

Standing Committee – Report 2006

**APPENDIX J**

**THE HARD GOSPEL REPORT 2006**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP** (*letters in brackets indicate sub-committee membership*)

Ven Patrick Rooke (Chair) (A,D)  
Ms Ruth Handy (Vice Chair) (D)  
Most Revd Dr Richard Clarke (A)  
Rt Revd Dr Michael Jackson (D)  
Mr Terry Forsyth (Honorary Treasurer) (B) appointed Sept 2005  
Revd Eileen Cremin (A)  
Revd Canon Dr Ian Ellis (Standing Committee)  
Mr Bernie Frayne appointed Sept 2005  
Revd Kenny Hall (B)  
Revd Canon Cecil Hyland (Parish Development Committee) appointed Sept 2005  
Rev Paul Hoey (Parish Development Committee [alternate]) appointed Sept 2005  
Mrs Margaret McNulty appointed Sept 2005  
Revd Daniel Nuzum  
Ms Stella Obe (C) appointed Sept 2005  
Revd Michael Parker (C,D)  
Revd Katharine Poulton (C)  
Ms Kate Turner  
Revd Canon Trevor Williams (D)

**Co-opted**

Revd Doug Baker (Resource) (A,D)  
Mrs Elaine Way (Resource)

**In attendance**

Mr David Brown (Youth Department)  
Mrs Jenny Compston (Communications)  
Mrs Janet Maxwell (Communications) (C)  
Ms Sarah Williams (Communications [Alternate])  
Revd Earl Storey (HGP Director) (A,B,C,D)

**Sub Committees re Hard Gospel Project**

- (A) Strategy/Planning
- (B) Finance/Grants
- (C) Communications/Publicity
- (D) Appointments

The Committee records its gratitude to the Bishop of Clogher who chaired the Hard Gospel Committee for a six month period prior to the appointment of Archdeacon Patrick Rooke in June 2005. Ms Ruth Handy took up the post as Vice Chair and Mr Terry Forsyth became Honorary Treasurer in January 2006.

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Mrs Joan Bruton resigned from the Committee in September 2005 and Dr Geraldine Smyth resigned as a co-opted member in February 2006. Both made a valuable contribution over a number of years. In nominating the names of additional members to the Standing Committee, the Committee has attempted to be as representative as possible.

### **HARD GOSPEL PROCESS**

In 1999, a report was made to General Synod by the Sectarianism Education Committee. As a result of the work of that committee and the report to General Synod a scoping study was commissioned in 2002. The study aimed to take a snapshot of attitudes to sectarianism and living with difference within the Church of Ireland. An underlying aim of the study was to assist parishes to increase their capacity to deal positively with difference issues. It also sought to explore how dealing with these issues might impact on decision-making within the Church of Ireland. *The Hard Gospel Report: Dealing with Difference in the Church of Ireland* was received by General Synod and all diocesan synods in 2003.

As a result of the response to the report, the Standing Committee of the General Synod authorised the establishment of the Hard Gospel Committee. The next phase of the Hard Gospel process has now begun with the Hard Gospel Committee embarking on a broadly-based project through which the Church of Ireland will address the complex and deep-seated issues that surround sectarianism and difference as identified in the Report. Archbishop Eames is President of this new initiative.

### **HARD GOSPEL PROJECT**

The core aims of the Hard Gospel Project are:

1. To facilitate the Church of Ireland in modelling in its own structures, relationships and values with regard to overcoming sectarianism, community conflict and dealing with difference that it will promote in wider society.
2. To develop and promote policies, practices and statements of the Church of Ireland that will encourage honest and constructive relationships in dealing with sectarianism and issues of difference in the church and wider society.
3. To enhance the capability of the Church of Ireland at all levels to take initiatives to build peace and to transform communities.
4. To implement initiatives, projects or programmes in collaboration with other Churches, agencies and groups in a manner that will create more open and inclusive local communities.

The Protestant community in Northern Ireland has experienced deep change within a relatively short period of time. Many old certainties have gone and familiar landmarks seem decidedly vulnerable. It has, at times, seemed disoriented in the light of changing

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circumstances. Pessimism, fear, insecurity and inability to articulate vision, anger or responsibility remain as significant factors within this particular Protestant community.

Change of a different nature, but no less profound, has taken place in the Republic of Ireland during the past decade. This has been manifest in the social, economic and religious life in all parts of the country. The growth of a large immigrant population is one of the most obvious changes to have taken place. Whether North or South the Church of Ireland finds new contexts in which it must express its life and mission as a Christian Church. New contexts mean not only opportunity but real challenge for the Church.

In a changing context the Church of Ireland needs to have something hopeful and engaging to offer. Many (particularly young adults) are walking away from the church. People see church as being part of the problem rather than witnessing to a gospel that could make a vital contribution to bringing about a shared future. The reality is also that many people now find community elsewhere and not in church. It may be that some of our church models are simply not working. We are increasingly in a post-Christian society; a fact of which the Church of Ireland has not always shown itself aware.

