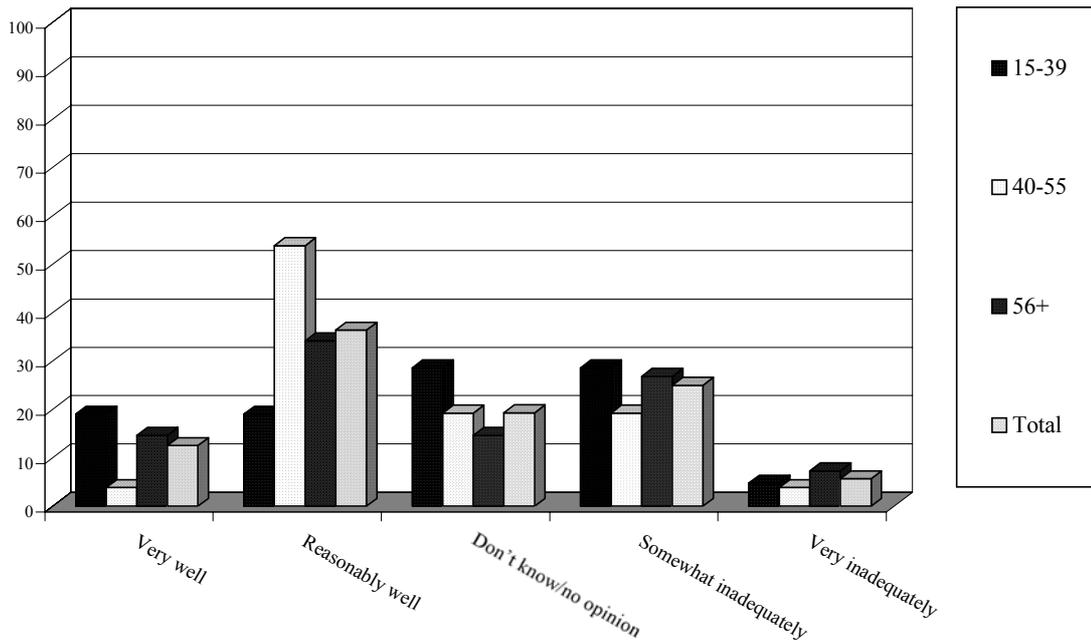


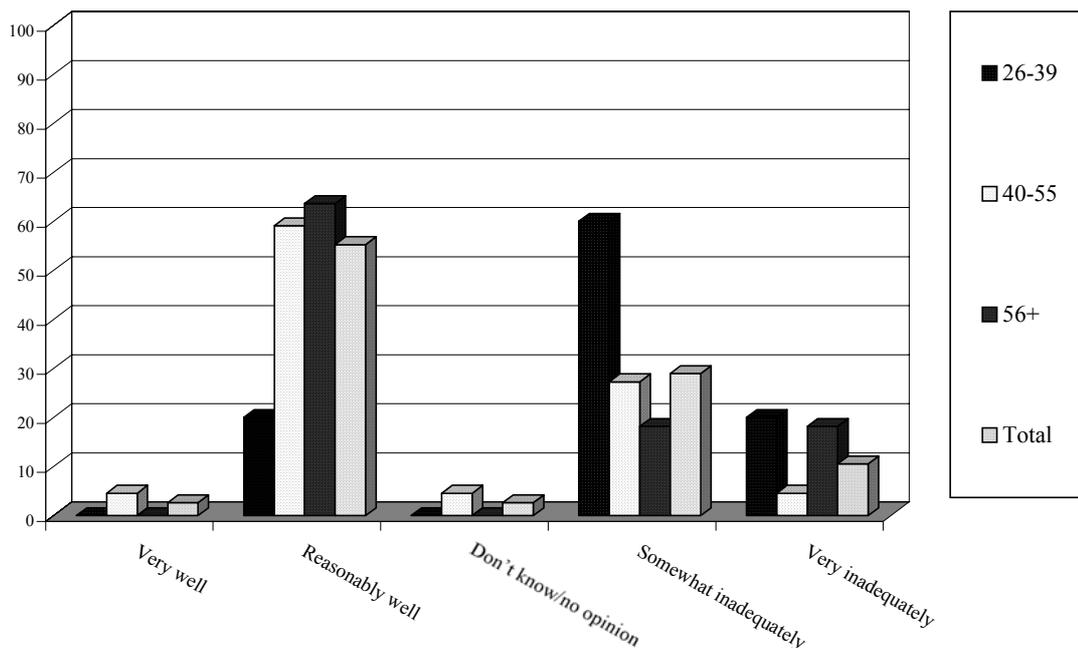
5: NORTH-SOUTH DIFFERENCE

One of the most striking issues raised in the research is the question of North-South difference (i.e. between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland). As one of the few Anglican Provinces that straddles such a contentious national border, the church is in an extraordinary position, and it is useful to note the contrasts between northern and southern respondents.

Lay People
Handling North-South difference
Fig. 37



Interviewed Rectors
Handling North-South difference
Fig. 38



Charts show that 53% of clergy, and 40% of lay people felt that the differences were well handled, which means that a significant proportion see room for improvement (see **Figs. 37, 38**).

It is striking that the substantial majority of lay people in the Republic associate sectarianism exclusively with Northern Ireland, as exemplified in the following quotations from a Focus Group report:

As the focus group progressed it became clear that there was complete dissociation of the focus group members with any part of sectarianism. It was also clear that they equate sectarianism with Northern Ireland. Consequently, as the process of the questionnaire continued and the questions became more explicitly focused on attitudes to sectarianism, the group became more critical of the North. This criticism was generic to Northern Ireland rather than to the Church of Ireland in the North. The criticism became increasingly angry although it was couched in tones of good-humoured bon-homie. There was [no acknowledgement] of any complicity in sectarian attitudes or behaviour and no recognition of the [potentially] sectarian nature of their own remarks and observations as the questionnaire progressed.
Focus Group report, Dublin and Glendalough

I couldn't live in the north because of the bigotry. **Lay person, Dublin and Glendalough**

My impression would be that the Church of Ireland in the north is largely captive to its Protestant Unionist population and really does not take a stand against sectarianism. Drumcree has fizzled out rather than been solved and a lack of clarity and courage has done the church enormous damage.
Rector, Dublin and Glendalough

Some would suggest that we are too far south to be of interest [to this study]. **Rector, Cork, Cloyne and Ross**

The peace and reconciliation questions are only appropriate for the North. **Lay person, unknown diocese**

People from Northern Ireland have much more to learn from the Church of Ireland in the South than vice versa. **Lay person, Tuam, Killala, and Achonry**

