

STANDING COMMITTEE

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS LAID BEFORE

THE GENERAL SYNOD AT ITS

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SIXTH ORDINARY SESSION 2026

**THE GENERAL SYNOD
OF THE
CHURCH OF IRELAND
HONORARY SECRETARIES OF THE GENERAL SYNOD**



Rev Canon Gillian Wharton, The Rectory, Cross Avenue, Booterstown, Blackrock, Co. Dublin

Mr Ken Gibson, 11 Magheralave Court, Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT28 3BY

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Rev Canon Malcolm Kingston, St Mark's Rectory, Portadown Road, Armagh, BT61 9EE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY - Mrs Janet Maxwell

SYNOD OFFICER - Dr Nicole Gallagher

SYNOD ADMINISTRATOR – Ms Aisling Sheridan

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1. SUMMARY

Some significant matters dealt with by the Standing Committee in the past year were:

- The Establishment of the Wedding Venues Working Group;
- Legislation by Working Group on Clergy Tenure.

2. NAMES AND ATTENDANCE OF MEMBERS

During the period June 2025–March 2026 (inclusive), 5 meetings were held. The number of meetings attended by each member is placed before his/her name.

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

THE ARCHBISHOPS AND BISHOPS

THE HONORARY SECRETARIES OF THE GENERAL SYNOD

5/5	Rev Canon Gillian Wharton
4/5	Mr Kenneth Gibson
5/5	Ms Hazel Corrigan
5/5	Rev Canon Malcolm Kingston

ELECTED MEMBERS

Armagh	3/5	Rev Gary McMurray
	2/5	Rev Carlton Baxter
	3/5	Ms Caroline Nesbitt
	3/5	Ms Mary Caldwell
Clogher	3/5	Rev Mark Gallagher
	2/5	Ven Paul Thompson
	3/5	Mr Glenn Moore
	1/5	Mr Neville Armstrong
Derry & Raphoe	1/5	Rev Graham Hare
	5/5	Rev Canon Harry Gilmore
	3/5	Mr Robert Ellis
	1/5	Ms Kaye Nesbitt
Down & Dromore	5/5	Rev Mark Lennox
	4/5	Ven Jim Cheshire
	2/5	Mr William Fyffe
	5/5	Mr Andrew Brannigan
Connor	4/5	Rev Peter Jones
	3/5	Rev James Boyd
	4/5	Mr Roy Totten

VACANT

Kilmore,	4/5	Rev Canon Ruth West
Elphin &	3/5	Ven Ian Horner
Ardagh	3/5	Ms Hannah O’Neill
	2/4	Mr Alan Williamson*
Tuam,	4/5	Very Rev Niall Sloane
Limerick &	2/5	Very Rev Lynda Peilow
Killaloe	5/5	Dr Catherine Smith
	2/5	Mr Edward Hardy
Dublin &	4/5	Rev Sean Hanily
Glendalough	4/5	Rev Rob Jones
	3/5	Dr Julie McKinley
	3/5	Mr Lyndon MacCann SC
Meath &	5/5	Rev Philip McKinley
Kildare	3/4	Ven Katharine Poulton (<i>elected June 2025</i>)
	0/5	Dr Harriet Wilkinson
	2/5	Ms Phyllis Roe
Cashel,	2/5	Very Rev Stephen Farrell
Ferns &	2/5	Ven Mark Hayden
Ossory	4/5	Mr Eric Driver
	5/5	Mr Richard Codd
Cork,	3/5	Rev Canon John Ardis
Cloyne &	3/5	Ven Andrew Orr
Ross	5/5	Ms Hilda Connolly
	5/5	Ms Helen Arnopp

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

3/5	Very Rev Kenny Hall	3/5	Rev Canon Aonghus Mayes
3/5	Very Rev Nigel Dunne	2/3	Ms Judith Cairns (<i>elected September 2025</i>)
4/5	Ven Peter Thompson	0/5	Ms Jane Leighton
4/5	Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott		

The Secretary General, and the Assistant Secretary of the General Synod are entitled to attend and speak at meetings of the Standing Committee.

