

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY REPORT 2025

Membership

House of Bishops

Rt Rev David McClay (Chair)

General Synod – Clerical

*Ven Elizabeth Cairns

*Very Rev Paul Draper

* Vacant

General Synod – Lay

*Captain George Newell

*Ms Hazel Uprichard

*Ms Judith Cairns

Director of Theological Institute

Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliot

Central Director of Ordinands

Very Rev Lynda Peilow

***Appointed at General Synod 2024**

Pensions Board

Ms Judith Peters

The Representative Church Body

Dr John Graham

Very Rev Nigel Crossey

Honorary Secretaries

Rev Canon Gillian Wharton

Standing Committee

*Rev Rob Jones

Co-opted

*Rev Emma Gibson

*Rev Canon Alastair Graham

*Dr Scott Brown

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.

Church Growth Conference 2026

The Commission has discerned that around the Church of Ireland, many parishes and other ministry initiatives are beginning to see the shoots of fresh growth, with numbers in Church beginning to rise steadily. The Commission believes that the time is right to hold a significant conference on the subject of Church growth to nurture this positive mood, by exploring what is happening and to encourage parishes across the island to become active catalysts for mission and outreach.

The Commission has established a Sub-Committee to facilitate the organisation of the conference, and more details will be made available in due course.

- Bishop David McClay
- Rev Canon Gillian Wharton
- Rev Rob Jones
- Very Rev Lynda Peilow
- Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott
- Rev Canon Alastair Graham

Clergy Well-being

The Commission pursued three aspects of clergy well-being during the year. The first was to have a presentation from the Clergy Support Trust, which is a charitable body that provides grants to assist clergy families in times of difficulty. You will be able to find resources from the Clergy Support Trust at the RB Stand at General Synod, if you would like to find out more about their work.

The second initiative has been called ‘Chats around the Fire’. This initiative aims to bring clergy together in an informal setting to discuss challenges that are encountered in clergy life and ministry. The intention is to share learning and experience outside the framework of more formal oversight. Today, we find that many clergy are ordained later in life, and there is a need for such a forum to allow the sharing of experience to build up a shared body of good practice.

The third initiative will be led by Dr Scott Brown, who is leading the Commission’s preparations in planning a conference to deal with stress and build resilience to sustain a vibrant ministry.

Reports on Retreats and Courses

A key part of the Commission’s activity every year, is the provision of three key retreats. One is open to all (the Advent Retreat), one is for those considering ordained ministry (the Vocations Retreat) and one is for clergy approaching retirement (the Clergy Pre-Retirement Course).

Advent Retreat

The annual advent retreat organised by the Commission on Ministry was held on 15th-17th November 2024 in Mount St Anne’s Retreat Centre, Portarlington. The retreat was co-facilitated by Rev Canon Alastair Graham and Ms Lydia Monds, Ministry Leader at the Church’s Ministry of Healing. Ms Judy Peters acted as co-ordinator. The retreat was fully booked. Ms Lydia Monds ran an Art Café as part of the retreat experience, which was enjoyed by those attending. Feedback from the retreat showed that participants were very happy with both content and hospitality. It is intended to run the retreat again in 2025.

Nurturing Vocations

A vocations retreat was held on 21st-23rd February 2025, in Manresa Retreat Centre, Dublin, for those exploring ordination in the Church of Ireland. The retreat was led and organised by Ms Judy Peters, and Bishop David McClay. The Rt Rev Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford was the guest speaker. As previously, practical sessions were led by Dr Katie Heffelfinger of CITI on pathways to ordination and Revd Rob Jones on Pioneer Ministry with consideration also given to the impact of ordination on the wider family. Rev Canon Lesley Robinson and Rev Canon Tom O’Brien acted as Chaplains to the retreat, alongside Rev James Boyd, leading worship in the chapel of the Retreat Centre.

The retreat offered the 22 participants from across the Church of Ireland an opportunity to consider the spiritual, intellectual, and practical aspects of ordained ministry, with time to consider and foster the process of discernment and provide a space for reflection. Participants benefited from a sense of community and left, we hope, with a network of peers to provide ongoing support and encouragement. Manresa proved an excellent facility for the event and the feedback was very good. The participants felt that they were provided with information, formation, and space to enable and equip them on their journey.

Clergy Retirement

At the time of drafting this year’s report on the work of the Commission on Ministry, a 24-hour residential course is being planned for 12th and 13th November 2025, for clergy that are approaching retirement. The Commission is grateful to the Stipends Committee and to the RB for providing funding towards the Retirement Course.

The venue for the course is the Stormont Hotel, Belfast. Bishop Ken Good and his wife Mrs Mary Good, will lead the event, joined by Ms Vicki Hastie (RCB Pensions), and members of the Commission on Ministry who will be addressing the event. It is hoped that this course will provide essential information and useful support to those clergy and clergy spouses where a clergyperson is planning to retire soon. Clergy and their spouses are also able to book an individual session with Ms Hastie to consider their individual situation.

We are indebted to those clergy who have served us faithfully for many years and the course is intended to help enable clergy and clergy spouses to continue having a fruitful ministry in retirement.

Pioneer Ministry

The Commission continues to maintain its awareness of the developing area of Pioneer Ministry, but now that the Pioneer Ministry Governing Council has its own report to General Synod, the Commission will not have oversight but will continue to collaborate in this area. For more information, please go to www.pioneerministry.org or email the National Director at rob@pioneerministry.org.

Legislation

The Commission proposed a Bill to General Synod to tidy up an anomaly to do with the retirement age of Archdeacons which was omitted in previous legislation.

Conclusion

The work of the Commission this past year has been focused mainly on taking forward residential gatherings. We are acutely aware of the need to raise those who are sensing a vocation to ordained ministry. We are, at the same time, exploring how we equip our clergy and laity to lead the mission and ministry of the Church forward with confidence in the power of the Gospel to transform lives and communities. Those clergy who have served the church faithfully for generations are deserving of support and encouragement in retirement. The ministries of lay people are increasingly significant across the dioceses of our church, and we celebrate the variety of lay ministries emerging at this time. As a Commission we are committed to making a contribution in all of these areas.