This does not, however, mean that respondents from the Republic believe themselves to be 'without sin', for instance:

If you think the word 'sectarianism' is a Northern thing, what are the issues that you think this committee can deal with in your context? If the Protestant/Catholic difference thing is the big one, what are [the others]?

I would have thought racism, discrimination against minorities such as asylum seekers, refugees, the homeless...**Lay person, Dublin and Glendalough**

We do not have the troubles like they do and they think that C of I people in the south have a cosy existence...they forget the fact that we are numerically smaller. **Lay person, Armagh**

We have visitors who would come from the North for holidays, so we would certainly be reasonably...supportive of the differences. But...those people who come on holiday, they come to church and then they go. So there's never any in-depth understanding. **Rector, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

So are you embarrassed by Drumcree, or is it other things?

Yes – it would be Drumcree, it would be the Orange Order, it would be the ongoing troubles of the North. We're embarrassed, but we're empathetic as well. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

I think the most striking difference is the...political one...The really painful ones are the political ones, and no doubt members of the Church of Ireland almost entirely in the Republic of Ireland are now identified with the State...that doesn't mean for one moment that they're anti-British...I think our people are certainly not like that, but they're very identified with the State here. And then of course we look across the border and we see that the vast majority of our people are utterly British, and feel a very

strong British identity, and they're often confused as to how they can cope with also having some kind of Irish identity and how to express that...And then that is a problem, and the differences around that are very marked. And it has the potential to pull us apart, particularly because of the undercurrents in Northern Ireland, and the history of violence. And the Protestant community...I know well, feeling alienated and hurt, and wounded, and above all afraid. I firmly believe [that most] sectarianism is based on fear. And they are afraid. And they haven't been reassured about being bombed and shot at for donkeys years now, so I think that's very deep in Northern Ireland, and that's the biggest division in the Church of Ireland. I hope that division won't lead to a greater gulf between the two parts of the Church of Ireland. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

