

## **Standing Committee Report**

**Proposer: Dr Lucy Michael**

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It is my privilege today to propose the Report of the Standing Committee to the General Synod of 2023.

During the past year, the Standing Committee has come out of the Covid lockdown period with a very full agenda and this is reflected in the number of new committees being established to undertake fresh projects that will support different aspects of the life of the Church of Ireland.

There is a significant emphasis on looking to the future. You will see this reflected in the working groups directed to review the future of curacies and how they are to be sustained and the working group to review chaplaincies in third level educational institutions – and how they are to be effective in coming years – and sustained. There is no doubt that the General Synod needs to give some serious consideration to various ministries of the Church – and how they are, indeed, to be financed and sustained, because we are facing a struggle at many different levels and our membership is ageing and our potential for raising income is, sadly, challenged just as we need to be dynamic and creative in structuring the Church for the upcoming generations. Another important initiative in this respect is the Pioneer Ministry movement of which you will hear more following this report. Standing Committee will nominate three members to sit on the Pioneer Ministry Governing Council. We offer the Pioneer Ministry leadership team, the Revd Rob Jones, Ven Barry Forde and Ms Ingrid Brennan our warmest support as they strive to develop new projects to reach those who are not long associated with Churches.

Tomorrow's church must also be fully inclusive to people of every background and experience. This includes those who come to Ireland from other places and those who come from other traditions. We also want to be sure that there is a welcome and a place for people of all abilities within our parishes. It would be enormously helpful at every level of the church for us to be more imaginative about, and open to, using people's talents in new and different ways, including in decision making. To this end, the Consultative Group on Disability is also reviewing its method of working to become more pro-active in supporting parishes and other bodies of the Church to incorporate provision for all in their thinking. When this group was first set up, the intention was that it would be consulted by others. However, the pandemic really did not facilitate this way of providing support across the Church. So the working group

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has decided is now time to reach out more actively and remind other committees and Church bodies of the help it is able to give.

Of course, while we are deeply conscious of the need to make the Church fit for tomorrow's world, we have also a significant body of work that looks to the needs of today. Not least of these, is the Priorities Committee, which annually raises funds and allocates varying amounts of helpful financial grants to parish initiatives in four categories: Outreach initiatives, Christian education, Innovative Ministry in a Rural Context, and Training for Lay and Ordained members of the Church. This year, the Priorities Fund has supported thirty-three projects to the value of €455,802. I'm particularly excited to see, for example, two outreach projects supporting refugees and asylum seekers, in the Diocese of Down and Dromore and at St Paul and St Barnabas Church in the Diocese of Connor, the 'Holylands' mobile cafe outreach project also in the Diocese of Connor, and after school clubs and summer programmes for children in low-income families in the Solas Project, Dublin, and at St Brendan's church, Sydenham, in the Diocese of Connor. Those are the issues of particular interest to me - but there are many others on the list of funded projects. May I encourage you to look at the list of funded programmes and be inspired by the many fascinating innovations happening across the island. Mr Roy Totten has chaired the Priorities Fund for many years, and I ask you to acknowledge the contribution and commitment he has shown to this particular initiative, along with a very dedicated committee. We acknowledge and thank parishes for maintaining support for the Priorities Fund even in these challenging times as many of these smaller projects are very valuable but would find it difficult to get off the ground without the support that the Priorities Fund is able to give.

Another item of interest is the beginning of a new phase in the relationship with the Moravian Church. Under the leadership of Bishop Michael Burrows, a focused conversation begins now that will lead towards establishing interchangeability of ministry between the Church of Ireland and the Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland – supported by the establishment of the new Moravian Interchangeability Working Group. We wish them success and look forward to their future reports and proposals.

Finally, I would draw your attention to two working groups that focus on times past. We offer our thanks to the members of the Historical Centenaries Working Group who are currently

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concluding their work after ten years. This group of people has been working diligently to recognise and reflect on the various historical centenaries and to work with the LAC in developing liturgical resources to support memorialisation in the wider Church. They have run various events and produced useful resources. At times, this process of remembering and reflecting has been difficult for our communities and has led to some very important dialogues between our community and others. It would be important to recognise the excellent leadership of the chairs of this committee during the decade. These were the Archbishop of Armagh, who was then Bishop of Clogher, the Most Revd John McDowell, the Rt Revd Kenneth Kearon, and the Rt Revd Paul Colton.

Further work on understanding our past is the focus of the Working Group Considering a Co-Ordinated Response by the Church to Historic Institutional Abuse. This group continues to engage with the State in each jurisdiction. We increasingly realise that the attitudes that formed the basis of our social context in the past are both difficult to recognise and to acknowledge. Life may have moved on, but for many, the legacy of time spent in institutions was and continues to be painful. Thanks must be paid to those who have co-operated with this process up to now.

Finally, I would like to thank those of you who have responded to the consultation recently conducted by another new working group which is reviewing the operation of the revised process for episcopal elections. This working group will present its report and recommendations to next year's General Synod. I would also like to express the thanks of the Standing Committee to all of the volunteers contributing so effectively and enthusiastically at all levels of church life. We value your contribution and the many hours of work that you are giving to the Church – without you the Church of Ireland would not be the thriving and dynamic Church it is today.