

Representative Church Body Report to General Synod 2026

Archbishop,

It is my privilege to second the report of the Representative Church Body.

At its heart, this report is about stewardship, good stewardship of the resources entrusted to us by God, and the faithful discharge of our responsibility as trustees. The RCB does not exist for its own sake. It exists to serve God and His Church, to enable the life, ministry and mission of the Church of Ireland to flourish in every place.

Having served as a member of the Body for over twenty years, I have had a privileged vantage point. Again and again, I have been struck by the extraordinary commitment of those who serve. People with deep expertise in law, finance, property and pensions give generously of their time and wisdom, not for recognition, but because they care deeply about the Church of Ireland, its future, and its witness. They want to see its ministry secured and its mission grow.

And beyond the RCB itself, we should acknowledge the remarkable army of volunteers across the whole Church, at central, diocesan and parish level, who work diligently and often quietly to ensure good governance, careful oversight, and faithful stewardship. The life of our Church depends in no small measure on their dedication, and we owe them a great debt of gratitude.

In particular, I want to acknowledge the proposer of this report, Hilary Prentice, as she approaches the completion of her term as Chair of the Executive Committee. Hilary has led with clarity, wisdom and deep faith. At each meeting, she has grounded our work in prayer, reminding us why we are here. Many of us will recognise these words:

“Almighty God, we meet in your presence to exercise stewardship of the resources of this Church. Grant us a clear mind and judgement in all things, a willingness to seek your will for the Church and an awareness of the trust and responsibility given to us. Guide us with your wisdom and lead us in the paths of truth. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

That prayer has not been a formality; it has shaped our priorities and our decisions. It has called us to clarity of mind, to sound judgement, to a willingness to seek God’s will above our own, and to a deep awareness of the trust placed in us. I believe we can say with confidence that the RCB has known God’s guidance and has seen prayers answered in very practical ways.

Under Hilary’s leadership, the Executive has helped set clear priorities. The provision of ministry remains central. The training of ordinands at the Theological Institute continues to be supported and strengthened. Recognising the financial realities faced by students, grants have been recalibrated and are now set at a proportion of the Minimum Approved Stipend: 35% for married students and 25% for single students; ensuring a more realistic and sustainable level of support.

We have also seen a very significant development in the funding of curacies. Bishops had become increasingly aware of the growing challenge for parishes in sustaining curacy posts. This concern was brought to the RCB, and a working group under the chairmanship of Mike Johnston was established. Its findings were met with generosity and strong support. We recognise that a good curacy, offering formation, mentoring and support is vital in shaping confident, resilient and faithful future ministry. This investment is therefore an investment in the future life of the Church.

Members will find the wider priorities set out on page 11 of the Book of Reports, and I commend them to you.

Alongside this, a funding strategy for third-level chaplaincy is now in place, enabling dioceses to apply for support. This is a development of real significance. At its heart is a commitment to incarnational ministry, being present on campus, among students and staff, sharing in the rhythms of university life, building relationships, offering pastoral care, and creating space for faith to be explored, questioned and deepened. Chaplaincy is not a peripheral activity; it is a quiet but vital expression of the Church's mission.

There is growing evidence across these islands that students are engaging afresh with questions of faith, meaning and identity. In a context often marked by pressure, anxiety and transition, the presence of a thoughtful, accessible Christian witness is both timely and needed. The Church of Ireland has a long and proud history of investing in college chaplaincy, recognising universities and colleges as key places of encounter and formation for future generations.

This new strategy acknowledges that the landscape of third-level education is changing. Student populations are more diverse, campuses are expanding beyond traditional centres, and new opportunities for mission are emerging. The funding model reflects that reality, offering a more flexible and responsive approach so that dioceses can engage meaningfully in their own contexts.

In Derry and Raphoe, for example, we are seeking to avail of this funding to support chaplaincy at the Magee campus of Ulster University. This is a growing and strategically important campus, and we see in it a significant opportunity for presence, engagement and witness. We hope, through this support, to establish a ministry that is rooted, relational and responsive, serving both students and staff, and offering something of the hope and hospitality of Christ in that place.

We also look to the future with the work of the Campus Review Group, which is bringing forward plans for a new Church of Ireland campus on the site of the former College of Education, adjacent to Church of Ireland House in Rathmines. This is an exciting and ambitious vision: bringing together Church House, the Theological Institute and the RCB Library on one site, alongside residential accommodation and enhanced facilities for gatherings and conferences.

This is more than a building project; it is a visionary, forward-thinking and creative use of the resources entrusted to us. It reflects a willingness to think imaginatively about how our assets can best serve the mission of the Church, not just for today but for generations to come. It is about stewardship in its fullest sense, aligning our physical resources with our calling, creating spaces that enable formation, collaboration and hospitality, and ensuring that we are well-equipped for the opportunities and challenges of the future.

It is, of course, a project that will take time, but it speaks of confidence, courage and a deep commitment to the ongoing life and witness of the Church of Ireland.

All of this brings us back to first principles. The Representative Church Body exists to bring glory to Jesus Christ and to enable His Church—as expressed in the life of the Church of Ireland—to live out its mission. Good stewardship is not simply about careful management; it is about faithful service, wise investment, and a readiness to respond to God's calling.

I hope this report demonstrates that, by God's grace, we have sought to be faithful to that vocation.

Archbishop, I am pleased to second the report.