

The report of the Representative Church Body was presented to General Synod in Dún Laoghaire this morning (Friday May 13). Proposing the report, Mr Robert Neill outlined the allocations of funds and said that the resources needed to meet the spending amount to €7.4 million. This amount is generated from General Funds.

He said General Funds increase in value by 7.5 percent last year and have increased 37 percent over the last four years. Last year invested assets increased from €166m to €178m. He said Unit Trusts had also performed well and increased in value by 8 percent. He recommended that every Church of Ireland treasurer and charity trustee use the resource and added that any money placed in the Unit Trusts are readily accessible. "The RB does not seek to snaffle your money!" he commented.

Mr Neill said that an average parish needed over €100,000 a year. That money comes from parishioners, local fundraising efforts and investment income.

"Thus some 450 parishes will spend a minimum of €45m per annum – a considerable sum of money in any organisation and one that should be a force for good. But much of the financial energy is absorbed in maintaining the historic infrastructure, including buildings, of the Church. And at that, we are not self-sufficient. We only survive by depending on assets left to us by previous generations. The €9m that is distributed annually by the Unit Trusts mostly goes to subventing the cost of maintaining our parishes. We are living off the charity of previous generations. We need to ensure that we, living in a time of relative prosperity, do our share to ensure the future vigour of the Church," he said.

He referred to a new resource to assist parishes who wish to develop and create a sustainable income base.

Tributes were paid to the governments, North and South, for their support of the Church and to the Allchurches Trust, the parent of the Ecclesiastical Insurance Company, for their support.

On Pensions, he said the investments had performed well while the liabilities have also increased but there was a significant improvement in the situation of the Clergy Pension Fund. Clergy stipends were increased in the South by 1.75 percent in 2016, the first increase since 2009, he said. In the North stipends were increased by 2 percent.

"Stipends are decided by Standing Committee in September on the basis of a recommendation from the RCB. They are funded by the individual parishes and dioceses," Mr Neill said.

He paid tribute to the permanent staff and voluntary committee members for their commitment to the RB and the Church. He also wished Dr Raymond Refausse well in his retirement as the first Librarian and Archivist. He also paid tribute to voluntary member Robert Kay who retired last month. He expressed gratitude to the Church of Ireland's first Secretary General, Adrian Clements, who retires next month and welcomed his successor, David Ritchie.

The report was seconded by the Bishop of Meath and Kildare, the Most Revd Pat Storey. She reminded people that the RB exists primarily "to have a duty of care to past, present and future generations."

The Bishop said a huge amount of time had been spent on the new charities legislation. She thanked Diocesan Secretaries and Parish Treasurers for rising to the challenge of the new legislation. She also spoke about assets that are managed by local trustees. She said the RB had established a pilot project to assist parishes in this area.

A lot of work had gone into bringing forward through Standing Committee the Church's new Dignity Charter. Initially three new policies are being implemented across the Church in the areas of: the prevention of bullying and harassment; grievances of members of the clergy; and long-term illness of members of the clergy, she said. "It is vital to understand the purpose of the Dignity Charter, which is set out on its opening page. It "articulates the Church's commitment to harmonious relationships in Church life with reference to the Christian principles underpinning those relationship." Thus, It is to help and not to hinder," Bishop Storey stated.

She said that the RB had used money and resources to fund university chaplaincies in line with hopes expressed in Long Term Church. "We are using our money in 'shaping to

serve' in the knowledge that via our last census we discovered that 39% of our worshippers are over 61 years of age. Investment is strongly required in children, youth and young adults. The investment in university chaplaincies is to help to address that," she explained.

The RB's investment policy was also outlined. "If you are interested in the detail of this, perhaps you would carefully read Appendices D and E which indicate our investment policy regarding environmental, social and governance or ESG, and our approach to the challenges of climate change. The RB is acutely aware of its stewardship responsibility and it is important to note that the Investment Committee monitors this constantly. We aim for a low carbon economy and we cease investing in areas that are contrary to our ethos, for example, strategic military sales and tobacco. We are consistently attempting to balance our investment in renewable energy alongside fossil fuels and our portfolio demonstrates a positive bias towards renewable and green investments. We no longer invest in thermal coal nor in a company where more than 10% of its turnover is derived from coal mining. This is a most challenging area, but we are progressing," the Bishop said.

Points raised during the debate on the RB report include:

- Tribute was paid to Robert Kay.
- An appeal was made to Synod to look at individual average giving by families to parishes – parishioners need to reflect upon what we as individuals give towards the work of the Kingdom.
- The RB's Climate Change Policy was discussed and the RB was urged to aim for zero investment in companies involved with fossil fuels by 2020. The RB was asked to produce a report on its engagement with policy groups next year.
- The importance of organisations like the Church to invest morally and care for the earth was stressed. Divestment from fossil fuels was encouraged. Divestment from tar sands was also encouraged.
- Climate change must be considered when considering the future of the Church as well the earth. Synod was asked to send a message to the RB on climate change.
- Thanks were expressed to Dr Raymond Refausse for his work in the RCB Library as Librarian and Archivist.
- The value of the archive held in the RCB Library was highlighted.