Nor does it mean that all northerners feel alienated from the Church in the Republic:

In terms of North/South differences, there were none recognised. **Focus Group report, Connor**

However, some respondents do feel misunderstood by the Church in the Republic:

The south doesn't really understand what's going on in the north. **Lay person, Connor**

If you closed your eyes at General Synod you'd think you were listening to republicans. For example in [dioceses in the Republic] they don't want any flags in churches, but they have no experience of the issues. The church is silent about [this]. **Lay person, Armagh**

Some respondents felt that being from the West of Ireland meant they were more isolated than any other part of the Church of Ireland:

The differences are East/West; while there was no animosity, it was suggested that the Church of Ireland concentrates on North-South and rarely if ever consults the west; they get all their information from *The Gazette*. Respondents felt that 'the people and issues of the West of Ireland tend to be airbrushed out of existence simply because no one takes the time and/or effort to ask...them'...The reality of sectarianism was in no way denied but that it was not an issue at all in the awareness of these [respondents]. **Focus Group report, Tuam, Killala and Achonry**

There is a small, but substantial minority of Northern clergy and lay people who feel aggrieved by the 2002 General Synod's decision not to discuss the question of North-South representation, some of whom contend that it is 'easy for difficult decisions to be taken by people for whom they will have no effect in practice'. It was apparent during the research that the rationale for not employing equal proportionality as the method for deciding General Synod representation is not widely understood. As for North-South representation on the General Synod, and north-south difference in general:

I think that the Synod is very generous in allowing over-representation to the dioceses in the South, and I appreciate that. I also regard it as perhaps being an advantage, in the sense that it helps to maintain a reasonably moderate ethos within the Synod, and also it's probably fair to say that the level of church commitment is higher in the Republic than it is in the North. **Rector, Limerick and Killaloe**

I think...the...political situation in the last thirty years in the North of Ireland has meant that the Church of Ireland north of the border has almost of necessity had to take a particular position, and I'm certainly not convinced that the position it was forced into as a result of the Troubles is where the Church of Ireland should be. I think that the Church of Ireland south of the border, and the direction it's taking, is where the Church of Ireland should be going in terms of its relationships with...the Roman Catholic Church...Neither do I think it's helpful to have members of the Church of Ireland clergy involved in what is a sectarian organisation...the Orange Order.

So do you want to say the church isn't split yet but it might be in the future...?

I think there are dangers there, because if you have a situation where certainly the future ordinands are coming out of the divided situation within Northern Ireland, and the ethos...which they bring with them, is not only an evangelical ethos, which I have no problem with, but if it's sectarian it intrudes. If it takes the Orange Order view of Roman Catholicism, and that gets somehow built in to the Church of Ireland, then there's grave dangers in that. **Rector, Armagh**

On the surface we are one church, and I appreciate that, and value that, that we are one church across the land. But I think when one analyses a little more deeply, one is conscious of a division there. **Rector, Armagh**

The General Synod, RB and Standing Committee need to address urgently the inner sectarianism of lack of proportionate representation for the North of the church vs the South and the implicit distrust of the North by the South. **Rector, Connor**

Well that's what I said to you, that it's very easy for us in the South to solve the problems of the North, because we're not here. And I really think that we should stand back and shut up. **Curate, Armagh**

I think there is certainly a lack of awareness on the part of people locally of...being blinkered, and saying, well this is happening in the North, it doesn't happen in the South. There are [in fact] some fairly strong disagreements and discussions about Republicanism/Unionism [in the Republic]. **Rector, Meath and Kildare**

