

1995

Annual Report of the Irish Council of Churches

Submitted to the Annual Meeting
of the Council
March 1995



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Introduction from the General Secretary

This year we entered a completely new situation with the IRA and Loyalist cessations of violence. Initial euphoria among some has given way to more cautious and sober assessment. Fear, uncertainty, apprehension and frank disbelief that violence has ended for good co-exist with relief and thanksgiving for the ceasefires. We have only taken one small and precarious step - like a toddler learning to walk. There is a long way to go.

There are three inter-related processes which need to occur:

- (i) the achievement of a permanent end of violence - at the moment we have two ceasefires but all the weaponry is still around;
- (ii) the establishment of a political settlement - and the difficulties of obtaining this should not be underestimated; and
- (iii) the healing of the hurts and the task of reconciliation - and these may last a generation or more.

One of our difficulties is to really imagine the possibility of peace and, therefore, that things can be different. We pray for peace but do we really want it? We have the best opportunity in twenty-five years of getting out of the endless spiral of violence. Can we seize it? Some people's identities are bound up in violence; they know where they are in bitterness and conflict, and with enemies. The prospect of peace disorients. We don't know where we are going. And this is even true if violence returns. Because if the violence returns it will not be the 'same' again, but different.

A subsiding deluge of violence leaves a lot of wreckage in its wake. Questions such as: What are we to make of the last twenty-five years? How are we to come to terms with the past?; What about the victims? have to be faced. At the same time old landmarks re-emerge. Issues like segregated living and sectarianism have not gone away. The Churches' public role will undergo significant change. This is something that the Annual Meeting will be looking at, as also will the Irish Inter-Church Meeting later in the year when the subject will be 'Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today' - in a sense the agenda for a new Ireland.

We have a challenge to build a culture of peace - the theme of a World Council of Churches' consultation at Corrymeela last May - so that we do not return to the old ways of violence. As part of its contribution the

Churches' Peace Education Programme has just published two modules for secondary schools - appropriately named Power to Heal and More Power to Heal. We hope that they will receive wide use.

Since the beginning of 1974 the Inter-Church Emergency Fund for Ireland has been supporting the work of peace and reconciliation. Almost £400,000 has been allocated by the Committee and nearly £270,000 passed through the Fund to designated projects. In addition, the Irish Ecumenical Church Loan Fund had given many hundreds of thousands of pounds in almost 100 low interest loans. The work of peace and reconciliation will not stop with an end to violence; it will only really be starting.

The 'troubles' have masked a rapidly changing religious situation in Ireland. Appendix One 'A Profile of Irish Religion' makes this very clear. Hopefully the 'Developing Missionary Congregations' Project mentioned in the Board of Inter-Church Affairs report may give us some clues as to how the Gospel can be credibly communicated at local level.

One aspect of the changing religious situation is the increasing gulf between the churches and working class people. Appendix Two 'The Church, The Working Class and Community Development' makes this clear. One initiative by church leaders in the Belfast area is trying to bridge this gulf and has led to the Belfast Churches' Urban Development Committee being set up under the 'umbrella' of the Council. It hopes to employ a person, funded by Making Belfast Work, to facilitate the community and social outreach of parishes and congregations in Protestant urban areas.

In our world today hidden problems increasingly emerge into the cold light of day. The issue of child abuse is one such. It has most publicly affected the Roman Catholic Church during the year, but it is something that all our churches ignore at their peril, for their moral credibility is at stake. It is, therefore, welcome that Child in the Church Group has been drawing up guidelines to help local churches.

Irish interest in other conflict situations was illustrated during the year by involvement in the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa and concern for the situation in the Sudan - the idea of an inter-church visit was under discussion.

During the year the Executive Committee decided that the Board of Community Affairs should be stood down and there will now only be one inter-church social issues body - the Department of Social Issues of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. This represents another stage in the evolution of Irish inter-church relations. At the same time the major priority in inter-church relations is for more to happen at local level. Perhaps the cessation of violence will open up new possibilities in this area.

Meetings

The Annual Meeting was held in March at the Dromantine Conference Centre near Newry. The evening session looked at 'Youth Work in the

Inter-Church Context'. It was an opportunity to say goodbye to the ICC Youth Committee and to look at the present work of Youth Link: Northern Ireland. The Rev. Alan Falconer, Director designate of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and outgoing Director of the Irish School of Ecumenics, spoke at the morning session on the present state of ecumenical relations in Ireland.

The Autumn Gathering was held in Belfast and the theme was 'Cooperation at Local Level'. The Rev. Dr. Johnston McMaster was the main speaker followed by a panel of people who spoke about their involvement in local inter-church cooperation.

Officers

The Rt. Rev. J. Cooper, the Rev. D. Nesbitt and Miss H. McMillan became President, Vice-President and Honorary Treasurer respectively at the Annual Meeting in March. We express our thanks to the outgoing President, the Rt. Rev. B.D.A. Hannon, and the outgoing Treasurer, Mr. R.W. Jess, for all the time and attention they gave to the activities of the Council during their terms of office.

Membership

Mr. John Unsworth became a coopted member during the year.

The Role and Structure of the Council

It has been agreed to stand down the Board of Community Affairs as from the Annual Meeting. This follows a review of the operation and structuring of the Department of Social Issues of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting by the Irish Inter-Church Committee. Consideration of the Council's role and how it relates to that of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting is an on-going process.

The process of election to the Executive Committee was looked at during the year and it was agreed to bring proposals for change to the Annual Meeting.

Inter-Church Centre

Extensive renovations were carried out to the building during the year.

Following consultation with the solicitors and accountants of the Inter-Church Centre Company - which owns 48 Elmwood Avenue - it was decided to seek to transfer the property to the Council and to wind up the Company. This necessitated a change in the Council's Constitution which was approved during the year. Work on the passing over of the property to the Council is at an advanced stage. Rental agreements with tenants will be drawn up in the near future.

The understanding concerning the use of the building was clarified during the year.

COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

(This is the last report of the Board following the decision to stand it down).

Moderatorship: Miss Pamela Lockie became Moderator of the Board and Mr. Trevor Morrow Vice-Moderator.

Inter-Church Emergency Fund for Ireland

The following grants were agreed in 1994:	£
Glenavy Community Support Group - to building work	2,500
Bangor YMCA - for refurbishment and improvement work	2,000
Ballynafeigh Community Development Association	
- equipment costs	2,500
Moyard/New Barnsley Play Project - for play equipment	600
Community of the Peace People - for rights and responsibilities guide	600
Youth Links After Schools Club, Willowfield - for equipment	200
Dungiven Community Resource Centre - for equipment and work with children	1,700
Shantallow Ballyarnett Cross Community Group	
- for mixed residential	700
Fountain Camping Association, Londonderry	
- for facilities and trips	1,000
Springhill Youth Action Group, Belfast - for programme costs	500
Irish Christianity Revision Group - towards publication costs	1,250
Edenbeg Community Association, Craigavon - equipment for youth activities	500
Interchange, Lurgan - summer scheme costs	600
Lurgan Interfriendship Prayer Group - towards residential costs	500
Woodvale Community Centre, Belfast - towards summer scheme costs	400
Woodvale Resource Centre, Belfast - for office equipment	1,500
Wishing Well Family Centre, Ardoyne - towards summer scheme costs	800
Alliance Ardoyne Playscheme - towards summer programme costs	1,000
Ardoyne Youth Club, Belfast - towards summer programme costs	350
Corpus Christi Services, Belfast - for cross-community wildlife garden and mural	200
Brownlow Play Assoc., Craigavon - for summer scheme and residential follow-up	800
Killesher Community Development Assoc., Co. Fermanagh	
- seeding grant	500
Aisling Centre, Enniskillen - towards building extension costs	1,200
Streetbeat Youth Project, Belfast - towards activity costs	1,000
Woodvale Ardoyne Youth Group - for summer programme costs	186
Grosvenor Youth Project, Belfast - for summer programme	700

Henderson & Mertoun Action Group, Holywood - for play and office equipment	1,000
Churches' Trust Ltd., Waterside - towards building work costs	2,500
West Belfast Parent and Youth Groups - to cost of residentials	1,500
Strathfoyle Women's Activity Group, Derry - to educational provision for women	750
North West Women's Information Group - towards costs	1,000
Fintona Development Association - towards equipment for youth club	250
Away from Home and Safe - towards publication of guidelines on children	500
John Paul II Youth Club, Ardoyne - towards programme costs	1,000
Tyndale Residents Association, Belfast - for building extension work	1,500
Habitat for Humanity, Belfast - for office equipment	2,000
Windsor Women's Centre, Belfast - for equipment costs	1,100
Children for Change/Children's Community holidays - conversion work costs	2,000

The following monies were designated by donors: £

From Methodist Relief and Development Fund - Cornerstone Community	2,000
From the Oekumenische Centre of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen Deutschland - Youth Link: Northern Ireland	61,532

The Inter-Church Emergency Fund has now given out nearly £400,000 to 618 projects since its formation at the beginning of 1974. Over £268,000 has been passed through the Fund in designated donations.