**Mr Alan Williamson was a co-opted member of the Standing Committee until his election as the Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh Over-45 representative in July 2025, filling the casual vacancy created by the ordination of the Rev Edward Lindsay.*

COMMITTEES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

FINANCE AND ARRANGEMENTS SUB-COMMITTEE

Mr Richard Codd
Ms Kaye Nesbitt
The Honorary Secretaries

LEGAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

His Honour Judge Tom Burgess
His Honour Judge Alastair Devlin
Mr Lyndon MacCann, SC
Mr Oswyn Paulin

Mr William Prentice
Sir Ben Stephens
Mr Andrew Walker
The Honorary Secretaries

PRIORITIES FUND COMMITTEE

Mr Glenn Moore
Rev Peter Ferguson
Ms Hazel Corrigan
Rt Rev George Davison

Ven Andrew Orr
Rev Peter Ferguson
Mr Roy Totten

BUDGET SUB-COMMITTEE

Mr Richard Codd
Ms Helen Arnopp
Ms Hazel Corrigan
Rev Canon Malcolm Kingston

WORLD DEVELOPMENT- BISHOPS' APPEAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Rt Rev Dr Ferran Glenfield (Chair)
Ms Iris Suitor (Hon. Secretary)
Rev Canon John Ardis
Rev Claire Henderson
Mrs Claire Holmes
Rev Canon Jonathan Pierce
Ms Gillian Purser
Rev Faith Sithole
Very Rev Niall Sloane

LAY JUDGES OF THE COURT OF THE GENERAL SYNOD

Sir Ben Stephens
His Honour Judge Alastair Devlin
Mr Lyndon MacCann SC
His Honour Judge Tom Burgess
Mr Patrick Good KC
Mr Charles Galloway
Ms Jenny Ebbage
Mr Alex Hoffman
Mr Philip Gilliland
District Judge Rosalie Prytherch

3. APPOINTMENTS/NOMINATIONS

During the period covered by this report, the Standing Committee made the following appointments/nominations:

- The Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott was nominated to attend the Kirchentag in Germany
- The Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe was appointed to represent the Church of Ireland at an online meeting of CEC
- The following were appointed to attend the AGM of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting: the Very Rev Niall Sloane, Dr Nicole Gallagher, Ms Cate Turner, the Ven Katharine Poulton, the Rev Susanne Cousins, the Very Rev Abigail Sines, the Very Rev Kenny Hall, the Rev Canon Andrew McCroskrey, the Rev Canon Jane Galbraith, Ms June Butler, Mr David Ritchie, the Rev Dr Ryan Hawk, Ms Gina Coptly, the Rev Philip McKinley, Mr Craig Copley Brown
- Mr Keith Gardiner and the Rev Canon Amanda Adams were appointed to attend the Presbyterian Church in Ireland General Assembly
- The Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe and Ms Iris Suitor were appointed to attend the Methodist Church in Ireland Conference
- The Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory was appointed to represent the Church of Ireland at the CEC Annual Meeting of European National Councils of Churches in Copenhagen
- Ms Audrey Hobson was appointed as a Church of Ireland Representative on the Secondary Education Committee
- The Bishop of Clogher and Mr Ken Gibson were appointed to attend the General Synod of the Church of Sweden
- The Very Rev Paul Draper was appointed to attend the Governing Body of the Church in Wales
- Dr Catherine Smith, Mr Daniel McDonald, and the Very Rev Diane Matchett were appointed to the Church of Ireland Marriage Council
- The following were appointed to the Wedding Venues Working Group: the Rev Lesley Robinson, the Very Rev Niall Sloane, the Rev Canon Jen McWhirter, the Rev Carlton Baxter, Mr Andrew Brannigan, Dr Ruth Gardiner, Mr Timothy Smyth, Ms Judy Peters, two Honorary Secretaries (Mr Ken Gibson and the Rev Canon Gillian Wharton) and two members of the House of Bishops (the Bishop of Meath and Kildare and the Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh)
- The following were appointed to attend the 2025 Irish Inter-Church Meeting: the Archbishop of Dublin, Mr George Woodman, the Rev Chris MacBruithin, Ms Gina Coptly and Mr Neville Cobbe
- The Rev Chris MacBruithin was nominated as the Church of Ireland Representative to the Conference of European Churches
- The following were appointed to attend the Irish Council of Churches Creation Care Conference: Mr David Brown, the Rev David McComb, Ms Lesley McComb, the Ven Andrew Orr, the Rev Julie Bell and the Rev David White.
- The nomination of Mr Henry Algeo by the Representative Body to the Pioneer Ministry Governing Council was approved by the Standing Committee on behalf of the General Synod
- Ms Kaye Nesbitt was appointed to the Standing Committee Finance and Arrangements Sub-Committee