It is in this context Southern members can play a particularly significant role. In the south the image of the church is also so much more ecumenical than in (certainly parts of) the North. Where inter-church marriage, communion, education, health care etc. are concerned this (RC sectarianism) could be highlighted to a greater degree and towards the benefit of all in the development of a truly tolerant, pluralist society. Certainly the image of the church in the South is positive at the moment. For many it has become 'the acceptable face of Christianity'...This is not the case in the North, and it is the relationship of some members with the Orange Order which is most fundamental to that. **Patsy McGarry, Irish Times**

There are two different emphases – north and south – of what the Church of Ireland sees itself to be; there are urban rural differences, age differences, and [sometimes] suspicion between the two. **Bishop**

C of I is unique in that its Synod is the only place where you have people drawn from both unionist and nationalist perspectives debating and subsequently agreeing with each other on certain issues. **Lay person, Armagh**

Are there two Churches of Ireland?

There are...You've got four churches...there is an evangelical/liberal split within the Church of Ireland...There is a North/South split. A lot of those parishes would have more affinity with the politics, cultural expression and churchmanship of Northern parishes than they would with their Southern neighbours. But yes, there most certainly is that split there. And it's handled appallingly. **Rector, Clogher**

Well in a sense there are [two Churches of Ireland]. It wouldn't be my wish that it should be so...The interesting thing is that...the Church of Ireland in the Republic turns itself inside out to prove how Catholic we are, and the Church of Ireland in the North turns itself inside out to show how Protestant they are. I mean that's not an original quotation, but I think it is very true. **Rector, Limerick and Killaloe**

It seems to me that there is a sense in which people want to get rid of the eyesore so that it doesn't look like the Church of Ireland is sectarian any more...I mean when you talk about a split North-South, it's a potential split in terms of disowning an unpleasantness. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

At the General Synod a couple of weeks ago, the issue of North/South representation was raised, and the Synod declined to discuss the issue in any depth. Do you think that that was the right way to proceed?

Well my personal reaction to that was to accept the Synod's verdict, on the basis that they'd had...four or five years discussing Synodical structures. They had a three-year working project that went into the whole business in very fine detail...and decisions were taken on that basis by the full Synod...

In spite of the fact that those discussions had happened, do you think that it masks sectarianism within the Church of Ireland?

No. I take the view that the present structure as we have it at the moment and the representation is a genuine attempt to represent the whole Church of Ireland throughout the island. It's part of our character. It's not easy to define, and it's not just about numbers. **Former rector, Connor**

The North-South link is a potential source of creativity rather than an actualised one. **Anonymous respondent**