Consideration is being given to a change of name for the Fund.

Sister Noreen Christian replaced Sister Peggy O'Keefe as a member of the Committee.

Irish Ecumenical Church Loan Fund

The Committee agreed the following loans in 1994:

Lamb of God Community, Belfast - £15,000 for 5 years @ 5% towards renovation of property.

Children for Change (formerly Children's Community Holidays) - £10,000 for 4 years @ 5% towards conversion work at new premises.

Habitat for Humanity, Belfast - £5,000 for 4 years @ 5% towards low cost housing.

The Churches' Trust Ltd., Londonderry - £15,000 for 5 years @ 5% towards purchase of further premises.

The Committee revised its Strategy Statement during the year. The size of the Committee's capital was increased by £25,000 by a loan from the Council.

The Committee became more broadly ecumenical with the addition of Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick, Mr. Jim McMillan, Dr. Margaret Downes and Mrs. Helen Gilfedder as members.

Speakers

Mrs. Fee Ching Cameron spoke at the autumn meeting on racial and ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland and on the work of the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre. Dr. Edwin Ho, coordinator of the Belfast Chinese Christian Fellowship, spoke at the same meeting, as did Ms. Christine Bell and Mr. Martin O'Brien on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Ms. Helen Johnston of the Combat Poverty Agency in Dublin, spoke to the January meeting on poverty in the Republic and the work of the Agency.

Race Relations

The Rev. David Haslem and the Rev. Theo Samuel of the Churches' Commission on Racial Justice of CCBI visited Ireland to discuss matters relating to race relations. They met a variety of people from both North and South during their visit in May.

Sunday Trading Legislation in Northern Ireland

The General Secretary attended a meeting convened by the Northern Ireland Evangelical Alliance to discuss prospective changes in the legislation in Northern Ireland governing Sunday trading.

Pastoral Care for Members of the Security Forces

The names of contact people submitted by the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches were passed on to the RUC and the senior Army Chaplain. Contact was made during the year with the RUC and the senior Army Chaplain about the working of the scheme.

Health Care in Northern Ireland

Arising from concern about the direction in which health care has been going in Northern Ireland in recent years a working party of the Board has produced a collection of papers on the subject.

The Churches and the Working Class

A study document was produced during the year (see Appendix Two).

Belfast Churches' Urban Development Committee

During the year a group of Protestant Church leaders in the Belfast area explored with government the possibility of the appointment of a person who would encourage and facilitate local churches in areas of Protestant deprivation and poverty in Greater Belfast to develop their social community and economic outreach. A favourable response was received from government who agreed to an appointment for an initial period of two years.

It was agreed that the Council should act as the umbrella body for the project with a steering committee appointed by the churches with the following membership:

Presbyterian Church in Ireland:	Mr. S.H. Dunlop, Rev. N. Hamilton and Rev. R.T. Anderson
Church of Ireland:	Rt. Rev. Dr. S.G. Poyntz, Rt. Rev. Dr. G. McMullan and Mr. W.J. Murdie
Methodist Church in Ireland:	Rev. G. Mason and Rev. J. Rea
Salvation Army:	Mrs. Captain C. Cunningham
Co-opted:	Ms. C. Acheson

An action plan and job description have been drawn up. The post was advertised early in the New Year.

Peace Developments

The situation following the IRA and Loyalist cessations of violence were discussed by the Executive Committee. It was agreed to make the subject of the evening session of the Annual Meeting 'The Responsibilities of and Challenges to the Churches created by the IRA and Loyalist Ceasefires'.

Expressions of gratitude and support were received after the ceasefires from the Assembly of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), the South African Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches of Christ, U.S.A.

Submission to Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

A submission was made to the Forum based on some of the recommendations of the Discussion Document produced by the working party on sectarianism of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

INTER-CHURCH AFFAIRS

Women's Link

The Annual Fellowship Day was held in May in Enniskillen. A group from the Free Church Women's Council in England was present at the Day - a programme for their visit to Ireland was also arranged. The Committee is discussing a suggestion to have more regional Days.

The Women's Desk has continued to operate in the Inter-Church Centre two mornings a week. The Desk has had a number of international visitors.

Child in the Church Group

The Group has been involved in following up the 'All God's Children' consultation held in November 1993. It has also produced guidelines for the churches for safeguarding children, leaders and clergy in relation to the issue of child abuse.

Meissen Agreement

Pastor P.G. Fritz spoke at the April meeting of the Board about the Meissen and subsequent agreements between Anglicans and Lutherans.

Marking the End of the Millennium

A sub Committee of the Board has been given consideration to how the churches might respond to marking the end of the Millennium. Their thinking has now been shared with various Boards and Committees of the Member Churches with a view to encouraging thinking more generally in the churches so that there might be adequate time for preparation of church and inter-church activities.

Evangelism

The Rev. Donald Elliott, Secretary of the Churches' Commission on Mission of CCBI, spoke to the October Meeting of the Board about the Commission's Developing Missionary Congregations Project. The Project wants to see what can be learnt and shared from the experiences in a number of different locations in how local parishes and congregations can be effective communicators of the Gospel in today's society. The Board was asked about an Irish dimension to the Project. It was enthusiastic about the idea, but considered that there was an issue concerning under whose auspices such a project should be carried out in Ireland and sensitivities in relation to the Irish context which needed to be looked at. It was agreed that the Project needed to have Irish Inter-Church Committee support - support which was given.

The Rev. David Godfrey continued to represent the Council on the Four Nations Forum on Evangelism. The comments of the churches on the Rev. Donald Elliott's reflections on the Forum's visit to Ireland in 1993 were considered by the Board.

Contacts with Other Churches

Greetings were sent to the Coptic and Greek Orthodox Churches on the opening of new churches in the Dublin area. It is hoped that closer links can be established with these Churches.

Faith and Order Conference at Santiago de Compostela

It was agreed that the most appropriate Irish follow-up to the Conference would be present the idea of developing a contemporary confession of faith in an Irish context to the Department of Theological Questions of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting with the hope that it might take it up once the study on 'Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today' is completed.

OVERSEAS BOARD

Moderatorship

The Rev. Dr. Gordon Gray will be standing down as Moderator as from the Annual Meeting. During his eight years as Moderator Dr. Gray gave much time and energy to the work of the Board.

World Mission Committee

A Study Day was held at the CMS Centre, Rostrevor, in April when the Rev. Cyril Okorocha from Nigera was the speaker.

The Churches Commission on Mission

The Rev. Jim Campbell represented the Council at the fourth meeting of the Commission in Bangor, North Wales, in September. The theme was 'Vision for Mission: Jesus' Answer to Domination'. The 1995 meeting will be in Dublin. An ICC representative is being sought for the Standing Committee of CCOM.

Inter-faith Issues

Canon Dr. Christopher Lamb of the Commission on Inter-faith Relations of CCBI visited Ireland in November. Two seminars - one in Belfast and one in Dublin - were held to help the churches explore the issues arising in the inter-faith area. The World Mission Committee is in the process of exploring follow-up possibilities.

Sudan

The Moderator has acted as Chairman of the Northern Ireland Sudan Support Group. The idea of an inter-church visit to Sudan was passed through the Executive Committee to the Irish Inter-Church Committee who endorsed it.

Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in south Africa (EMPSA)

Six people from Ireland - including the Associate Secretary, Mr. Rob Fairmichael - participated as monitors in the EMPSA Programme in the run up to or during the elections in May. Sister Noreen Christian, who had acted as monitor earlier in the year, spoke to the May meeting of the Board.

Visitors

Meetings were arranged with the Most Rev. Benamina Yukusuk, Archbishop of the Episcopal Church in the Sudan and the Rev. Jose Chipendu, General Secretary of the All African Council of Churches.

The Rev. Keith Clements, International Affairs Secretary of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland and the Rev. Dr. Norman Taggart spoke at Board meetings during the year. Dr. Taggart spoke about the situation in Sri Lanka.

European Elections

A list of questions was drawn up concerning international and development issues which was put to election candidates in Ireland. Fourteen replies were received. A follow-up is being considered.

ICC Representative on the Council of the Friends of Ludhiana

Dr. Jean Shannon was appointed to this position.

Hearing Views from Overseas Churches

Consideration is being given to arranging a conference to listen to people from overseas churches and their comments on ourselves.

CCBI International Affairs Liaison Group

The Moderator continues to attend the meetings of the Group.

White Paper on Irish Foreign Policy

A comment was made as part of the consultative process for the proposed White Paper.

Christian Aid

During 1994 Ms. Maureen Eastwood resigned from her position as Coordinator for the Republic of Ireland and was replaced in September by Rev. Michael Begg. Ms. Margaret Scales, Administrative Assistant in Dublin, endured a long illness and died in January 1995. She will be greatly missed. Mrs. Hilda Ferres joined the staff in Belfast in a part time capacity.

Christian Aid's new board was constituted in November 1994 with Rosemary Calvert as the ICC nominated representative (in succession to the Rev. Dr. Dick Gordon). Other Irish members are Rt. Rev. Roy Warke, Bishop of Cork, and Rev. Jim Campbell. The sponsoring churches have made new nominations for the next four years of the Irish Committee.

As Christian Aid prepares for its 50th birthday in September 1995, a new Statement of Intent is being prepared, and views have been submitted from Ireland. Plans are being laid for a major conference and service of celebration in Ireland.

The total amounts raised in Ireland for the year ending 31st March 1994 were £826,000 plus IR£402, 000. In common with many other charities Christian Aid is aware of the extra pressure on fundraising in the community, but notes with gratitude that there has been a marvelously generous response to Rwanda by churches and individuals as well as to Christian Aid Week (£343,000) and other appeals. The Irish government must also be thanked for their support for emergency and development projects.

In order to remain efficient, a reorganisation within Christian Aid has been carried through, placing more emphasis on teams of staff (such as the Irish Team). Efforts are being made to ensure that the good work initiated by the youth officer, Mr. Tim Magowan, whose post is under threat in the reorganisation, may continue.

During the year Mrs. Margaret Boden, accompanied by Miss Anne Buchanan, visited Senegal and Ghana, and she is looking forward to sharing her experience and insights.

A new campaign entitled Who Runs the World? was launched in 1994, and concentrated on the influence of the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund, which have a major impact on many poor countries, using funds provided by our governments. The aim is to make our governments ensure that these funds are used to benefit the poor, not to make life harder for them. Details are available and support is welcome, especially from the churches.

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES

The former General Secretary of CEC, the Rev. Dr. Glen Garfield Williams, died in March. He was a good friend to Ireland and was instrumental in the setting up of the Inter-Church Emergency Fund for Ireland and in establishing links between the Irish Protestant Churches and CEC.

EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL COMMISSION FOR CHURCH AND SOCIETY

The Rev. Sam Hutchinson and Dr. Kenneth Milne attended the Annual Meeting of the Commission in Belgium in September. They have been appointed as the Council's representatives on the Commission for a further two years.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The WCC held a Conference on 'Building Cultures of Peace' at Corrymeela, Ballycastle, at the end of May. The General Secretary attended.

An Ecumenical Team visit to Northern Ireland was sponsored by the WCC, together with the Conference of European Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, in the wake of the IRA cessation of violence in September. A report was produced which was welcomed by the Executive Committee. Further visits by the international Christian community were invited as the situation evolved.

The Rev. Michael Davies, an Assistant General Secretary of the WCC visited Member Churches in January 1995 and also attended the Board of Inter-Church Affairs.

THE CHURCHES' PEACE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

(The Churches' Peace Education Programme is the legal entity which runs the joint peace education programme of the Council and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace).

During the year the Management Group reviewed the priorities of the Programme and decided on a restructuring of the Peace Education Officers posts. At the primary school level it was decided that the priorities should be the completion of the revision of the *Free To Be* materials and work at Key Stage 1. For secondary schools it was decided that the priority was the dissemination of the non-violence modules and work at sixth form level.

The two Peace Education Officers posts were restructured to create the posts of Peace Education Officer with responsibility for Secondary Schools and Peace Education Officer with responsibility for Primary Schools. The former post was offered for a two-year period to Mrs. Brigid Lenane who accepted and the latter post to Mr. Norman Richardson who declined. The post was then advertised and Miss Sarah Bennett was appointed for a two-year period from the beginning of September.

Mr. Norman Richardson made an enormous contribution to the development of peace education and education for mutual understanding in schools since he commenced work with the ICC in September 1983. He has been an indispensable resource person in this whole area and we hope that he will find a setting that will enable him to use his vast experience and many talents.

Mr. Richardson completed the revision of part of the *Free To Be* materials for primary schools and this is now being printed as *People Need People*. Mrs. Brigid Lenane completed the non-violence module and this was published in two parts: *Power To Heal* and *More Power To Heal*. She also completed a module on Northern Ireland for sixth formers entitled *Pack Up Your Troubles*. The new materials were launched in January.

The role and future of the Resources Centre continues to be kept under review. A new and slim-downed version of the catalogue was produced and this is being disseminated in schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

A submission on the Department of Education in Northern Ireland's consultation document 'The Education Service in Northern Ireland: A Strategic Analysis' was made.

THE IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING

(The Irish Inter-Church Meeting is composed of the Irish Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church and the Member Churches of the Irish Council of Churches. The General Secretary of the ICC is Joint Secretary of the IICM).

The Irish Inter-Church Committee

The Committee met five times during 1994. Better links with the smaller churches who do not currently have a member on the Committee were agreed. During the year Pastor P.G. Fritz became the representative of the smaller churches on the Committee for a four year period in succession to the Rev. D.H. Banham.

Consideration was given to the idea of an inter-church visit to the Sudan and it was agreed to recommend this to the Member Churches. However, it has become clear that there is not sufficient support for such a visit at this time.

Planning is under way for the next Inter-Church Meeting which will take place in November 1995 and will have the theme 'Freedom, Justice

and Responsibility in Ireland Today' and will consider a document produced by the Department of Theological Questions. It is also hoped that the Meeting will deal concretely with the new situation now facing the churches following the paramilitary cessations of violence.

A meeting of representatives from the British and Irish churches will take place in Northern Ireland in February 1995. This will be a follow-up to the meeting held in Belfast in February 1993.

Procedures for the publication of documents by Departments, Working Parties, etc. were agreed.

The Committee endorsed the idea of an Irish dimension to the Developing Missionary Congregations Project of the Churches' Commission on Mission (see under ICC Board of Inter-Church Affairs section).

The Committee commended to the Member Churches the idea of a common Bible Sunday to be held on the second Sunday in Advent.

A statement was issued in June about the situation in the community following increased violence.

Department of Social Issues

The Irish Inter-Church Committee agreed proposals from the review group set up to look at the operation and structure of the Department. These proposals will, hopefully, mean that the Department will be better able to respond on an inter-church basis to social issues. There will also be an enlarged membership and church nominations are being sought. It is hoped that the Department will commence its new mode of operation in early 1995.

The Department has begun work on a study looking at 'Preparing for the Twenty-first Century'.

Follow-up to *Sectarianism - A Discussion Document* has continued and a paper on church and other responses was considered at the January 1995 meeting of the Irish Inter-Church Committee. (See Appendix Three).

