

Representative Church Body Report to General Synod 2026

Introduction

Thank you, Your Grace.

Archbishops, Bishops, members of General Synod, the Representative Church Body and friends:

It is my pleasure to report to you on the business of the Representative Church Body for 2025.

Executive RCB Strategy and mission

I will begin my presentation with a focus on RB Executive Strategy, as it is this strategy which details the mission, values, ambition and priorities of the Executive Committee.

In 2025, the Executive Committee conducted a survey of the members of the Representative Body, and the results of this survey were presented at the Executive Committee Strategy Away Day in October. At that meeting, the Executive Committee reviewed and confirmed the mission and strategic priorities, which are summarised in the Executive Strategy for 2026-2028. The strategy document is available to view on the Church of Ireland website.

The Executive Committee is responsible for and takes ownership of both the preparation and implementation of its strategic plan but must rely on the RCB staff to deliver that strategy. To this end the Chief Officer reports to the Executive Committee every six months on progress in implementing the strategy. The status of the strategic priorities at the end of 2025 is detailed in the slide before you.

Where items are marked ‘complete’, this indicates that they have been integrated into the ‘business-as-usual’ of the RCB. For example:

- since September 2025, the RCB has provided curacy grants to parishes that take on a new curate; and
- for the MindMatters COI initiative, grant funding from Benefact Trust has been given to parishes, and the RCB is funding the cost of the Clergy Assistance Programme.

In relation to Funding and contributions

The delivery of the RCB’s strategy and operations is dependent on income that the RCB withdraws each year from RB General Funds. We use a Total Return formula to determine the maximum level of annual withdrawal that can be considered sustainable over the long term. This maximum level of withdrawal is calculated as a percentage of the average fund value over the previous five years, and is currently set at 3.9%.

For 2025, the maximum Total Return income from General Funds was 8.4 million Euro, compared to 7.3 million Euro for 2024.

The increase in income from 2024 to 2025 reflects a strong performance from the investments of RB General Funds, particularly over the previous eight years. You can see on this slide an overview of fund performance, presented as a graph showing year-end values of RB General Funds since 2008.

During 2025 – despite global events including US trade tariffs and the continuing war in Ukraine – financial markets remained relatively positive, and the RCB's funds broadly retained their market value. General Funds ended 2025 with a market value of 260 million Euro, compared to 263 million Euro the previous year.

The Total Return income is supplemented by parish contributions, which subsidise some of the services that the RCB provides. The slide before you shows these contributions as a percentage of MAS per cure for a parish. When proposing parish contributions, we are mindful of the financial burden on parishes.

For 2027, given the solvency position of the Clergy Pensions Fund, we expect that the Clergy Pensions Fund Solvency Levy will no longer be needed. However, we do need to increase the contribution towards the cost of Safeguarding, to support the increased staffing of this critically important service for the Church. Later on, as you will see from your Synod papers, we will be asking Synod to affirm a recent decision of the RCB that the rate of Safeguarding contribution increase to 2.25% of Minimum Approved Stipend in 2027.

RCB Expenditure

So how do we spend our finite financial resources

The RCB pays service delivery costs including staff salaries, the provision of offices, support services, and IT systems. This expenditure accounts for half of the RCB's spending. The other half provides funding for the General Synod – which includes the Church of Ireland Youth Department, Education, the Press Office and the committees of General Synod – as well as funding the delivery of theological training, the episcopacy, chaplaincy and, most recently, Pioneer Ministry.

I would like to provide some more detailed commentary on these funding allocations:

Firstly Church of Ireland Theological Institute (or CITI):

There has been an increase in the costs of providing training through the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, following the recruitment of a fifth lecturer and an increase in student grants. Grants have increased to 35% of Minimum Approved Stipend for married students, and 25% of MAS for single students. These student grant increases, along with the grants for curacies, are intended to encourage ordinands in training, and to encourage parishes to take on a curate.

Next Pioneer Ministry:

The RCB pays the costs of the Pioneer Ministry National Leadership Team, and provides grant funding for up to five new pioneer initiatives each year. The RCB's Pioneer Ministry grant covers a proportion of the costs of a pioneer initiative for the first five years of ministry. At the end of 2025, the RCB was funding nine pioneer ministries, with the expectation that a further five ministries will be started each year until 2029, when the annual cost to the RCB will peak at approximately one million Euro.