The Hard Gospel Project aims to offer something hopeful to the Church of Ireland as it faces both challenge and opportunity. The Hard Gospel Project seeks to help the Church to come face to face with the reality of a new context in Ireland, both North and South. The project will help all levels of the Church, at central, diocesan and parochial level, to ask themselves fundamental questions:

- What issues does this raise for us and how do we respond?
- What does reality tell us about challenges to our faith?
- What is it that we believe about ourselves?
- Is the way that we express our life and witness a help or hindrance to a new and cohesive society both North and South?
- What does the gospel say about the quality of relationships with family, stranger and foe?
- In an emerging new context what does it mean to be church?
- Because God has blessed something in the past ....

In all of this there is a need for visionary leadership that re-imagines the future – equipping people to be Christians/Church in the world they find themselves in. It is about enabling Church to find a relationship with an emerging new Ireland, both North and South.

The Hard Gospel Project is a response to the challenge to the Church of Ireland to speak truth to ourselves, as well as to the world we live in. It is the holding up of a mirror to Church and community, not to condemn but to save. Its core aim is to strengthen the Church for a purpose – the purpose of effective witness in a divided and changing society.

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The Hard Gospel Project is based on the belief that Church is strengthened by asking itself searching questions, and understanding and engaging with the context in which it lives. It also believes that Christian witness points to relationships of two types:

- Vertical - new relationship with God
- Horizontal - new relationship with others i.e. neighbour/stranger/enemy

The aim of this project is to effect change. This means a variety of work with central structures, dioceses and parishes: change in one feeds into the other so any project must deal with all. Grassroots work is important but there is also a need for systematic work within the Church of Ireland in generating new agendas and strategies for bridge building.

It is always better to light a candle than curse the dark. Finding new ways of Christian witness in a vastly changing community may lead to feelings of helplessness in the face of a daunting task. There may be some lack of vision that things either could or should be any different. We can all display the ability to shield ourselves from the negative realities of social, political or economic division.

The Hard Gospel Project will seek:

- To enable visionary and well facilitated dialogue.
- To provide a language of common purpose that all can share.
- To recognise that stirring vision for something new is not enough. There is a need for vision to be accompanied by the resources that will enable change to take place at all levels.

The work of this project will aim to bring energy rather than burden. It is not a recipe for political correctness, a theology of the bland or a belief that there are no boundaries. It is about facilitating the Church of Ireland to engage at all levels with the society it lives in, and to do whatever it takes to be the most effective Christian witness possible within that context. The manifestations of some of that journey may be different for North and South, yet the fundamental opportunities and challenges remain the same.

#### **Staffing**

Project Director – Revd Earl Storey was appointed and took up this role on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2005. As well as directing the project his work will focus on reviewing, auditing and engaging with central structures and processes in respect of the way in which the Church of Ireland makes its contribution to wider society in Ireland today.

Project Officer (based in Belfast) – Mr Stephen Dallas (Commenced 1<sup>st</sup> January 2006)

Project Officer (based in Dublin) – Mr Philip McKinley (Commenced 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006)

There is provision for Administrative support in the Hard Gospel office, which is in Church of Ireland House, Dublin (Tel : 014125606)

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### **Methodology**

The Hard Gospel Project is working to a three-year strategic plan to promote and enable the following objectives:

1. Examine and, where necessary, change central structures and representative bodies to achieve a more balanced participation.
2. Enhance existing structures and where needed provide new structures for internal dialogue to promote openness and understanding of difference in the Church.
3. Identify and change areas where sectarianism and destructive patterns of relating to difference affect the witness and ministry of the Church.
4. Proof all policies, practices and statements of the Church of Ireland in terms of sectarianism, dealing positively with difference, including those where the current attitude of the Church reflects historical identification with one political and cultural community.
5. Identify areas of policy and practice where new guidelines on honest and constructive relationships in dealing with difference are needed, and develop them.
6. Widen the range of Churches, faith communities and other interest groups with which the Church of Ireland has regular and established relationships.
7. Raise the profile and increase understanding of the Church of Ireland's approach to sectarianism and dealing positively with difference through a focused and sustained programme of publicity and information.
8. Provide training, support and resourcing for central leadership.
9. Provide training, support and resourcing for diocesan/parish leadership (clergy/lay).
10. Modify initial and continuing clerical and lay training processes to include significant emphasis on learning to overcome sectarianism, to deal positively with difference and to encourage and enable others to do the same.
11. Develop the Youth Training Programme to include a significant emphasis on learning to move beyond sectarianism and to deal positively with difference.
12. Collate information about best practice in moving beyond sectarianism and dealing positively with difference and actively promote it within the Church and beyond.

### **Funding**

As reported to General Synod 2005, the initial funding for the Hard Gospel Project was £561,000 (International Fund for Ireland £300,000; Church of Ireland related sources £261,000 – Book of Reports page 155). This funding was linked to the achieving of specific 'Aims, Objectives and Strategies' and is reviewed quarterly by the IFI and Standing Committee. A further €40,000 has been contributed from the Republic's Department of Foreign Affairs Reconciliation Fund for which the Bishop of Clogher has publicly expressed our gratitude.