Department of Theological Questions

The Department is currently working on its study of 'Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today'. A document on this subject will be presented to the next Irish Inter-Church Meeting. A residential meeting was held in October to work on the draft. It is hoped to cooperate with the National Bible Society of Ireland in producing bible study notes on the theme.

Local Ecumenism

Information is sent twice a year to local ecumenical groups. A one-day event was held in March in Enniskillen. It dealt with the subjects of inter-church marriage and sectarianism. A weekend for local groups will be held

at the end of February and the Dromantine Conference Centre near Newry. It will deal with resources for worship and bible study and is a follow-up to the Ecumenical Spirituality Consultation held in Denblane, Scotland, in November 1993.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

The sub-committee produced the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Irish Order of Service for the second time.

APPENDIX I

A PROFILE OF IRISH RELIGION

Statistical information and research evidence do not reveal the real essence of religion. Nevertheless, they tell part of the story and may give us some idea of what is happening, and point out challenges, opportunities and dangers for the future. The following review is presented in this light. Information on the various surveys quoted is provided at the end of the article.

(A) Northern Ireland

Duncan Morrow in recent research (1) shows that the Churches are central to culture and society in Northern Ireland and that they shape and form everyone's lives - believers and non-believers alike. Churches still provide much of the framework in which social and personal life is lived. It is impossible to draw any clear boundaries between church and community, particularly in rural areas. Churches are probably the largest providers of social and recreational activities in the Province (for instance, only 15% of local churches do not have a recreational youth club of some sort). Many of these activities are open to non-members but there is little cross-community participation, except perhaps in bowling clubs.

The Religious Breakdown of the Northern Ireland Population

The 1991 Social Attitudes survey gives the following religious breakdown of the Northern Ireland population in 1989:

	%		%
Roman Catholic	35	Presbyterian	25
Church of Ireland	19	Methodist	4
Baptist	2	Brethren	1
Free Presbyterian	1	Other Protestant	2
Missing/Others	12		

If we look at the trends in those who say they have no religion, we find the following:

1968 Rose survey **almost nobody**

1978 Moxon-Browne survey **3%**

1989 Social Attitudes survey **12%**

The main Protestant Churches are all losing support. For instance, consider the following figures for the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches:

Presbyterian Church	1968	399807	
	1993	311751	22% fall
Methodist Church	1968	65064	
	1993	58744	10% fall

Since the beginning of this century there has been an erosion in membership of the main Protestant Churches, with an increase in membership of the smaller Protestant Churches, and in the last twenty years, a significant rise in the number saying they have no religion.

An analysis of the 1991 Census returns show that those with no religion are more highly educated, more likely to be divorced and younger than those who are religious.

Church Attendance

The results of various surveys are tabulated below:

		R.C. %	Prot. %	C of I %	Pres. %	Meth. %	Other Prot. %
1969	Rose survey -						
	once a week or more	95	46				
	never	1	5				
1978	Moxon-Browne survey -						
	once a week or more	90	39				
	never	3	11				
1986	Policy Studies Institute survey -						
	once a week or more	90	34	27	34	36	62
	never	1	11				
1989	British Social Attitudes survey -						
	once a week or more	86	44	35			
	never	3	15				

The 1991 Social Attitudes survey found that 69% of all Protestants were 'regular' churchgoers and 90% of all Roman Catholics.

The above figures appear to show a small drop in Roman Catholic attendance and that 'core' Protestant attendance does not appear to have dropped all that much, but there has been a significant rise in the number of Protestants who never attend at all.

Young People and the Church

The 1978 Moxon-Browne survey found that 91% of Roman Catholics under the age of 25 attended church at least once a week, but only 17% of Protestants did so.

The results of the 1986 Policy Studies Institute survey is tabulated below:

	16-24 age group	25-34 age group
Roman Catholics	%	%
at least once a week	89 (82% male)	86
never	2	2
Protestants		
at least once a week	22	23
at least once a month	23	23
never	21	15

The results of the 1989 Social Attitude survey are as follows:

	18-34 age group	35-54 age group	55+ age group
Roman Catholics	%	%	%
at least once a week	77	88	91
never	4	2	3
Protestants			
at least once a week	26	44	49
never	22	10	16

The evidence suggests that there has been a slight drop off in attendance among Roman Catholic young people (particularly young men). Morrow says that there has been a significant fall off in mass attendance among the young in certain parts of Belfast, but not in other areas.

The evidence also suggests that there has been a significant fall off in church attendance among Protestant young people.

Figures from the Methodist Church regarding membership are interesting:

	1969	1992
number of junior members and adherents	21,082	12,694
	- a fall of 40%	

This suggests that there may be a fall off in membership among Protestant young people, as well as attendance.

There seems to be a very considerable difference between Protestant and Catholic young people. A survey of young people with some church connection carried out by an inter-Church working party in the late 1980s found that Roman Catholic young people were much more critical of their Church than Protestant young people. A Belfast churchgoers survey in 1993 found that Catholic young people are more likely to be less orthodox than older Catholics, whereas for Protestants the younger they are the more conservative they are likely to be.

The more conservative Protestant Churches and groups according to Boal, Livingstone and Campbell in their analysis of the 1983 Belfast Churchgoers survey seemed to be better at retaining young people. Bruce and Alderdice in their analysis of the 1991 Social Attitudes survey confirm this picture (3). They found that evangelicals were more likely to have been regular churchgoers in their teens. It may be that among Protestant young people there is both a movement away from religion and, among those who remain religious, a movement towards a more conservative orientation.

There is a persistent theme in recent research of Protestant young people being less open to ecumenism and good relations with Roman Catholics. Greer and Long's research among rural Ulster school children (4) found that Catholic pupils were more open to Protestants than Protestant pupils were to Catholics. Morrow found that there was a tendency for Protestant younger clergy to refuse to worship with Roman Catholics more often than their older colleagues. In contrast, McElroy's survey of Northern Ireland priests in 1986 found that younger priests tended to be more liberal than their elders in a number of issues, e.g. on mixed marriage, on attitudes to integrated education and on peace and reconciliation activity.

Women and Religion

Francis Porter found (5), using a secondary analysis of the data of the 1991 Social Attitudes survey, that a very substantial personal faith is evident in 75% of the adult female population. Morgan and Fraser in their research on women in the Northern Ireland community speaks of 'the great importance, both direct and indirect, of Church linked organisations, particularly in rural areas' (6). Steve Bruce and Alderdice in their analysis of the 1991 Social Attitudes survey quoted above speak of the importance of women in the transmission of religion and say that the effect of parental religion comes through the mother's church attendance.

A person's church-going is positively associated with a mother's. Theological conservatism among Protestants is also positively associated with a mother's church-going. Women are more likely to attend church than men and, among Protestants, women are more likely to be evangelical than men.

Age, however, is a factor in religious convictions and Porter found that in her analysis of the Social Attitude survey data there was a notable difference between those under and those over 35. It was suggested that differences in educational qualifications, in participation in the work force and in participation in manual work between women aged over 35 and those under 35 may be factors in this. It is clear that the changing expectations of women, the increasing education of women and, particularly, the increasing participation of women in employment have considerable implications for faith and for involvement in church activities. For instance, Morgan and Fraser found that the membership of the Church women's organisations in the two areas they surveyed were predominantly middle aged.

Porter found a clear and striking connection between strong religious commitment (both for Roman Catholics and for Protestants) and conservative attitudes in moral issues and gender roles. While the connection between strong religious views and conservative attitudes is clear, it is not invariable. Morgan and Fraser say 'Church commitment ... made no simple or direct connection with views about the role of women in the community, some of those expressing the most conservative views we heard based their ideology on religion as did some of those with the most radical approaches' (7).

Urban Society

Evidence cited in the inter-church working party report *The Challenge of the City* (8) suggests that there has been a weakening of church attendance and connection in the inner city and outer housing estates. In the case of the Protestant Churches this is from already quite low levels. In the case of part of Roman Catholic West Belfast there appears to have been some significant falls in church attendance, particularly among the young. However, Morrow shows that the Church still belongs to these working class areas in the sense that people still recognise the Church presence as community leaders, in schools, at baptisms, weddings, funerals, and in the Christian education of the young. At the same time the authority of Church figures in these areas is considerably less than in rural or middle class areas, and the Churches appear to be losing influence.

