

## VEN JIM CHESHIRE-PROPOSER STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT

Archbishop, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to present the formal report of the Standing Committee to the General Synod of 2025.

This year saw a much appreciated return of the Standing Committee to the traditional setting of Boardroom 1 of Church House for in-person meetings. Since the pandemic, in-person meetings had been held in the former chapel of the Church of Ireland College of Education to facilitate better social distancing. However, with the eventual elimination of restrictions, the Standing Committee took a democratic decision to return to the more intimate setting of Boardroom 1 where, it was felt, the layout of the room generated better debate amongst members.

One of the large-ticket items discussed by the Standing Committee over the past year is the current state of the Constitution. At the January meeting, it was agreed that the Constitution of the Church of Ireland required an editorial revision (an exercise referred to in the past as a 'consolidation') with the aim of imposing a standardised house-style on the content of the Constitution with regards to capitalisation of certain words, referencing, etc. as well as correcting any minor infelicities such as formatting and punctuation. It is important to note that this editorial exercise would not make any changes to the actual content of the Constitution. It was, therefore, proposed and resolved at this meeting that a revised edition of the Constitution would be brought before the General Synod of 2026 with Mr Lyndon MacCann SC to act as Editor.

During the year, the Standing Committee was informed of the retirement of Dr Kenneth Milne as Editor of the Journal

of the General Synod. Dr Milne had acted as Editor of this publication for almost thirty years. The Standing Committee and indeed the General Synod as a whole owes a great debt of gratitude to him for his years of diligent dedication to this particular role. Happily, Dr Milne's Deputy Editor, the Very Rev Gregory Dunstan, has agreed to further exercise his keen eye for detail and take on the role of Editor.

Another larger item of discussion at Standing Committee over the course of the past year was the Church-wide census. At the June 2024 meeting, after the 2023 census figures were presented, the Standing Committee voted that, since the census now takes place in a simple online format using retrospective figures, it should be an annual event. The thanks of the Standing Committee must be paid to Mr Jonathan Hull for undertaking the collection of the census data and compiling the figures that are included in Appendix E of the Report. The thanks of the Standing Committee

must also be paid to the people from each and every parish who submitted their census returns, particularly to those, both clerical and lay, who undertook the submission of figures for vacant parishes. Without them, the phenomenal response rate of over 99% would not have been possible. After a slightly longer period of time, as trends begin to emerge, the data from the census will be analysed by a statistician.

While the census provides a snapshot of the Church as it currently is, it will also, eventually, help us become more strategic in working towards church growth and the provision of effective ministry for the coming years. With the large number of clergy retirements due in the relatively near future alone, the Church must take these things seriously, and prepare for this. One of the ways we can do this is by focusing on fresh expressions of ministry, as has been the case with Pioneer Ministry. Similarly, the Commission on

Ministry has been looking at ways of resourcing clergy in parishes to encourage growth at a parochial level across the whole of the Church. In recent years, the Standing Committee has also put a strong emphasis on equipping the Church for the future. These include the working groups that were established to look at the future of curacies and chaplaincies, both of which concluded their work this year. The report of the Future of Curacies Working Group can be found as Appendix K, while the report of the Third Level Chaplaincies Review Group can be found as Appendix N. The Future of Curacies Working Group presented what was supposed to be their final report to the Standing Committee in September 2023. However, the Standing Committee requested that the group continue its work and return with recommendations as to how the proposals in the initial report might be implemented. The Working Group kindly obliged and returned to the Standing Committee with its recommendations in November 2024. These

recommendations included the establishment of a Curacy Fund, financed by the Stipends and Allocations Committees, and the fostering of a culture of continual learning, making sure that both a training rector and a curate assistant know what is expected of them throughout the entire period of curacy. The group also noted that an agreement had been reached with the Theological Institute to provide in service training for rectors. Regarding the future provision of chaplaincies, the Third Level Chaplaincy Review Group also wound up its work this year. Its final recommendation was that central church funding for third level chaplaincy should be provided for through the Allocations Committee and that any additional funding sourced externally by the RB Executive Committee should also be managed by the Allocations Committee. The final report also included a number of considerations for chaplaincies, all of which can be found in Appendix N, and the recommendation that another review be carried out in the medium-term to ensure

that chaplains are being adequately supported. The thanks of the Standing Committee goes to the members of these two groups for going about their work in a timely and thorough manner, particularly to Mr Mike Johnston who chaired both committees.

In looking to the future of the Church and gauging a picture of what that might look like through the census and the work of the future of curacies and chaplaincies committees, it is important that tomorrow's Church is a welcoming place for all and, to that end, the Standing Committee this year undertook to seek fresh expressions of interest for the Consultative Group on Disability. A new group was then appointed, chaired by the Rev Natasha Quinn-Thomas, and their report including plans for future work can be found in Appendix I. These plans include the undertaking of surveys to see how best to accommodate differently-abled people at parochial level, making recommendations for parishes to

appoint disability representatives who can liaise with the Consultative Group on Disability, and looking at ways to make the Church of Ireland website more accessible for those with additional needs.

As we consider the future of the church, I conclude by noting that we would be remiss if we did not pay attention to what the Lord has been doing through a move of the Holy Spirit in the present, in what has been called the quiet revival taking place across the UK and which has already found its way to these shores, led in large part by a younger generation that is seeking truth and meaning and hope and life, and they are finding it in Christ. Preparing for the future will also require us to recognise and faithfully respond to what God is doing in the present, something that our census next year may begin to track. Regardless, this quiet revival is something that we should all take to heart and prayerfully long to see in our own time, for our own parishes and for our

own Church. In our future planning, may we not miss out on this gathering wave of God's blessing as we see God's kingdom coming and being made manifest more and more in the lives of people locally and throughout our land in the here and now.