

REPORT OF THE RCB GENERAL SYNOD 2005.  
GEOFFREY PERRIN Dublin Diocese.

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY.

Your Grace, members of Synod.

The RCB report, sets out on pages 4 to 98 in the Book of Reports, the main issues discussed over the past year by the RCB, the Executive Committee and the other committees whose role and purpose is also summarized. The debate which follows should give ample time to deal with any specific points and hopefully clear up any outstanding issues, so in my report today I don't propose to cover the individual subjects in any detail. The first ever Report of the RCB was laid before the second General Synod, that held in 1871. On the third day of that Synod, it was a Saturday, all 40 pages of the report were read by the Honorary Secretaries. The report was proposed, seconded, and passed that the report of the RCB be received, and printed for SALE!. Its very interesting to know, or to remind ourselves, that way back then, in the 1870s, that the funds handed to the church at Disestablishment were in sufficient to meet the church's long term needs, and that it was because of major fund raising carried out in the dioceses, that significant reserves were established. How fortunate we are that they have been added to and very carefully managed, down the years.

But in those early pages which refer to the work of the committees and those who serve on them there is hopefully some indication of the range of the work involved and the amount of detail and time that it involves. So let me again pay tribute, on your behalf and on my own to those who give up so much time both in preparation for, travel to and attendance at, these various meetings. The Executive committee at each meeting receives reports from the various committee chairmen reminding us all of the additional pressure placed on these otherwise very busy people. Behind all of them, Chief Officer Denis Reardon and his staff.. On behalf of those of you whose telephone queries are so speedily dealt with, those whose face to face enquiries are patiently attended to, those whose anxieties often of a technical legal or financial nature are replied to, may I again say a big thank you to the staff in Church House. And may I remind you of the additional pressures and workload that the staff have been under for the past year, and which will continue for the next year at least, brought about by the gradual introduction of the new management and information system, phase one of which should be operational by the end of the year. Not just do we know ourselves of the commitment and skill of the staff involved but our external auditors, Pricewaterhouse Coopers were extremely complimentary indeed when referring to progress with the new system in their audit review this year.

So we are extremely fortunate to have the skills and dedication of the church house staff and those who staff the various committees. As we are to inherit similar skills from those who have done this work in earlier years and to those who have given such generous

financial help down the years. One result of all this has been the historically healthy financial position that we have. And we need it. You will see on page 13 that we had a deficit last year of just over a quarter of a million Euro. The budgeted deficit was even greater but hard work by the allocations committee and some unspent money in the previous year brought the figure down to a more reasonable level. But it's another year that we have ended up in deficit and the indications for the next few years indicate more of the same. I don't wish to be unduly alarmist but want to point out the reality of the situation we are working in especially when, as I see it, there are some major issues coming down the track, and they are all likely to involve major, and additional, costs.

I'm very conscious incidentally, that the way in which the report is presented, with its pages of figures, percentages, pie charts, reference to the language of accruals, allocations reserves, statements of Total Recognized Gains and Losses can be very off-putting and downright boring. But its not just that we have to comply with external best practice in these areas, its clearly very important that the facts are presented as just that, facts about what has happened in the past year. But I do hope, that the debate that follows will encourage as many as possible to ask questions on these fundamentally important areas of accountability and governance, and in my later reply I'll attempt to answer as many as I can of the queries raised.

So let me try and deal with some issues with as I see it significant financial implications for the RCB and the Executive.

Let me start with pensions. Its by no means unique to the Church, its a problem that a major headache to every employer. In the CoI we have 2 schemes, both operating under the Defined Benefit basis where the employer, in our case the church, has to meet the bulk of the cost of the scheme, and certainly any shortfall there may be between the value of the fund and the pension due to be paid.. Last year General Synod approved an increase in contributions for the larger of the 2 schemes, that for the clergy. The smaller scheme, that for the staff in Church House, now has a significant shortfall as well. These deficits arise from poor stock market returns in recent years, but also because of increasing life expectancy, low annuity rates, bond yields etc etc. Like all employers we are going to find that funding what are 2 very good schemes, is going to cost us more and more in the future. Let me look at another area as we struggle to find resources for mission as well as maintenance. Bishop Miller, writing in 'A time to build' published in 1999 said 'centrally we seem to find it almost impossible to release money for community and social projects' He's right. And the pressure for financial support for these community and social projects will get greater and we are going to have to find the money centrally and at parish and diocesan level. One of the biggest challenges, and a costly one, will be how do we lead hopefully, or at the very least respond to the quite phenomenal changes in Irish society resulting from people migration. We are told that there are now as many people speaking Chinese in the country as speak Irish. The President of Dublin City University recently said that if present trends continue, by the year 2050, the native Irish will be in a minority. The 50000 or so Poles who have come to live here in the last year. A small town like Gort in Co Galway where an estimated 600 people, more than one third of the population speak Portuguese as their first language. I