A Protestant Conservative/Liberal Split

The Presbyterian Church Board of Social Witness survey shows a split between Presbyterians who believe in the necessity of a 'born again' experience to be a Christian and those who don't. Bruce and Alderdice found that between one fifth and one quarter of all Protestants were people who say that they are born again or had a 'born-again' experience.

Probably as many as one third of regular church-going Protestants would be in this 'born-again' category. Boal, Livingstone and Campbell in their 1983 survey of church-going Protestants in the Belfast area found that more than a quarter of regular churchgoers belong to a group identified by their insistence on the all importance of a conversion experience and on a strictly inerrantist view of the Bible. 'Liberals', who rejected these two notions, were well over 50% of those surveyed. Boal, Livingstone and Campbell found that the conservative - liberal split cuts across all the Protestant denominations, but cuts across them differently. For instance, 76% of members of the Church of Ireland were 'liberals', 53% of Presbyterians, and 55% of Methodists, but only 6% of Baptists and 4% of Brethren. Comparing the results of the 1983 and 1993 Belfast churchgoers surveys there is some slight evidence of increasing conservatism.

The liberal/conservative split relates to a number of religious, moral and social issues; indeed, conservatives tend to give a higher priority to

'religious' issues than to 'social' issues. The split also has political consequences, for instance, Boal, Livingstone and Campbell found that 'conservatives' are much more likely to vote for the Democratic Unionist Party (9), whereas 'liberals' are more likely to vote for the Official Unionist Party or the Alliance Party.

The split is, however, limited to certain issues. The vast majority of Protestants, irrespective of theological conviction or denominational affiliation, in the Boal, Livingstone and Campbell survey expressed their belief that the Protestant opposition to a United Ireland sprang primarily from a fear about the role the Catholic Church would play under such a constitutional arrangement. (By contrast, Catholic support for a United Ireland is expressed in terms of political reasons, not religious (10)). Similarly, the overwhelming majority objected to mixed marriage, with conservatives being most emphatic in their opposition.

Catholic Divisions

There do not appear to be the same kind of theological divisions within Catholicism that affect how people vote as there is within Protestantism. The 1993 Belfast churchgoers survey found only a weak association between religious views and voting patterns.

There are divisions within the churchgoing community, particularly between young and old and between those who are more educated and those who are less. Those who are older and less educated are more likely to be more orthodox and to see the Northern Ireland conflict as religious rather than political.

Morrow suggests a growing problem for the Church within the Catholic community in the sphere of personal morality issues, e.g. contraception and what to do about family breakdown. Compton and Coward have found that Catholic attitudes towards family planning have been moving towards those held by Protestants, while suggesting that a significant factor in larger Catholic family size in Northern Ireland remains the role of religion. Montgomery and Davies found (11) that Catholic women were more inclined to favour of easier divorce than Protestant women.

There seems to be a greater willingness, at least among some middle class Catholics in some parts of Northern Ireland, to send their children to non-Catholic schools. Morrow has highlighted the importance in the Catholic community of the church/school/family nexus. Are there divisions opening up in the Catholic community in relation to personal morality and family issues and education? Is an 'à la carte' Catholicism developing among some? The European Values survey (1990) found evidence of the emergence of the 'New Catholic' in the Republic (see section on the Republic). The same survey found, however, that Catholics in the North are more orthodox than Catholics in the South.

Attitudes to Ecumenism

Morrow's research found that 5% of Methodist clergy, 18% of Church of Ireland clergy and 44% of Presbyterian clergy would not participate in joint worship with Roman Catholics. The 1983 and 1993 surveys of Belfast churchgoing Protestants found that only a minority (35% in 1983 and 39% in 1993) were willing to worship with Catholics. The 1993 survey found that 54% of Church of Ireland members, 47% of Presbyterians and 44% of Methodists were 'happy to take part in a joint service of worship with Catholics'. By contrast, 78% of Catholics were happy to worship with members of the Church of Ireland, 48% with Presbyterians and 42% with Methodists.

Only 10% of Protestant in both the 1983 and 1993 surveys of Belfast churchgoers thought that the aim of relations with the Roman Catholic Church should be unity. Forty eight percent in 1983 (47% in 1993) expressed a desire for greater co-operation with the Roman Catholic Church in both religious and social matters. The vast majority of the 'liberals' in the 1983 survey expressed a desire for cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church in both religious and social matters, but the 'conservatives' were not interested in extending relationships beyond the social sphere. Indeed one-third of 'conservatives' wanted no dealings with the Roman Catholic Church whatsoever.

Catholics appear not to fear the Protestant Churches in the same way as Protestants fear the Catholic Church. The 1968 Rose survey found that five-sixths of Catholics said there was nothing they disliked about the Protestant Churches. In the 1993 Belfast churchgoers survey 47% of Catholics thought that the aim of inter-church relations should be unity and another 46% thought that the aim should be greater co-operation on religious and social matters.

Morrow found that a much greater number of Roman Catholic clergy had no contact with clergy of other denominations. He observed that for many Catholic clergy in Belfast and Londonderry inter-community relationships and ecumenism were considered to be unimportant relative to issues such as unemployment and social conditions. Morrow suggests that in a situation of residential segregation people develop lives which take no cognizance of the other community. He also suggests that a concern for the maintenance of institutional 'purity' may also be a factor. It is clear that there is a significant antipathy to and a disinterest in ecumenical activity.

Mixed Marriages

According to the survey by Compton and Coward one in sixteen Northern Ireland marriages are mixed marriages. Forty percent of one of the partners change their religious denomination and half of the children are brought up as Catholics. Mixed marriage is highest among manual workers and more common in the 'more peaceful and less segregated'

North Coast area of the Province and lowest in the 'sectarian conflict' areas of mid-Ulster and South Armagh. Mixed marriages have increased since the 1950's and are still rising, although a decline was noted when the Troubles were at their height between 1968-72.

There is a strong opposition among Protestants to mixed marriage, particularly among conservative Protestants. Roman Catholics express more tolerance about the prospect. However, in the McElroy survey only one quarter of priests thought the Church should liberalise its position on mixed marriage.

Moral Attitudes

The 1989 Social Attitudes survey finds that conservatism on moral attitudes, e.g. on censorship, abortion, homosexuality and pornography correlates with regular Church attendance for both Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland. The Presbyterian Board of Social Witness survey of communicant Presbyterians found a strong conservative consensus on censorship, homosexuality, abortion and sex before marriage. There are disagreements between Protestants (particularly Presbyterians) and Roman Catholics when it comes to gambling, use of alcohol, capital punishment, attitudes to prisoners and to some extent on abortion (e.g. when it comes to choosing between the mother's or the baby's life, or on the possibility of defects to the fetus). According to Cairns (12) Catholics hold more radical views on questions concerning the distribution of wealth, welfare, law and order and support for political protest. On the issue of law and order, in particular, Protestants take a much more conservative position.

Cairns found (13) that only on the issue of premarital sexual relations was there strong evidence of a generation gap. This was true for both Protestants and Catholics.

Conclusion

Religion remains totally central to Northern Irish society. Religious participation and attendance remains far above Western European norms. There are, however, some signs of erosion, particularly in urban areas and among the young. There are large increases in people who say they have no religion and in those who never attend church (particularly Protestants).

While the core Protestant Church support seems to be holding up quite well, there seems to be a developing or expanding cleavage between religious (and church going) and largely secular (and non-church going) Protestants. This is in addition to a liberal/conservative religious cleavage. There appears to be a significant shift away from participation and attendance by Protestant young people. The Protestant Churches face the prospect of becoming largely rural and suburban, middle class, middle aged, more conservative and smaller institutions.

There has been a slight fall off in mass attendance among Roman Catholics over the last twenty years. There are some danger signals - in urban areas and among the young. There is a shift away from traditional Church teaching in areas such as contraception.

There is little participation by Protestants and Catholics in each other's organisations and there is a strong antipathy to and disinterest in ecumenism. There is a significant Protestant defensiveness and a strong fear of the Roman Catholic Church.