The largest section of the pie chart is RCB Service Delivery:

The range of operations and services provided by RCB staff is summarised on our next slide. As you will appreciate, this range of operations and services is far more extensive than the trustee services that the RCB provided when it was first established in 1870. These central services are intended to help reduce the administrative burden for parishes, and to provide consistent central support and advice.

Much information and support material is available on the Parish Resources section of the Church of Ireland website. If you have questions that you would like to ask our staff, please do visit the RCB display stand today or feel free to contact the RCB's offices at any time. Information on how to contact our staff is available on the Church of Ireland website under 'Central offices', and in the Church of Ireland Directory.

I would now like to highlight how some of these services have evolved to meet the demands of increasing regulation and compliance requirements, and some aspects of the services we provide that may be of particular interest to parishes and clergy.

The first one is Safeguarding:

During the past year, the RCB implemented a restructuring of its Safeguarding function by specialism, which means that safeguarding case management is now separate from the management of policy, training and vetting oversight.

During 2025, the RCB recruited a new Safeguarding Case Officer for Northern Ireland, and we merged our AccessNI and Garda Vetting functions to improve the efficiency of our systems. During 2025, the Safeguarding function developed the Church of Ireland's amalgamated Child Safeguarding Policy. A summary of the policy is available at our Safeguarding display stand for your information.

At the beginning of 2026, the RCB recruited a new Safeguarding Case Officer for the Republic of Ireland, and most recently I am delighted to announce the appointment of Dr Niall Moore as Head of Safeguarding for the Church of Ireland.

Moving to Property and Trusts:

The RCB's Property and Trusts department oversees over four thousand Church of Ireland properties for which the RCB is trustee. This means ensuring that property deeds are kept safe and that approval for the purchase, disposal, lease or alteration of any of these properties is appropriately considered.

In 2025, the department appointed a dedicated Trusts Manager to oversee over eighteen thousand trusts that the RCB administers on behalf of parishes, dioceses and other trustees. The invested monies of these trust funds are professionally managed within the RB General Unit Trusts.

In addition to this day-to-day business, the Property and Trusts department is currently supporting the RCB Campus Review Group, which is working to develop a new Church of Ireland campus. This is an exciting project. The new campus will include the RCB's offices, currently based at Church House Dublin, in addition to the RCB Library and the Church of Ireland Theological Institute – all to be located on a purpose built campus in Rathmines which is immediately adjacent to the current RCB offices in Church House.

The RCB is also working with Bishop and staff of Connor Diocese to identify a new shared Belfast office, which we would hope to announce over the summer.

Under ‘Investment Management’:

The RCB’s Investment function administers the RB General Unit Trusts. These consist of a Sterling fund for NI and a Euro fund for the ROI, which offer parishes and dioceses a professionally managed fund that has the objective of returning a stable distribution and long-term capital appreciation.

Parishes are free to withdraw their funds from the Unit Trusts at their discretion, noting that, naturally, where the capital or income is held under the terms of a specific trust, then the parish can only use those funds as permitted by the terms of trust.

The Unit Trusts pay out distributions to unit holders in June and December each year. Valuation statements are issued every six months, and quarterly unit prices are available in the Parish Resources section of the Church of Ireland website.

You will see on the screen an overview of the annual distributions for 2025, and increases in unit price valuations over the year. During 2025, the Executive Committee approved increases in the December distributions per unit, by 0.7 pence in the case of the Sterling Unit Trust and by 0.7 cent in the case of the Euro Unit Trust.

I would like to refer now to Clergy Pensions:

A significant role of the RCB is to provide pensions administration and company secretarial services for the Clergy Pensions Fund, and to oversee the governance of the two clergy defined contribution pension schemes.

Dealing firstly with the Clergy Pensions Fund:

The RCB is the sponsor of the Clergy Pensions Fund, and the Executive Committee receives regular updates on the investments, governance, compliance and administration of this fund. I am pleased to say that the Clergy Pensions Fund is solvent, and the Trustee during the past year has implemented a significant de-risking of the Fund’s investment portfolio, to protect the Fund’s ability to pay future pension benefits to members.

The RCB pensions administration team are at General Synod this year and are available to address clergy queries. Additionally, each year, team members attend the annual clergy retirement conference to address queries from members of the clergy who are approaching retirement.