was in Cork recently and told that the CoI population in 1 parish was made up of 2 groups; old Columbans (male) and Nigerians. I was told that while one group was declining the other was expanding greatly. I'm sure you can work out which is which. The Church of Ireland in many areas of the country has adapted well to these dramatic changes, but can we lead? Our CHURCH over the years has succeeded in being cross cultural and cross political. Whats happening now will possibly be the biggest challenge yet, and will require funding.

I foresee another potentially costly area for the church , if not quite as urgent as some of the others. All organizations in society are under increasing pressure to comply with a much greater regulated social and economic environment where recourse to costly litigation procedures is a frequent, almost inevitable outcome. Thank goodness in the CoI we have always put a strong emphasis on openness and transparency in our affairs, as our annual book of reports with some 360 pages testifies. But this very openness brings additional costs with it. In the Church of England, recent years have seen a major review of clergy terms of service, both for those with, and without, freehold. The work and reports are ongoing but are likely to lead to a radical change with a new concept of common tenure defining clergy rights in terms of employment law rather than property ownership. ( under this all clergy would have the same status and would undergo regular appraisals with the bishops having greater powers to deal with the underperformers or the incompetent) OK this is the Church of England but these ideas have come in response to government requests to regulate all areas of employment and ensure that they are regulated by EU led employment law. While one report notes that 'Parochial clergy have a measure of independence and security of tenure which far exceeds that of those in almost any other walk of life' these are radical changes and back to my main concern today, going to be very costly. To give but one example of this, as a consequence the CoE has announced that it will set up a Human Resources department of 18 practitioners at an extra cost of Sterling 800000 per annum. The CoI manages at the moment without one specialist HR person.

So all rather gloomy, extra costs here, there and everywhere and further strain on an already under strained financial system. Not all may be quite so costly as I expect and not all at once but most certainly the church will face new and greater financial pressures than before and without repeating some of the areas that I touched on last year, we do now have to constantly challenge many of the things that we have always done, and are very comfortable with, at parish, diocesan and national level with the associated costs that we possible don't need and more certainly will find harder to justify when there are new areas that we have to get into or comply with. One challenge that I will refer to again is the need to experiment with new and I believe, more efficient forms of representation by clergy and lay in central church affairs. I am thinking of tele and video conferencing as Possible, only possible alternatives to some of our large meetings where the time and cost of travel is, in my view, hard to justify. Lets have a look at the idea, lets just try something new, and it might be cheaper! The time, and strain involved in traveling to meetings in this country is getting greater and greater. We owe it to our clergy and laity to at least look at all ways to ease this strain and cost.

And while we are at it we might also look at some of our cute and curious language. Our church has benefited hugely over the years from the commitment and involvement of busy lay people whose expert knowledge is willingly and freely given. But some of the vital skills that we need are getting harder to source because those concerned are just so busy with their other work and find some of our language and procedures hard to relate to. If they were just to look at the book of reports what would they make of some of our day to day terms:

Locomotory allowances. Are those claiming such allowances self propelled and driven by steam?

A cure. Surely that's for those who wish to preserve meat and fish by smoking or salt?

Primate. Easy this, but to most people they are found in cages

Incumbents they are supposed to be spending all their time lying down or resting.

I have this morning touched on some of the areas for change with some of the financial challenges that lie ahead. I'm now thinking of that brief story of the old lady who had enjoyed 2 sermons by the new young curate who had just joined her parish church. After service, she said to him, 'I think you are wonderful. I never really knew what sin meant until you came'

Your grace, members of Synod I have been extremely happy to act as Chairman of the Executive Committee for the past 3 years, and am now happy to propose the report of the Representative Church body for the past year.