Women have been and are the bedrock of the Churches. The increasing expectations of women, improved education and increasing participation in full time employment may have significant religious consequences - as may increasing marital breakdown.

As we have said religious participation and attendance remains far above Western European norms. Part of the reason for this may lie in the fact that prolonged political or ethnic conflict may encourage religious affiliation (14). The connection between religion and ethnic identity in Northern Ireland may have inhibited secularisation. The effects of an end to violence and of a political settlement on religious participation and attendance are worthy of thought.

(B) The Republic of Ireland

The Religious Breakdown of the Republic of Ireland's Population

The 1991 census gives the following religious breakdown: %

Roman Catholics	91.6
Church of Ireland	2.53
Presbyterian	0.37
Methodist	0.14
Others, not stated and no religion	5.4

There has been a growth of smaller independent evangelical Churches, fellowships, and 'house' Churches. The 'Christian (unspecified)' category in the census totalled 16,329, more than the number of Presbyterians at 13,199.

The decline of the Protestant population in the Republic in this century is illustrated by the following table:

	Roman Catholic	Church of Ireland	Presbyterian	Methodist	Others, not stated and no religion
1901	89.3	8.2	1.5	0.6	0.37
1911	89.6	7.9	1.4	0.5	0.5
1926	92.6	5.5	1.1	0.4	0.45
1936	93.4	4.9	0.9	0.3	0.4
1946	94.3	4.2	0.8	0.3	0.4
1961	94.9	3.7	0.7	0.2	0.55
1971	92.4	3.3	0.5	0.2	2.13
1981	93.1	2.8	0.4	0.2	3.52
1991	91.6	2.5	0.4	0.14	5.4

Church Attendance

Various surveys give the following for weekly or more mass attendance:

		%
1974	Nic Ghiolla Phadraig survey	91
1984	Breslin and Weafer survey	87
1988/89	MacGreil survey	82
1992	AGB Adelaide survey	

MacGreil found that mass attendance is highest for those over 50, those raised in rural communities and those living in Munster and Connaught/Ulster. It was lowest for those aged 21-35, those raised in large cities and those living in Dublin. Weekly mass attendance in Dublin was 69%; it may, however, be as low as 5% in some deprived and marginalised communities from other evidence. (15)

MacGreil found that weekly Church attendance for Protestants (members of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches and the Church of Ireland) was 55%; for 1 to 3 times a month or more it rose to 70%.

Young People

The results of the 1990 European Values survey show that those born since the mid-1950s display significantly less likelihood of adhering to traditional values and substantially lower levels of religiosity.

The MacGreil survey found that weekly mass attendance in the 21-35 age group was 71% (all age average 82%). The evidence suggests that a major cultural shift has taken place among those born since the mid-1950s affecting levels of religious orthodoxy and mass attendance.

Women and Religion

As in Northern Ireland women in the Republic of Ireland are more religious than men. They are more likely than men to be frequent mass-

goers, i.e. more than once a week. Women are also more likely to be very regular communicants, to avail of confession, and to pray more frequently. In addition, women are more likely than men to attach importance to the influence of religion in the personal development of their children. In this sense, women form the bedrock of the Church, and play a very significant part in religious socialisation and transmission (16).

However, there is evidence of a growing sense of alienation among women from the institutional (hierarchical) church. In 1992 a survey, carried out by the Subcommittee on Women in the Church under the aegis of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace among women who considered themselves committed Catholics, found a high level of anger and hurt (17). Over two-thirds (68%) of the respondents felt a sense of anger at the way women are treated in the church, and the same proportion felt the Church leadership was authoritarian. On the other hand, just 11% felt the Church authorities were supportive of women. A total of 57% felt hurt by the Church - either by the form of liturgy, by what the Church says or by the interpretation of scripture.

It is also clear that full-time participation of women in the world of employment has considerable implications for religious practice (as in Northern Ireland). Ninety three percent of women who are full-time in the home attend mass weekly; this drops to 78% for those who are in full-time employment according to the European Values survey.

Moral Attitudes

The European Values survey found that the only circumstance in which the majority of people would approve of abortion was where the mother's health was at risk. Irish respondents are substantially more likely than their European counterparts to condemn absolutely divorce and abortion. However, there has been a shift in the 1980s to a more liberal position of allowing divorce and abortion in some circumstances.

A survey of Church of Ireland members in 50 different parishes scattered throughout the Republic in 1989-90 found that 45% of those questioned said they differed a lot from the majority viewpoint on such issues as divorce, contraception and information on abortion; 34% a little and 12% not at all. Many parishioners across the age groups said legislation about divorce should be introduced and contraception should be made available to all. However, they were against abortion in all cases except where the life of the mother was in danger, ironically the majority position now of people in the Republic, according to the European Values survey.

The controversies of the 1980s surrounding divorce and abortion, plus cultural, social and other changes (e.g. an increasing tendency for people to assert the right to come to their own decisions on matters of 'private' personal morality) have left their mark in a decline in confidence in the Roman Catholic Church's ability to provide satisfactory answers to a range of social and moral questions (particularly in the areas of contraception,

divorce/separation and abortion), according to the European Values survey. To this extent the Church has lost authority.

The 'New Catholic'

The European Values survey provides confirmation that a 'new Catholic' has emerged with the following characteristics:

- **an outlook that questions the Church's right to speak with absolute authority on matters of personal morality or to speak out on government policy while at the same time considering it appropriate that the Church should be outspoken on social issues.**
- **an optimistic interpretation of religion, one's standing before God and the world.**
- **a liberal attitude on sexual matters which can be coupled with a rejection of abortion except in circumstances where the mother's health is at risk.**
- **an increased tendency to think in terms of a spirit or life force rather than a personal God while retaining an appreciation of the sacramental life of the Church.**

Mixed Marriage

The Roman Catholic Church's regulations on mixed marriage have been the source of much bitterness among the Protestant community over the years and have been regarded as one of the reasons for its reduction in size. Howard Robinson in a survey in 1983 found (18) that one quarter of Church of Ireland members who marry wed Roman Catholics. It was found that over 40% of the children of mixed marriages had been baptised in the Church of Ireland. Fifty eight percent of Church of Ireland in the Dublin diocese marriages are now mixed marriages (19).

Ecumenism

MacGreil found that between the early 1970s and the late 1980s people's enthusiasm for ecumenism had cooled somewhat, particularly among the young. Eighty three percent of those interviewed in Dublin in the 1972-73 survey had said unity between Catholic and Protestant Churches was desirable in principle and 62% possible in practice. In the 1988-89 national survey these proportions had slumped to 45% (63% in Dublin) and 30%. Only 37% of 18-20 year olds thought Church unity was desirable in practice; 28% thought it undesirable.

The survey of Church of Ireland members in the Republic found the following perceptions of the ecumenical movement:

36% considered it a good thing

12% saw it as a threat

50% considered it could be both good and bad

It was hypothesised that the opposition and ambivalence were due to fears that ecumenical initiatives might essentially benefit the Roman Catholic majority and endanger the cohesion of the minority community.

Sixty-five per cent of the parishioners believe that the position and influence of the Roman Catholic Church in the Republic was 'far too important', 27% believed it 'a little too important'; and 5% believed it to be 'just right'. The perception of the role of the Catholic Church seemed to depend on the local attitudes towards Roman Catholic clergy.

The research found that many areas of common ground between Roman Catholic and Protestant had developed and religion was no longer the only significant predictor of attitudes. Socio-economic status provided an important cross-cutting influence. The degree of commonality between Protestants and Catholics seemed to vary according to age group and area - those over 55 years are likely to have a deeper sense of polarisation from the majority than those in other age groups. Surprisingly social polarisation was also apparent among those under 25 years.

