

Standing Committee Report
Proposer: Bishop Pat Storey
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Archbishop, members of Synod,

I am happy to have been asked to propose the Standing Committee report to General Synod – I am anticipating that the best I can hope for in undertaking this task is the curate's egg: good in parts! We might remind ourselves that the role of Standing Committee, and its sole role, is to effect the work and decisions of General Synod. Firstly, I would like to draw the attention of Synod members to the new format of the Book of Reports this year which many of you will be holding right now. Those who requested hard copies of the Report will have discovered the unbridled joy of the spiral bound, larger format, larger print Book. I trust that those with aging eyesight like myself will value this more user-friendly version and find it of help in terms of readability and visual clarity as we go through the Synod Reports.

At last year's General Synod, we passed a Diversity Motion. This was considered by the wider Church during the year – and feedback has been received from various dioceses. We encourage those dioceses which have given substantive responses to put great ideas into action, and ask dioceses which have not yet responded, to consider this important issue and find ways to improve the participation in the life of the Church of the many people from diverse international backgrounds who are now living in our communities. In particular, I want to thank Dr Lucy Michael and the members of the Primate's Diversity Group for demonstrating patience and perseverance in encouraging this developing strand of our church life.

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Following last year's General Synod, the Honorary Secretaries were asked to send a letter of **good wishes to King Charles following his Coronation**. During the year, a reply was received in which he conveyed his thanks to the members of the General Synod for their greetings and, in return, sends his warmest good wishes to all Synod members.

A project very close to my heart has been the MindMatters initiative. The first phase of this project is now drawing to a close. The project was sponsored by Benefact Trust and I want to express our thanks to them for that support. The project ran a conference in Dublin earlier this year. The conference was booked out to capacity and we enjoyed a live link from the Middle East where we were addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. He shared some very personal experiences regarding his own mental health journey and offered huge encouragement to Church of Ireland members to continue to develop their ministry in this area, which can make such a difference to so many people. I am delighted that General Synod will have a special presentation about **MindMatters** at this meeting, but I want to emphasise that this is only the beginning and I would ask all of you here today, to maintain your interest in this initiative and keep working on positive mental health at parish and diocesan level. In a similar vein, I am delighted too to see the approval and adoption of the Clergy Permanent Health Insurance Policy.

The Bishops' Appeal Committee was pleased to announce the appointment of Hilary McClay as the new Education Advisor. Hilary hit the ground running with numerous emergency appeals. She launched the first of a series of appeals within days of taking up her new role.

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Among the funds raised for support this year were:

- relief for those effected by the February 2023 Earthquake in Turkey & Syria.
- for those impacted by the floods in Libya.
- for those impacted by war in Gaza and across the Middle East.
- Continued support for those impacted by war in Ukraine.

All of this did not mean that funding for ongoing work was ignored. In addition to the emergency appeals, funding continued to be provided for partner organisation projects in Pakistan, Uganda, Cambodia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Malawi, Peru, Kenya, Chile. The committee was also pleased to note that the Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe diocesan link project was active in fundraising, through Bishop Burrows' Peregrination (which I am consistently unable to pronounce), that raised funds for a Mothers' Union literacy project in Burundi and a Feed the Minds sustainable business project in Madagascar. As ever, the fundraising for our overseas development work is a very active area of focus across the Church of Ireland and I want to pay tribute to all of those who participate and donate across the Church.

The Central Communications Board and the Royalties Fund supported a plethora of activity in recent years in the production of revised and new liturgical books by the LAC, and also books to commemorate and celebrate aspects of life of the Church of Ireland, for example, the 150th anniversary of Disestablishment and, most recently, the *Architectural History of the Church of Ireland*. These are only the most recent fruits of what has been a decade of active publications.

However, it has all come at a cost and drained the resources of the Royalties Fund in particular, and this year, following discussions with the RB Executive Committee, it was agreed that the General Synod Royalties Fund had been depleted to a level where it could not sustain continued expenditure. As a consequence, the Royalties Fund has been frozen to halt spending for the time being, with applications

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to the fund for grants or requests to support publishing being diverted to the Chair of Allocations, Canon Graham Richards, who will accept limited requests and make funds available from Allocations resources. The Fund has delivered an abundance of good publications for the Church, the latest of which are our new *Book of Collects* being launched this week, and our two new services for sudden death and miscarriage and stillbirth. You will find these publications amongst others available at the stall just outside the doors as you leave the Synod Hall.

We greatly look forward to our first reports from our new Pioneer Ministry Council. The Pioneer Fund exists to encourage new initiatives around the island, and to see fresh ideas and growth in our communities alongside our diverse church life. It should greatly enrich and deepen the ministry of the Church of Ireland to those presently outside our walls. We will keep praying for those who are training in pioneer ministry, and for those who are demonstrating creativity by envisaging new initiatives.

You will find many other reports on Standing Committee work and matters of interest in the appendices. Much of our work has been done throughout the year in a combination of in-person meetings and meetings by Zoom. There has been much debate about how much we can achieve through Zoom, especially if we need to discuss something that requires discretion. It is also argued that it is a much better format for those who either do not have to travel, or do not have to take time off work – there are strong opinions, and the debate continues. But it would be safe to say that we all enjoy the social aspect of getting together as actual human beings over General Synod.

As I conclude (were there ever more joyous words?), may I just make mention of the thousands of volunteers around our island who make church life fruitful and vibrant? We could not do all that we do without a huge number of volunteers, including many who sit here today with us for these few days of General Synod, some of whom give their time and services also to Standing Committee. We do not take it for granted and greatly value your contribution. Archbishop, I am delighted to propose the Standing Committee report.