As you will see from the slide, the Clergy Pensions Fund, which was closed to new members in 2013, is at an advanced stage of maturity, meaning that a majority of its beneficiaries have now retired.

You may recall that by 2024, the Fund had exited the Funding Proposal that ran for ten years from 2013-2023 with the aim of restoring the scheme to solvency. By the end of the Funding Proposal period, the scheme's solvency was duly restored, and in 2024 the Clergy Pensions Trustee was able to provide significant increases to pensions in payment. In 2025, the Trustee was again able to provide above-inflation pension increases, and I am pleased to report that the Trustee has applied similar percentage increases in 2026. The intention is to continue applying annual increases until a pension calculated based on Pensionable Stipend reaches a similar level to a pension calculated using Minimum Approved Stipend.

Moving to the Clergy Defined Contribution Pension Schemes:

During 2025, the Clergy Defined Contribution Pension Schemes for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were wound up and member benefits were transferred to new Euro and Sterling clergy defined contribution Master Trusts. The RCB attends six monthly governance meetings for these Master Trust schemes, and reports any significant developments to the Executive Committee.

Under 'Library and archives'

The RCB Library holds records and archives for over twelve hundred and fifty parishes, twenty cathedrals, and a number of dioceses, committees and other collections. The Library staff are available to provide expert advice to parishes on the safekeeping of parish records.

Each year, parishes and dioceses transfer parish and diocesan records to the Library for safekeeping, and the Library offers artifacts for parish or diocesan use. During 2025, the Library lent the Red Book of Ossory to St Canice's Cathedral in Kilkenny. Following the success of this exhibition, the Church Fabric and Development Fund provided a grant to produce a replica of the book for permanent display at the Cathedral.

The current Library building is insufficient to hold its current and expanding collections. The development of the new Church of Ireland campus in Rathmines, which I mentioned earlier, will be an opportunity to make a significant increase in the Library's capacity, and to build a purpose-built library with public access and space for exhibitions.

Referring now to HR advice:

The RCB's HR Manager, among other roles, provides administrative support for the implementation of the Church of Ireland's suite of Dignity in Church Life policies.

There are currently five policies, which include clergy and parish policies. Yesterday we presented to Synod some amendments to these policies, as approved by the Standing Committee during the past year on the recommendation of the RCB. These consist of: first, a revised Prevention of Bullying and Harassment Policy; and second, some operational changes to the Clergy Permanent Health Insurance Policy, such that each member of the Clergy PHI Panel will be entitled to know the name of the applying member of the clergy.

Under the heading of RCB and Climate Change:

The RCB continues to advocate for reducing the carbon impact of RCB and church activities, with a focus on energy usage, transportation, waste, and biodiversity.

During 2025, the RCB issued a survey to all Church of Ireland parishes to find out what actions parishes had already taken to reduce their carbon impact. The results of this survey informed the RCB's application to Benefact Trust for grant funding to run a building energy efficiency competition and to enable us to provide follow-on grants. Benefact Trust awarded us a grant of £200,000 to run this competition. We are very grateful to Benefact for this generous funding. In addition, the Church Fabric & Development Fund has provided £100,000 in support of the competition.

I was delighted to attend the competition award ceremony last night and our congratulations go to the winning parishes. You are an inspiration to all of us.

I would note that £100,000 of the Benefact and Church Fabric & Development Fund prize fund has been retained as a grant fund for future parish carbon reduction initiatives.

Your Grace,

I would like to comment that a huge amount was achieved during 2025, and we have much to be thankful for as we continue to strive towards delivering on our strategic priorities.

Before I conclude, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the RCB and the committees of the Representative Body.

First, to all the staff of the RCB, I would like to say that your commitment and dedication are very much appreciated by the members of the Representative Body.

Finally, members of General Synod, I would like to express my thanks to my colleagues, lay and ordained, who serve on the Representative Body, its Executive Committee and on the committees of the Representative Body. I have appreciated your commitment and wisdom, and your personal encouragement to me as we continue to support the mission and ministry of the Church of Ireland.

Your Grace, I have pleasure in proposing that the Report of the Representative Church Body, incorporating the report of the Church of Ireland Clergy Pensions Trustee DAC, be taken into consideration.