4. APPENDED MOTIONS

A motion to amend the Standing Orders of the Standing Committee to allow for the election and nomination process to fill co-option casual vacancies via electronic means can be found in Appendix A on page 126.

5. ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE CHURCH OF IRELAND CENTRE, DCU

The report of the Advisory Council appears as Appendix B on page 126. A report from the Church of Ireland Centre, DCU is also contained in the Board of Education Report.

6. ARMAGH AGREEMENT REFERENCE GROUP

The report of the Armagh Agreement Reference Group can be found in Appendix K on page 158.

7. AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS

In June 2025, PricewaterhouseCoopers were appointed as auditors of the accounts of the Representative Church Body for the financial year 2025.

8. BISHOPS' APPEAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The report of the Bishops' Appeal Advisory Committee can be found in Appendix C on page 130.

9. BOARD FOR MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The report of the Board for Ministry with Children and Families can be found in Appendix D on page 142.

10. CENTRAL COMMUNICATIONS BOARD

The report of the Central Communications Board can be found in Appendix F on page 147.

11. CHARITIES REGISTRATION MONITORING WORKING GROUP

The report of the Central Communications Board can be found in Appendix G on page 152.

12. CHURCH AND SOCIETY COMMISSION

The report of the Church and Society Commission can be found in Appendix H on page 153.

13. CHURCH OF IRELAND CENSUS

The results of the 2025 Church of Ireland Census were presented to the Standing Committee at the March 2026 meeting. The thanks of the General Synod must be paid to Mr Jonathan Hull for his assistance in facilitating the census in the online format which has worked so well over the past three years and for his expertise in compiling the resulting data. Figures from the 2025 censuses can be found in Appendix E on page 146.

14. CHURCH RESPONSE TO GAZA AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN CRISES

In the discussion following the report of the Standing Committee at General Synod 2025, it was requested that the Church of Ireland send words of comfort to the people of Gaza and the response to this request was that it would be referred to the House of Bishops and the Standing Committee for consideration. This item was brought to the Standing Committee in June 2025 at which point the

members were presented with a copy of a joint statement by the Archbishop of Armagh and the Archbishop of Dublin on this topic.

15. CIYD GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP

At the September 2025 meeting, Ms Hilary Prentice, Chair of the Representative Body Executive Committee, informed the Standing Committee that a Working Group had been formed to look into the governance and reporting structures of CIYD following a review by Pobal into beneficiaries of its Youth Services Grant Scheme.

16. CLERGY PENSIONS FUND – SOLVENCY LEVY

In September 2024, Mr David Ritchie, Chief Officer, presented a report on proposed changes to the Clergy Pensions Fund Solvency Levy.

