirit not only to new ways of being and doing Church but also new ways into being and doing Church. But there is also great virtue in preserving, nourishing and sustaining that which has served us well and will continue to serve us well if we provide properly for it.

Formation is a vital component in fostering and encouraging and retaining Vocation. And I personally am passionate in maintaining the value of the Curacy in this process of formation. I was ordained in a service in Derryloran Church in Cookstown to serve in the Parish of Drumglass, Dungannon. I was privileged there to have two outstanding mentoring Rectors in the late Canon Alfie O'Connor and the late Canon Derrick Swann, but also the support and encouragement of a wonderful set of parishioners in Dungannon and Moygashel who understood the learning curve for someone newly ordained. And I am immensely grateful to those people for their support and friendship, and I do look very fondly on those early but also challenging days – the morning after my ordination I was walking down Scotch Street in Dungannon with my new white shiny clerical collar when I met an elderly gentleman coming up the street. As he drew level, he tugged the peak of his cap and said "Good morning, your reverence" and for the first time I felt the privilege and the weight of responsibility of being ordained, - that deeply personal, sacred and sacramental response to God's calling. I must admit I was somewhat overwhelmed; I knew I had so much to learn but well 40 years later, I'll still standing and I'm still learning. But the proper financing and provision of curacies and their importance to the ongoing formation and mentoring of those newly ordained is surely a vital work for our Church and its future.

Let me quickly move on. Another area of support is the advice and service provided by the staff of the RCB in the issues surrounding compliance, for example the advice provided in relation to **Safeguarding**. The development of safeguarding policy, delivery of training, and advice has been a key focus for RCB staff. During 2023, the staff of the RCB developed a paper addressing the division of roles and responsibility between the RCB as policy developer and advisor, and the dioceses having a responsibility for implementation. The Safeguarding Board have

requested an external independent review of the governance of safeguarding and this review will be considered by the Safeguarding Board and the Executive Committee.

There are of course many other areas for your consideration within the Report. I simply draw your attention to two more of them:

Firstly, Properties. The RCB is the primary trustee for the properties of the Church of Ireland. These range from majestic cathedrals – my own in Kilmore among them - to rectories to graveyards. The Executive Committee have identified the need to review our property portfolio to determine their most efficient and effective use, in supporting the priority initiatives identified by the Executive Committee.

Secondly, the staff organisation of the RCB. We are seeing a re-focusing of the Church's priorities towards mission, so I would expect that over the coming years the RCB staff structure will need to evolve to address these changes in priorities, though that may be a process of re-alignment which takes a number of years to achieve.

However, as I draw towards a conclusion, I would like to thank all those who serve on the Representative Body and its committees, and in particular to the Chief Officer and the staff of the RCB for their support of the mission of the dioceses and parishes of our Church.

Times they are a-changing and the Church must change too. The old parody of the hymn:
"Like a mighty tortoise moves the Church of God.
Brothers, we are treading where we've always trod"
No longer holds true. But change does come with its cost and with its challenges. So As a Church, we must be visionary, expectant, hopeful – and patient.

I commend this report to you and I second its adoption.