The Governance and Organisation of the Church of Ireland

**WHO ARE WE?**

The **Church of Ireland** belongs to the world-wide church known as the Anglican Communion. The Anglican church across the world has over 80 million members in over 160 countries.

The Church of Ireland is an **Episcopal** church, which means that it is governed by a body of bishops. In the USA the Anglican church is known as the Episcopal Church.

**WHERE DID WE COME FROM?**

The Church of Ireland is so named as it covers the whole island of Ireland and until 1870 was the **established** church in Ireland - established by an act of parliament. As such it had a privileged position and was supported and financed by every citizen in the land irrespective of their religious affiliation. In 1870 the Church was DISESTABLISHED and since then has been fully independent of status and state support.

**WHO’S THE BOSS?**

The **Archbishop of Armagh** - currently The Most Reverend A.E.T. Harper, O.B.E., B.A. - is the head of the Church of Ireland and is known as the **Primate of All Ireland**.

Armagh is the ecclesiastical (or church) capital of Ireland ever since St Patrick set up his headquarters there in the fifth century. Thus the Cathedral there is dedicated to St Patrick.
How is the Church organised?

The island of Ireland is divided by the Church into TWO Provinces - The Northern Province of ARMAGH, and the Southern Province of DUBLIN.

The Primate (the Archbishop of Armagh), whilst being head of the whole Church of Ireland, has particular oversight of the northern province of ARMAGH.

The Archbishop of DUBLIN has general oversight in the southern province of Dublin.

Each province is further divided into DIOCESES with a Bishop for each diocese. The Bishop is the head of each diocese. For example, the Bishop of the Diocese of CLOGHER is the Right Reverend John McDowell.

There are 12 dioceses in total, 7 in the northern province and 5 in the southern province. Each diocese is sub-divided into PARISHES, with a Rector as overseer.

The RECTOR is the minister in charge of a parish (or sometimes several parishes). In a large parish he/she may have the assistance of a CURATE.

So, the organisational structure of the Church of Ireland looks like this:

```
The Primate - The Archbishop of Armagh

The Northern Province of ARMAGH
  Diocese of:
    ARMAGH
    CLOGHER
    DERRY and RAPHOE
    DOWN and DROMORE
    CONNOR
    KILMORE, ELPHIN and ARDAGH
    TUAM, KILLALA and ACHONRY

The Southern Province of DUBLIN
  Diocese of:
    DUBLIN and GLENDALOUGH
    MEATH and KILDARE
    CASHEL, OSSORRY and FERNS
    LIMERICK, KILLALOE and ARDFERT
    CORK, CLOYNE and ROSS
```
How is the Church governed?

The Church of Ireland is governed by the **GENERAL SYNOD** (like a parliament). The General Synod is made up of two Houses:

- **The House of Bishops**, consisting of all 12 Bishops, and
- **The House of Representatives**, consisting of:
  - 216 Clergy
  - 432 Lay people

These Bishops, clergy and people represent all the dioceses and parishes in Ireland. The Synod meets annually and has overall responsibility for the church.

The General Synod enacts legislation for the whole of the Church of Ireland, as well as discussing the work of the **STANDING COMMITTEE** which is responsible for oversight of the legal, financial and pastoral work of the church. There are several other Committees which are responsible for various aspects of church life.

The **REPRESENTATIVE CHURCH BODY** (RCB) is the Administrative office of the Church of Ireland. It’s function is to support the work of the Standing Committee, the House of Bishops and General Synod. The RCB has the legal responsibility as Trustees of the Church of Ireland, and for all it’s financial affairs.

So what about the Diocese?

Throughout the island of Ireland, there are 12 diocesan groups made up of up 26 dioceses. A diocese (e.g. Clogher) is divided into **RURAL DEANERIES** which are further divided into **PARISHES**.

The **DIOCESAN SYNOD** has responsibility for the oversight of parish life, finances and structures of the diocese, and sends Diocesan Representatives to General Synod. The Diocesan Synod is made up of The Bishop and One Clergy person and Two Lay People representing each parish in the diocese. Like General Synod, Diocesan Synods meet annually.

Diocesan Synod in turn elects a **DIOCESAN COUNCIL**, which deals with all the business of the diocese. Other Diocesan Committees will usually include: Finance, Glebes (buildings), Education, Youth Work, Missions, Ministry of Healing and Social Welfare.
So who’s who?