Standing Committee approved the following resolution:

That, as recommended by the Representative Body and the Trustee, in accordance with Section 36 of Chapter XIV of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland, the rate of levy to be paid by each diocese towards the cost of securing the solvency of the Clergy Pensions Fund from 1 January 2026 be set at the reduced percentage level of 0.8% of the Minimum Approved Stipend in force at 1 January 2026.

17. COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURE

In January 2026, the Standing Committee considered the 2024 Income and Expenditure report for the Complaints Committee as required under Chapter VIII 23 (e). This report is appended as Appendix J on page 151. The appointment of the Complaint Administrator for the purposes of the relevant part of Chapter VIII was approved for another year.

In November 2025, the Honorary Secretaries report noted that the Chair of the Disciplinary Panel had instructed for all Orders and Judgements arising from Disciplinary Tribunals to be published. The Honorary Secretaries noted that concerns had been raised by the RCB GDPR Compliance Officer and the RCB Legal Department as to the resulting implications of this. The matter was further considered by the RB Executive Committee in January 2026 and by the Standing Committee meeting in March 2026 with the matter being referred to the Legal Advisory Committee of the General Synod by the Standing Committee for further consideration.

18. CLERGY PHI POLICY AMENDMENTS

At the March 2026 meeting, the Standing Committee approved amendments to the Clergy PHI policy. These amendments allowed for all three members of the approval panel to know the name of the PHI applicant.

19. CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON DISABILITY

The report of the Consultative Group on Disability can be found as Appendix I on page 156.

20. CORRESPONDENCE

Two resolutions were passed during the course of the year regarding correspondence from the General Synod. Firstly, a resolution was passed that the Honorary Secretaries write on behalf of the General Synod to the President of Ireland, Ms Catherine Connolly, congratulating her on her election and assuring her of the prayers of the Church of Ireland during her time in office. Secondly, a resolution

was passed that the Honorary Secretaries write on behalf of the General Synod to the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Most Rev and Most Honourable Dame Sarah Mullally DBE, to send the prayerful good wishes of the Church of Ireland to her as she undertakes her new role.

21. DIGNITY IN CHURCH LIFE POLICIES

At the November 2025 meeting of the Standing Committee, a proposed re-draft of the Dignity in Church Life Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy prepared by the House of Bishops was approved and adopted, having previously been approved by the Representative Body in June 2025.

22. ECO-CONGREGATIONS

In September 2025, the Ven Andrew Orr gave a presentation to the Standing Committee on the work of Eco-Congregations, highlighting how Churches should be at the forefront of the climate movement.

23. GENERAL SYNOD 2027

The Standing Committee passed by resolution at the June 2025 meeting that the General Synod of 2027 will take place in the Armagh City Hotel from 6th-8th May 2027.

24. GENERAL SYNOD/STANDING COMMITTEE FINANCES

At the September 2025 meeting of the Standing Committee, the Budget Sub-Committee presented its report which was accepted by the Standing Committee and forwarded to the Allocations Committee for consideration.

25. MINIMUM APPROVED STIPENDS

Under section 51 (1) of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland as revised by Chapter VI of 2011, the Standing Committee is required to consider recommendations from the Representative Church Body as to the rates of Minimum Approved Stipends to take effect from 1 January 2026.

At its meeting of 16th September 2025, the Standing Committee heard a submission by Mr Michael Johnston, Chairman of the Stipends Committee, which detailed the RCB's recommendations.

The Standing Committee approved the recommendations of the Representative Church Body and approved the following resolution:

That, as recommended by the Representative Body in accordance with Section 51 (1) of Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland, the rates of Minimum Approved Stipends shall be as follows with effect from 1 January 2026:

- (a) no stipend shall be less than £38,653 per annum in Northern Ireland or €46,462 per annum in the Republic of Ireland in the case of an Incumbent or a member of the clergy appointed as Bishop's Curate under the provisions of Section 42 of Chapter IV or of a Diocesan Curate over the age of 30 years appointed under the provisions of Section 43 of Chapter IV.
- (b) the stipend for a Curate-Assistant shall be in accordance with the following scale:

First Year	75.0% of minimum stipend for incumbent
Second Year	77.5% "
Third Year	80.0% "
Fourth Year	82.5% "
Fifth and succeeding Years	85.0% "

26. PENSIONABLE STIPENDS

Under Section 2 of Chapter XIV of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland as revised by Chapter V of 2011, the Standing Committee is required to consider a recommendation from the Representative Church Body and the Church of Ireland Clergy Pensions Trustee Limited as to the rates of Pensionable Stipend to take effect from 1 January 2026.

