

MS HELEN ARNOPP – SECONDER

Your Grace, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to second the report of the Standing Committee to the General Synod of 2025.

Over the course of the past year, the various sub-groups of the Standing Committee have been particularly busy with various projects. The General Synod of 2023 resolved that ‘The General Synod of the Church of Ireland requests the Church and Society Commission to explore, and if necessary recommend and/or draft resources which will enable Parishes to engage pastorally with, and care for, individuals and communities that are still deeply affected by trauma from ‘the Troubles’ ...’ Originally, CASC were to report back to the General Synod of 2024, however, such was the depth and complexity of this work, that it has taken two years to bring back to the General Synod. As you will see in Appendix H, the outcomes of this work include:

- The creation of a liturgical response to the issues raised in the motion;
- The production of an informational booklet for Church leaders entitled *Healing and Hope – Addressing the Trauma of the Troubles*. This booklet highlights support groups and other initiatives that may be of use to those living with this trauma;

and

- A proposal to introduce training on trauma informed care as part of the pastoral care element of the Continuing Ministerial Education programme at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute.

As a part of this work, CASC has engaged with the South East Fermanagh Foundation (also known as SEFF). This is a group set up in 1998 to provide practical and emotional support in the area of South Fermanagh for those who have been through traumatic experiences cause by terrorism. We are delighted that SEFF have brought a number of their memorial quilts to exhibit at this year’s General Synod and we would encourage all members to take the time to look at these if they have not already done so.

While many of the sub-committees of the Standing Committee, such as CASC, have been in existence for some time and their reports are an annual fixture within the report of the Standing Committee, it is necessary that, from time to time, new groups are established to undertake a specific project or body of work. One such example of this is the Working Group to Review Clergy Tenure. While this group was originally formed as a Select Committee of the General

Synod in 2023, it has now, since last year, become a Working Group of the Standing Committee. Since the reorganisation of this committee as a Working Group, this group has been hard at work undertaking a series of consultations with other denominations (including the Church of England, the Methodist Church in Ireland, and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland) to discover and discuss how other Churches deal with the issues of clergy tenure and discipline. The Working Group has also undertaken consultations internally within the Church of Ireland to see where the gaps might lie within the current disciplinary procedures and the model of clergy tenure laid out in the Constitution. For this phase of work, discussions were held with members of staff from the Representative Body from the legal and HR departments, the Chair of the Complaints Committee, and the chair of the Disciplinary Panel. A questionnaire was also conducted, with all bishops, archdeacons, diocesan secretaries, and honorary secretaries of diocesan synods invited to participate. Now that this consultation phase has concluded, the work of this group will be focused on what changes it can bring to the General Synod for consideration next year. The full Report of this Working Group can be found in Appendix R.

Another sub-committee of the Standing Committee established over the course of the last year was the Response to Humanitarian Crises Working Group. The General Synod of 2024 passed a resolution requesting that the Standing Committee identify an enhanced mechanism by which we as a church community may publicly speak to gross humanitarian situations in a timely and Christian manner and to report back to the General Synod of 2025. Following the passing of this resolution, the Standing Committee established the Response to Humanitarian Crises Working Group, chaired by the Rev Canon Gillian Wharton, and a final report was presented to the Standing Committee in November. The group concluded that the only body that can speak on behalf of the Church of Ireland is the General Synod and that, while bishops, archbishops, and various committees (such as CASC) may issue statements to the Church, they do not speak on behalf of the Church (although this nuance is often lost on the media and the general public). The group noted that bishops should be encouraged to have robust and timely responses to crises as they arise, and that theologians should be encouraged to make written responses where it is felt that Scripture is being abused. Finally, the working group acknowledged times where Christian Churches spoke together and noted the power of this, encouraging Christian Churches (the Church of Ireland included) to work together with the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter Church Meeting in issuing statements.

As you will see from the various reports appended to the Standing Committee Report, this is just a flavour of the work that is being carried out by the various sub-committees of the Standing Committee each year between the sessions of the General Synod. The Standing Committee wishes to thank each and every person who serves on these sub-committees for so selflessly giving of their time and expertise. Your contribution is greatly appreciated and does not go unnoticed. Should any members of the General Synod feel they have something to offer any of these committees, please never hesitate to get in touch via the Synod Office.