

**Report of the Standing Committee
Speech seconding the report by George Davison, Diocese of Kilmore,
Elphin & Ardagh**

Embargoed until Delivery

Archbishop, Members of Synod,

You will see from the fact that the Standing Committee Report this year runs to some 142 pages of the red book of reports, that the Committee has had a lot of material to consider throughout the year. In seconding this report, I want to briefly highlight three areas which reflect something of the diversity of matters which appear on the agenda of the Standing Committee at its meetings.

1. Marriage Law

Some matters which present themselves do so as the result of changes in the society in which we live. Those who read last year's Standing Committee report may remember that the authorities on both sides of the border are currently reviewing the law as it relates to the conduct and registration of marriage. At first glance this may seem to be a rather dry technical sort of exercise, but it has the potential to affect the way in which marriage is conducted in the Church of Ireland. As a result of the efforts of the small working group appointed by the Standing Committee last year we have been able to make representations to government in both jurisdictions and ensure that the views of our church are known at a stage when the legislation is being drafted. The working group continues to play an important role as the legislative processes continue in both jurisdictions and in alerting the church to the implications that this subject will have for all of our parishes.

2. Synodical Reform

The topic of reform of the General Synod is one which has been a thorny subject for a number of years now. There is no doubt that it is a difficult subject and one which arouses all sorts of strong feelings from all sorts of people. Those strong feelings, at times mixed with fear and prejudice, have meant that Synod has not yet given this matter a fair and reasonable hearing.

Following the direction of a resolution passed by General Synod at its meeting in 2001, the Standing Committee appointed a working group to consider the question of reform further. The

report of that group may be found in Appendix T on page 269 of your book of reports, (though I fear that the introductory sentence may be an impostor which has strayed from the report of the Central Communications Board, also chaired by the Bishop of Connor!).

The working group have considered a wide range of issues relating to the constitution and operation of this body and some of their deliberations are recorded in this report. These are not yet at the stage of formal proposals to Synod, but implicit in the report is the hope that synod members will take time to discuss its contents today, in order to give guidance to the committee which will formulate some of these ideas into proposals for legislation at a future meeting.

The thrust of the report suggests that reform is necessary, but that difficulties in addressing the matter in the past may have arisen as a result of trying to tackle too many issues at once. Therefore their recommendation is that we take each of the issues individually and consider it on its own merits.

It seems clear that the issue of representation in the General Synod is the issue which must be addressed first. In spite of arguments which we have heard to the contrary, we make ourselves look foolish when we say that the arrangements that suited the Church of Ireland in 1870 don't need to be revised for the 21st century. The working group has provided three different models for us to consider. These models take heed of the message from synod that a majority of members did not wish to see the size of this body radically reduced, as had been considered previously. They address the problems of trying to find a model of representation which is more equitable than the current situation, but which still provides a reasonable voice for the less-populous parts of our church.

I hope that we will be able to consider these matters carefully, give guidance on our thinking to the members of the working group today and then our support when the necessary legislation is brought before synod in a year or two's time.

3. Ecology & Sustainable Development

Finally, members of synod, you will see that the 'Green' agenda occupies a substantial part of this years report. In November of last year, the Revd George Pitt, Education Adviser for Bishops'

Appeal made a presentation to Standing Committee on the need for an understanding that all our development work must go hand in hand with sustainability and a concern for the environment.

It was a powerful presentation arising not only from George's own interest in the subject, but also from the fact that he had represented the Church of Ireland at two important meetings on the subject in South Africa last August. The first was the Global Anglican Congress on the Stewardship of Creation, which as its name suggests included delegates from all over the Anglican Communion, and the second was the World Summit on Sustainable Development which was organised by the UN and attracted representatives from governments all over the world, including Tony Blair & Bertie Ahern. George's report on those meetings can be found in Appendix L (p.235) of the Standing Committee report, and the declaration which came from the Anglican Congress can be found in Appendix M (p.239). Underlying both these reports is a realisation that we cannot properly care for the people of this world unless we also care for the world itself – it is the created order that is God's life-giving gift to his people.

Following George's presentation, Standing Committee passed a resolution committing itself to encourage the Church of Ireland to implement the Anglican Global Congress's recommended actions at all levels, in whatever way possible. In order to assist the church in this matter an ad hoc group was established to advise us on how best we might address the issues of environment and our stewardship of creation.

In their report in Appendix N (p.242), this group give us not only inspiring thoughts to consider, but practical ways in which we can do something in our own parishes and in our own homes. In particular the 'Ecocongregations' scheme is commended to us all as a useful way to begin to look at our own use of resources in the parish.

Issues of environment are becoming a part of everyone's agenda these days. We are all being told that we need to 'Wake up to Waste'. In the church we are often accused by those outside of not being relevant to today's world. Here is just one way in which we can be seen to give leadership which is Christian, biblical and relevant to the world which we all inhabit – but only if we do something about it!

Archbishop, I have pleasure in seconding the Report of the Standing Committee.