At its meeting of 16th September 2025, the Standing Committee heard a presentation by Mr David Ritchie, Chief Officer, which detailed the financial background to the recommendations of the RCB and the Church of Ireland Clergy Pensions Trustee Limited.

The Standing Committee approved the recommendations of the Representative Church Body by adopting the following resolution:

That, as recommended by the Executive Committee and the Trustee, in accordance with Section 1 of Chapter XIV of the Constitution of the Church of Ireland, Pensionable Stipend shall be as follows with effect from 1 January 2026:

- (a) Pensionable Stipend shall be £35,060 per annum in Northern Ireland and €43,937 per annum in the Republic of Ireland in the case of an Incumbent or a member of the clergy appointed as Bishop's Curate under the provisions of Section 42 of Chapter IV or of a Diocesan Curate over the age of 30 years appointed under the provisions of Section 43 of Chapter IV.
- (b) Pensionable Stipend for a Curate-Assistant shall be in accordance with the following scale:

First Year	75.0% of Pensionable Stipend for incumbent
Second Year	77.5% "
Third Year	80.0% "
Fourth Year	82.5% "
Fifth and succeeding Years	85.0% ""

27. PIONEER MINISTRY GOVERNING COUNCIL

In January, the Pioneer Ministry Governing Council presented an interim report on Pioneer Ministry to the Standing Committee, as is required in the PMGC Terms of Reference.

28. PRIORITIES FUND

The accounts of the Priorities Fund and the grants, approved by Standing Committee in March 2026, are contained as Appendix L on page 160.

29. CHURCH OF IRELAND SAFEGUARDING BOARD

At the June 2025 meeting, Dr Niall Moore, Safeguarding Manager for Policy and Training, gave a presentation to the Standing Committee highlighting the work of the Safeguarding Board. In November, the Standing Committee approved the updated Child Safeguarding Policy as well as the Terms of Reference Document for the newly created Safeguarding Case Management Committee.

Slight amendments to the Terms of Reference documents for both the Safeguarding Board and the Case Management Committee were then approved at the March 2026 meeting. (content to be edited to reflect discussion and decision at March meeting).

The full report of the Safeguarding Board appears as Appendix M on page 170.

**30. STANDING COMMITTEE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE AND GENERAL PURPOSES
FUND ACCOUNTS 2025**

The accounts are contained as Appendix N on page 173.

31. WEDDING VENUES WORKING GROUP

At the General Synod of 2025, a private members' motion was passed asking the Standing Committee to form a Working Group to explore the possibility of Church of Ireland clerics solemnising marriages in venues other than churches. At the June 2025 meeting of the Stading Committee, the Terms of Reference document for this Working Group was approved, with members elected in September 2025.

The report of the Wedding Venues Working Group can be found in Appendix O on page 179.

**32. WORKING GROUP CONCERNING A CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE BY THE CHURCH
TO HISTORIC INSTITUTIONAL ABUSE**

The report of the Working Group can be found in Appendix P on page 181.

33. WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW CLERGY TENURE

The Working Group to Review Clergy Tenure presented its recommendations to the Standing Committee in January 2026. Some slight amendments were suggested at this meeting, and re-drafted proposals were brought before the March 2026 meeting. These proposals were approved and will go before the General Synod of 2026 in the form of three bills. The full report of this Working Group can be found as Appendix Q on page 185.