Conclusion

Various surveys have found a high degree of religious faith and practice in the Republic of Ireland. The rapid changes in Irish society have not resulted in an evident *general* secularisation. Nor is there a *general* disenchantment with the Roman Catholic Church or an inclination to adopt alternative belief systems. There are a number of sections of the population which manifest weaker commitment and frequency of practice and sometimes lower levels of orthodoxy. These would be the young males, those born since the mid-1950s, those having third level education, people living in Dublin, those reared in large cities and the urban unemployed. Those born since the mid-1950s display a significantly less likelihood of adhering to traditional values and substantially lower levels of religiosity. This suggests that a major cultural shift is underway with this group - a shift with major religious and moral implications for the future. Also of importance is the evidence of a significant alienation from the Roman Catholic Church of many women. When this is combined with the fact that many more women are participating in full-time employment there could be major future changes in women's religiosity and frequency of practice.

The main Protestant Churches continue to decline but there is evidence of growth among the smaller evangelical groups. There are many more mixed marriages, but there is evidence of more children being brought up Protestant. Relations with Roman Catholics have improved over the years, but there are still doubts and hesitations concerning the Roman Catholic Church and ecumenism.

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APPENDIX II

THE CHURCH, THE WORKING CLASS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

This short paper is intended to stimulate thought and reflection on the issue of "the church and the working class", and especially how the church can respond today to issues of concern regarding community development in working class areas. Of necessity, due to its length, it is only a cursory look at some of the issues concerned and deals predominantly with the Protestant and Northern Ireland arenas. *1 A short reference list and bibliography at the end can act as a pointer for those wanting to read more.

Definitions

Many different definitions are possible - of 'church' as well as 'working class'. In a rapidly changing economic and social situation some people have difficulty with using the term 'working class' at all. But, as a term which is commonly used if with many different connotations, it can be used if we clarify what we mean. All definitions have their advantages and drawbacks.

In terms of a manageable definition perhaps the best is simply those people who are residents of the inner city and outer housing estates. *2 Another definition would be those people and their families who are in blue collar employment plus those who are unemployed.

Other definitions are possible; for example, including the poor in rural areas and unemployed people in general. Another approach is to use an aggregate term for those who are deprived through being poor economically with low pay or unemployment and poor educational performance and/or provision. Another term which is sometimes used is that of 'the underclass' for those totally dependent on state benefits and/or caught in the poverty trap but this term is unacceptable because of its deterministic implications that the situation is unreformable. Yet other definitions would include attitudes and lifestyle as an important aspect.

This paper tries to address the question of church interaction with working class areas broadly speaking in relation to community development and not with evangelism except insofar as the former impinges on the latter. 'Community development' is taken to mean an approach which assists people to do things for themselves locally (i.e. implying a handing over of power) rather than being dependent on local or other services which are provided for them.

The Concern

A major concern for all churches in Ireland is now the extent to which they are losing, or have lost, the working class. The situation is different to

Britain, however, in that on both Protestant and Catholic sides, North and South of the border, the church has traditionally had large scale working class involvement; in Belfast perhaps 160,000 out of a working class population of 200,000 had involvement with the church in 1886. *3 In Britain it is more debateable to what extent the Protestant churches ever had widespread working class involvement.

So at this stage a concern is simply with declining church attendance. However, while this is a legitimate concern, to be concerned solely with church attendance figures and membership is to miss the opportunity for the church locally to be involved in a positive way with its immediate neighbours, because 'loving our neighbour' includes those on our own doorsteps, so to speak.

There are bound to be 'mixed motives' involved for Christian churches and groups involved in community work and community development. If service to the wider community is undertaken solely for the sake of attempting to win members for a church then, unless explicitly stated, it is a cynical exercise to win souls by subterfuge. Community projects need to be undertaken for their own intrinsic value.

But while community service projects should not be used to evangelise, Christian churches cannot hide their light under a bushel. If churches get kudos and resultant new members through particular projects then this has to be welcomed. But the most important outcome of involvement is likely to be the 'knock-on' effect within a church by bolstering the sense of purpose and morale which in turn will make that church a more interesting place for others to be involved.

Interacting with Working Class Areas

Service to the community is a time-intensive operation. Much time, effort, and indeed money can go into it. So the question needs to be asked about the effect church involvement has. Is it providing a service which is otherwise lacking? What effect has the involvement on the individuals concerned and the wider community?

And - distinguishing between community service and community development - is it merely providing a service to the community or is it enabling people within the community to be better prepared to deal with the issues of concern locally?

There is nothing inherently wrong with providing a service to the community as opposed to being involved in community development; the church has traditionally helped to alleviate poverty, for example. But the question needs to be asked as to whether the prophetic role of the church in dealing with issues of injustice and poverty at a local level can be effectively tackled through the likes of ACE (Action for Community Employment) schemes. The churches in Northern Ireland are heavily involved in ACE; statistics from the beginning of 1994 show 19.2% of ACE places (1,841 out of 9,589) are church based. *5

ACE is a useful service in that it provides employment funded by the state, albeit for a short period, and experience and training for the individual worker; around 30% of East Belfast Mission ACE workers find permanent employment during or at the end of their ACE year. But as an overall response to the needs of an area it can be sadly lacking; most ACE workers return to the dole, and organisations are faced with continuous turnover of staff which they have to keep retraining for specific tasks. In the case of West Belfast, the Catholic church's involvement in ACE has raised questions about the state's search for a 'safe pair of hands', leading to other groups feeling excluded. Some community workers on the Protestant side would also be concerned about Protestant church involvement in ACE schemes.

Alternative Ways

There are two alternative ways of addressing the needs of working class areas which this paper will briefly address (these two approaches are not contradictory). One is the approach adopted by the Bridge Community Centre on the Lower Ravenhill Road in Belfast which is attempting to develop an integrated development plan for the area involving the churches. Another approach is to put pressure on those who make decisions to provide for the needs of people locally, i.e. a deliberate refusal to provide services as well as demanding that the bodies who should be providing better services do so.

The Bridge

The Lower Ravenhill Road is a small working class Protestant area of 3,000 people immediately across the river Lagan from Belfast city centre. It borders the only Catholic working class area in east Belfast, the Short Strand. Work in recent years has shown the extent of deprivation in working class Protestant areas *6, and the Lower Ravenhill is no exception to this. The area has been subject to redevelopment and currently regeneration plans by Laganside Development Corporation.

The Bridge Community Trust, founded in 1987 and now based at 135/139 Ravenhill Road, has a Christian basis but is open to all within the community. *7

As well as trying to provide services for the local community it also has the aim of enabling and resourcing local people to organise themselves to respond to community needs.

As part of this it is currently involved in an action-research community development project to work on an area based partnership, including the churches, within the Lower Ravenhill. As well as supporting existing groups this seeks to explore developing cooperation between groups (including women's and community groups), churches, private businesses and statutory agencies within the area to arrive at a common plan for community and economic development in the area.

Specifically concerning the churches, the project is examining the impact, or lack of it, of the churches on the area. Many of the churches have a substantial commuter population - people who have family connections from the past with the area but who now live elsewhere. The project is examining the approach the churches and mission halls take to practical involvement with the people of the area, and the extent of possibilities for the future which would avoid dependency and promote individual, group and community development.

The work from this project will be written up and available more widely. It is exciting because it is trying to draw all possible individuals, groups and institutions in the area together for the common good. There are, of course, difficulties, not least with the emphasis which many Protestant denominations and groups have solely on the individual and individual salvation. But it represents an approach which seeks to find out and utilise all the resources in the area.

Broad Based Organising

The broad based organising or mass organisation approach is one which seeks to build alliances from a local level upwards to put pressure on power-holders to provide the services local people demand; this can be as regards housing, services, policing, roads, street cleaning, real job creation or whatever. This approach refuses to provide services which it feels the state or local authorities should be providing for people.

The characteristics of this model include a broad base, large numbers, picking out single demands that people can unite around, picking winnable issues, building using self interest, and not being welfare or service based. It is quite clearly about empowering people and attempts to work within the culture and traditions of the people involved.

There are different avenues within this approach which is mainly identified with the United States of America but has also been used in Britain. *8 One avenue is to use the churches as the 'building blocks' of such an alliance; however, to do this exclusively in Northern Ireland could create a number of difficulties. Such difficulties could include; the assumption that the project was really about something else (e.g. ecumenism), the simple division which exists between churches and church members as regards living areas and political philosophies, and perhaps an unwillingness by enough churches to cooperate to make it worthwhile, apart from the absence of residents of working class areas from many of the churches located in those areas (where people commute in).