Clerical Management and Operating Structure of a Diocese

- The Bishop
- The Archdeacon
- The Rural Deans
- Parochial Clergy
- Non-stipendiary Clergy
- Lay Readers
- Parish Readers

The Rt. Rev. John McDowell
Bishop of Clogher

Newly appointed Parish Readers in Clogher Diocese

Newly commissioned Diocesan Lay Readers in Clogher Diocese

The Diocesan Cathedral

The Diocesan Cathedral is the Mother Church of a diocese.

A Cathedral is governed by: - The Dean and Chapter

The Chapter consists of clergy appointed by the Bishop:-

- The Dean
- The Precentor
- The Chancellor
- The Treasurer
- The Archdeacon
- The Prebendaries (Canon)
- and the Bishop (ex-officio)
And what about the Parish?

Each Rural Deanery is made up of a number of PARISHES. Each parish has an ordained RECTOR as the Incumbent (the clergy-person in charge), and a number of families and individuals who are usually living within the defined geographical parish boundary.

Every parish, or Union of parishes, elects a SELECT VESTRY from among it’s members. The Select Vestry is responsible for the 3 ‘F’ s of parish life - Fabric, Furnishings and Finance, though usually they oversee many other aspects of parish life as well. The Select Vestry is elected by the people of the parish at the annual General Vestry Meeting which takes place at Easter-time.

Membership of the Select Vestry consist of the Rector, 2 Churchwardens, 2 Glebe Wardens and 12 Vestry members.

A parish may then have many other organisation which are run for parishioners and the wider community, such as:

- Mothers’ Union
- Scouts and Guides
- Girls Brigade and Boys Brigade
- Choir
- Youth Club
- Bible Study
- Prayer Groups
- etc.

Map of Clogher Diocese showing Parishes and Rural Deaneries

Key: 
- Kesh Rural Deanery
- Enniskillen Rural Deanery
- Kiliskeery Rural Deanery
- Clogher Rural Deanery
- Clones Rural Deanery
- Monaghan Rural Deanery
The Church of Ireland - A Member Church of the Anglican Communion

**Organisation and Administration**

**Church of Ireland**
- Two Provinces:
  - ARMAGH - presided over by the Archbishop of Armagh.
  - DUBLIN - presided over by the Archbishop of Dublin.

The provinces are divided into:
- 12 diocesan groups, 6 in each province.

These contain all the parishes in the Church of Ireland.

**The General Synod of the Church of Ireland**
- This is made up of 12 bishops, 216 clergy, and 432 laity who represent all the dioceses and parishes of Ireland.
- The synod meets annually and has overall responsibility for the church.

**The House of Bishops**
- Consists of:
  - 2 archbishops
  - 10 bishops

**The RCB – Administration**
- Consists of:
  - Bishops
  - 1 clergyman
  - 2 laity from each diocese
  - 12 co-opted members

These bodies are responsible for the administration and the organisation and oversight of all church matters, material and spiritual, and are answerable to the General Synod.

**The Diocese**
- There are 12 diocesan groups made up of 26 dioceses.

A diocese is divided into rural deaneries which are divided into parishes.

- A diocese consists of:
  - A bishop
  - Clergy
  - The family of the laity in the parishes.

**Diocesan Synod**
- Consists of:
  - The bishop
  - 1 clergyman
  - 2 members of the laity representing each parish in the diocese.

Diocesan Synods will vary in number of members depending on the population size of the diocese.

**Diocesan Council**
- This is elected by the diocesan synod and deals with all the business of the diocese.

Other diocesan committees may include:
- Finance
- Social welfare
- Education
- Youth work
- Missions
- Ministry of healing
- Glebes

**The Parish**
- Each rural deanery is made up of a number of parishes.

- Each parish has a clergyman and a number of families who are usually living within the geographical parish boundaries.

**The Select Vestry**
- administers a parish and is elected by the people of the parish.

- Consists of:
  - Rector
  - 2 church wardens
  - 2 glebe wardens
  - 12 vestry members.

The vestry is responsible for finance, the fabric and the furnishings of the parish.

- Usually meets monthly or when required.

**Parish Organisations**
- A parish may have any number of organisations:
  - Sub-committee of vestry e.g. finance
  - Choir
  - Bible study
  - Prayer groups
  - Mothers’ Union
  - Youth organisations
  - Bowling club
  - Badminton club
  - Scouts and guides