

## RECENT LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS BY THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

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There were three Bills before the General Synod, meeting this year in Cork, Republic of Ireland from 17 to 19 May, all of which were duly enacted.

The first was introduced at the request of the Representative Church Body to wind up the Clergy Endowment Assurance Scheme. This Scheme was first established in 1970 to provide a capital sum for clergymen on retirement. The Pensions Board had reported that, in the meantime, substantial changes had occurred to the benefits provided by the clergy pensions fund and that the circumstances which gave rise to the original Scheme had greatly altered. The premiums payable and the maturity values of the policies were, in today's terms, extremely low. The Bill was duly enacted to wind the Scheme up by repealing Section 2(d)(iv) and Section 16(8) of Chapter XIV of the Constitution and the Third Schedule annexed to the Chapter. Participants in the Scheme who continue to pay the premiums and who would have been entitled to a small contribution from the Representative Body will continue to receive equivalent refunds for a period of ten years following the termination of the Scheme in such manner as the Representative Body may decide.

The second Bill sought to replace Section 12 of Chapter III of the Constitution to create a greater degree of flexibility in the dates on which the annual general vestry meeting of parishes can be held. The previous provision was that such general vestry meetings could only take place within 13 days after Easter Day and be adjourned to a day or days not later than the fourth Monday thereafter. It is now enacted that a meeting of the General Vestry of each parish, to be known as the Easter Vestry, is to be held each year on a day not earlier than 20 days before and not later than 20 days after Easter Day and may be adjourned from time to time to a day not later than the fifth Monday after Easter. This requirement is subject to a proviso that the general vestry meeting may not be held on, or adjourned to, a day within the period from the Sunday next before Easter (Palm Sunday) to Easter Day (inclusive).

The final Bill was to amend the Statute of the General Synod, Chapter 1 of 1986 to extend the powers of the Commission on Church Buildings. This Commission can recommend that grants be paid by the Representative Body for the demolition of churches and the development of closed churches. The terms of the statute enable the Commissioners to recommend, and the Representative Body to make, in addition to other grants which they might make, grants towards the development of churches which remain open in a benefice following a final determination by the Commissioners for the closure of particular churches. The power is subject to the proviso that artifacts used in such developments should come from a church which was closed subsequent to that final determination. The intention is to enable creative work to be undertaken and to give a new lease of life to artifacts which might otherwise become totally lost.