Some other broad based organising avenues use community groups as their basic unit. There is no reason why there cannot be a mixture of community and church groups involved - similar to what the Bridge is attempting in the Lower Ravenhill area of Belfast. And a local alliance can forge links with other alliances and campaigns elsewhere to bring issues forward at a higher or national level.

Attempting to use this approach and anchor it within the local culture in Ireland, North or South, might mean differences to how it is done elsewhere. For example, an alliance could be built on a single issue which, when success is achieved, is allowed to wither away; people would take their experience with them which they could bring to another issue and another alliance. This would be different to having one alliance which moved from winnable issue to winnable issue.

In addition, the more directly confrontational model used in North America may suit the culture there but be inappropriate in Europe. Here, while demands may need to be made it can be done in a less confrontational manner and without 'putting powerholders on the spot' in a way which, because of the culture here, may antagonise and alienate more than pressurise and influence.

Conclusion

The mission of the church to working class areas is a thorny one. As society changes and secularisation increases the numbers who only have a minimal identification with the church, if any, there are new challenges thrown up. If the churches are to demonstrate their love in a practical way, new ways of working and responding to local issues are needed and new ways of relating to people who currently may feel the church does not relate to them.

This short paper has sought to examine briefly a few of the issues involved and one or two different ways of approaching the subject. We all fall into the trap of being creatures of habit and learned responses. The challenge to Christians who want to show their love to the areas they seek to serve is to learn how, today, that love can be put into effective action.

References and Bibliography

- *1 Crosscare, the Catholic Social Service Conference in the Archdiocese of Dublin, has experience of community development work in local areas, for example, providing support, training and structures. Crosscare, The Red House, Clonliffe College, Dublin 3, phone 01 - 836 0011.

In Northern Ireland, some other Christian projects working in the community include the following, and this is not intended as an inclusive list;

- The Churches' Trust, 91 Spencer Road, Waterside, Londonderry BT47 1AE, Telephone 01504 - 42536.
- Downtown Centre, c/o 1st Lisburn Presbyterian Church, Market Square, Lisburn BT28 1AG, phone 01846 - 672052.
- East Belfast Mission, 239 Newtownards Road, Belfast BT4 1AF, Telephone 01232 - 458560.

A useful paper available from the East Belfast Mission is "Insights into worship in a working class culture: Understanding their experience and relating to their needs" by Jim Rea

- Hope Link Project, 31 Carlisle Circus, Belfast BT14 6AT, Tel: 332019
- 174 Trust (Saltshaker Centre), 174 Antrim Road, Belfast BT15 2AJ, Telephone 01232 - 747114.
- Shankill Road Mission, 116 Shankill Road, Belfast BT13 2BD , Telephone 01232 - 324345.

The following couple of groups work at the level of advice and resource;

- Frontier Road Trust, 157 Albertbridge Road, Belfast BT5 4PS, Telephone 01232 - 454806.
- Community Work from a Christian Perspective, c/o Doug Baker, Corrymeela House, 8 Upper Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NT, Tel: 325008.

- *2 This is the definition used in *The Challenge of the City: A report to the churches*, Department of Social Issues, Irish Inter-Church Meeting, 1990. 87 pages.
- *3 As above, page 37.
- *4 *The Irrelevant Church*, Robin Gamble, Monarch Publications, 1991. 192 pages.
- *5 Training and Employment Agency statistics quoted in *Belfast Telegraph* 29/1/94.
- *6 See, for example, *Poverty amongst plenty; Surveys of Taughmonagh and Clarawood estates, 1992*, Commissioned by CDPA/Community Development in Protestant Areas Steering Group, report produced by Community Training and Research Services. See also CDPA's seminar report, *Community Development in Protestant Areas* (1991).
- *7 Bridge Community Trust, 135/139 Ravenhill Road, Belfast BT6 8DR. Tel: 01232-459000. Fax 01232-739099. Regarding the project described, contact Christine Acheson or Maurice Kinhead.
- *8 The Citizen Organising Foundation in Britain and the Industrial Areas Foundation in the USA both use the approach of taking churches as the building blocks of local alliances. Other community-based alliances building up across the United States include Citizen Action and Acorn. Information available from; NAT, 16 Ravensdene Park, Belfast BT6 ODA, Tel: 647106.

Other publications in addition to those mentioned above;

- *The Church and Community Development - an Introduction* by George Lovell, Avec Publications (155a Kings Road, Chelsea, London SW3 5TX), 1980/1992. 80 pages.

- *Work is the key; towards an economy that needs everyone*, The Irish Episcopal Conference, 1992, published by Veritas. 103 pages
- *Poverty and its alleviation: strategies for community work* by Greg Smith, University of Bradford / Christian Urban Resources Unit, Occasional Papers No.7.
- *Lost Horizons, New Horizons: Community development in Northern Ireland*, ed. Eamonn Deane, 1990.
- The Community Development Review Group at the start of the 1990s produced reports on different aspects of community development, plus recommendations. These reports included;
- *Funding and Support for Community and Voluntary Groups in Northern Ireland*, ed. Avila Kilmurray, 1991, and
- *Community Development in Northern Ireland; Perspectives for the Future*, ed. Ken Logue, 1991.

January 1995.

APPENDIX III

FOLLOW UP TO 'Sectarianism - A Discussion Document'.

1. Church Responses or Progress Report

Church of Ireland

- Response received.

Methodist Church in Ireland

- Recommendation from Annual Conference '94 to local churches to study document.
- Study guide prepared and distributed to local churches, September '94.
- Major presentation at 3 District Synods.

Moravian Church

- Matter raised at District Conference.
- Document recommended to all 5 congregations.
- Document discussed by District Ministers at fraternal.

Lutheran Church

- The Church's response to the Opsahl Report covered the Sectarianism Document as well.
- Document discussed by various groups within the Church.

Religious Society of Friends

- Letter received accompanied by a comment on the Document. The comment was written by an individual Quaker at the request of the Yearly Meeting Committee.
- Document recommended for study by individuals.

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

- Response due by end of February 1995.
- Study of the Document is underway through various Boards.

Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church

- Response expected shortly.
- Meetings to discuss Document have taken place.

Roman Catholic Church

- Document recommended for study by Episcopal Conference.
- The Advisory Committee on Ecumenism has considered the Document.
- A study day was held in the Armagh Province for ecumenical officers, etc.

2. Sales

2000 copies of *Sectarianism - A Discussion Document* printed; approximately 300 remaining.

1500 copies of *Roots of Sectarianism* by Joe Liechty printed; approximately 250 remaining.

250 copies of *How We Evangelical Christians ...* by Gary Mason printed;
approximately 20 remaining.

3. **Churches Peace Education Programme**

Produced 'What the Bible Says About Sectarianism' by John Lampen. Working on module on Sectarianism for schools.

4. Study Guideline on Document produced by Rev. Dr. Johnston McMaster for Methodist Church - outlines 6 session study or 12 session study.

5. **Youth Link: Northern Ireland**

Study courses for youth leaders using Document.

6. Corrymeela/ISE Ministry Conference in May 1994 on subject of Sectarianism.

7. **Irish School of Ecumenics Sectarianism Project**

ISE is commencing on a 3-year project spearheaded by Dr. Joseph Liechty, a member of the Working Party.

8. Talks on Discussion Document / subject given by members of the Working Party and Secretariat of Irish Inter-Church Meeting, others.

9. Extensive discussion and study of Document by inter-church groups, e.g. Belmont Council of Churches (who produced a written report); Cavehill Fellowship, Lower Antrim Road Clergy Group; South Down Ecumenical Group.

10. Articles, reviews.

11. North West Triangle Meeting in May 1994 discussed subject.

12. Session at CCBI Assembly.

13. **Outside Interest**

The Document was commended in a resolution of the 1994 British Methodist Conference in Great Britain; interest in Conference of European Churches and CCEE who are jointly organising the next European Ecumenical Encounter on the theme of Reconciliation; request for copies in the USA.

14. Irish Council of Churches used the document as the substance of its submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

January 1995

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