

COMMISSION ON MINISTRY REPORT 2026

Membership

House of Bishops

Rt Rev David McClay (Chair) (4/4)

General Synod – Clerical

*Ven Elizabeth Cairns (3/4)

*Very Rev Paul Draper (3/4)

** Rev Lesley Robinson (3/4)

General Synod – Lay

**Captain George Newell (4/4)

**Ms Hazel Uprichard (3/4)

**Mrs Judith Cairns (2/4)

Director of Theological Institute

Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott (4/4)

Central Director of Ordinands

Rev Canon Nicola Halford (1/4)

* **Appointed at General Synod 2024**

****Appointed at General Synod 2025**

Pensions Board

Mrs Judith Peters (2/4)

The Representative Church Body

Dr John Graham (3/4)

Very Rev Nigel Crossey (4/4)

Honorary Secretaries

Rev Canon Gillian Wharton (4/4)

Standing Committee

Rev Rob Jones (3/4)

Co-opted

*Rev Emma Gibson (2/4)

*Rev Canon Michael Alastair
Graham (4/4)

*Dr Scott Brown (4/4)

Introduction

The Commission on Ministry has continued its work with a focus on supporting and equipping those engaged in ordained and lay ministry across the Church of Ireland. This year has seen the development of new initiatives aimed at clergy wellbeing, the continuation of retreats for vocational discernment and spiritual renewal, and the planning of regional gatherings to encourage church growth. In all our work, we have sought to respond faithfully to the needs of those serving in ordained and lay ministry, recognising the challenges they face and the opportunities that lie ahead. Through prayerful reflection, collaborative planning, and practical support, the Commission remains committed to nurturing the life and mission of the Church.

Advent Retreat

The annual Advent Retreat, organised by the Commission on Ministry, was held from 28th to 30th November 2025 at the Manresa Retreat Centre, Clontarf. The retreat, themed “Shall God’s wonders be known?”, led by Very Rev John Mann. The Commission had another meaningful time of reflection, prayer, and renewal. After reviewing and reflecting, the Commission decided to have a retreat for all licensed lay ministers across all dioceses in the month of October 2026. Two one day conferences will be organized in 2 venues.

Vocations Retreat

A vocation retreat was conducted on 20th–22nd February 2026 at the Manresa Retreat Centre, Clontarf. As in previous years, the retreat offered those exploring ordination in the Church of Ireland a space for discernment, prayer, and practical guidance. Rev Nicola Moy was the Speaker, with 22 people in attendance. The Commission is confident that this retreat would continue to foster a deeper understanding of vocation and provide a supportive environment for those discerning God’s call.

Clergy Retirement

The annual clergy retirement course was held on 12th and 13th November 2025 at the Stormont Hotel, Belfast. The programme included expert input on pensions and retirement planning, with clergy having the opportunity to meet one-on-one with members of the Church House Pensions Team. Special attention was given to the complexities of cross-border pensions, and the course aims to provide practical support and encouragement to those approaching or recently entering retirement. Twenty-nine clergy attended along with their spouses. The feedback from the attendees was very positive. The next retirement course will be conducted in the Republic of Ireland. The course fostered a strong sense of fellowship and support among participants, affirming the Church's commitment to those approaching or who recently entered retirement.

Clergy Support and Wellbeing

A new initiative, the Clergy Support and Wellbeing Programme (THRIVE), takes place from 27th–28th April 2026. This residential course was designed for clergy between three years post-first incumbency and ten years pre-retirement, though others may attend with episcopal recommendation. The programme will address challenges such as family pressures, ministry demands, and vocational expectations. Stress, conflict resolution, interpersonal relationships, financial topics, particularly housing planning were addressed. The programme was framed around the theme of “Thrive” rather than “Survive,” and it is hoped to run it as an annual event.

Growing God's Church

Following discussions at the House of Bishops, the Church Growth Conference has been reimaged as two regional one-day events under the title “Growing God's Church: Rooted in His Word, Responding to His Call.” One conference took place in the Northern Ireland and the other in the Republic of Ireland. Each began and ended with worship and included plenary sessions exploring the biblical foundations of church growth. Alongside the plenary sessions, a range of practical seminars were offered. These were designed to equip both clergy and laity for faithful and hopeful ministry today. These seminars explored nine key areas of parish life, focusing on:

1. Growth through Evangelism
2. Growth through Stewardship
3. Growth through Prayer
4. Worship and Church Music
5. Leading you your context.
6. Community Engagement
7. The Bible - Read, Mark, Learn
8. Buildings: not a burden but a resource for mission and church growth, also, practical advice on permissions from the Representative Church Body
9. Communication: in the church and community.

The Commission is committed to supporting parish-level growth and mission through these gatherings.

Future Planning: Archdeacon's Supporting Programme

The Commission on Ministry has taken the responsibility for convening Archdeacons annually for a day focused on professional development and peer support, similar to support offered to other ministry groups.

Conclusion

The Commission on Ministry has focused this past year on developing and delivering residential gatherings that support clergy and those exploring vocation. The introduction of the Clergy Support and Wellbeing Programme marks a significant step in addressing the daily challenges faced by clergy in ministry. At the same time, the Commission continues to nurture vocations, encourage lay ministries, support clergy in retirement, and contribute to the wider mission of the Church through initiatives like the Church Growth Conferences. Recognising different faces of ministries, we remain committed to

equipping all clergy and those involved in lay ministries to serve with confidence, compassion, and vision in the transforming power of the Gospel.