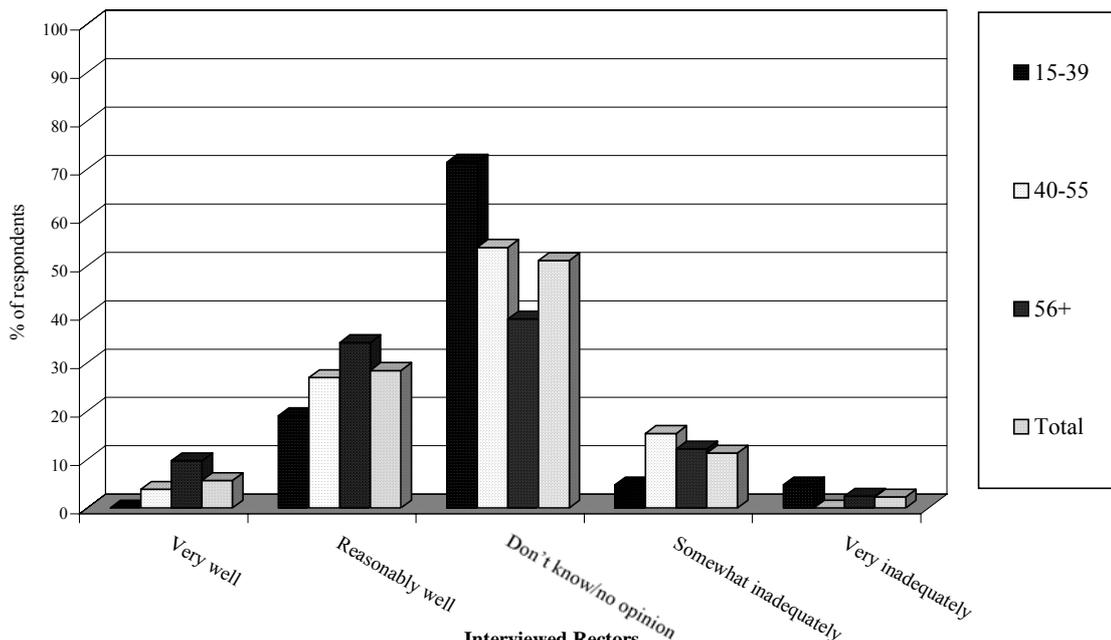
NORTH-SOUTH DIFFERENCE

- *There are both obvious and subtle differences between the parts of the Church of Ireland based in Northern Ireland and the Republic.*
- *Most (but not all) respondents in the Republic believe that sectarianism is a northern issue. This is reinforced by the widespread perception of the Drumcree controversy as the epitome of sectarianism.*
- *Some northern respondents feel insecure and potentially threatened by the disproportionate southern representation on General Synod. Many respondents, both north and south, appreciate the diversity such representation brings.*
- *Respondents from the West of Ireland sometimes feel isolated from the rest of the church.*

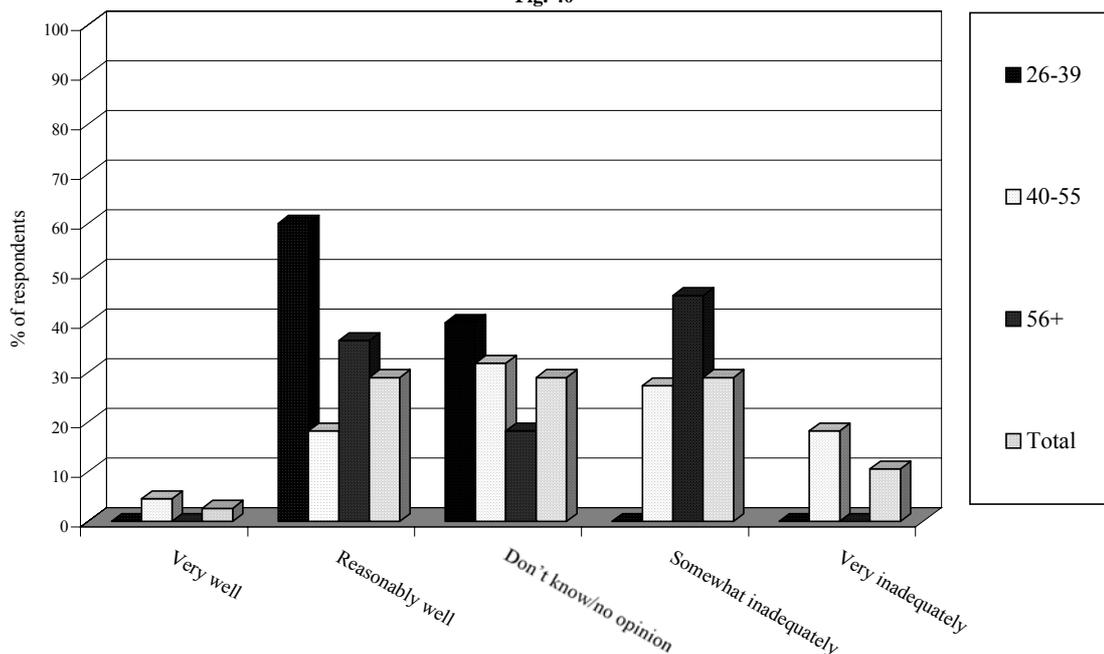
6: ETHNIC DIFFERENCE AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Republic of Ireland is now one of the leading destinations for economic migrants. Northern Ireland is beginning to show similar patterns of immigration, and, sadly, racially motivated attacks or xenophobia appear (from anecdotal evidence) to be on the rise. It is important to distinguish between the local ethnic minority population and asylum seekers, as these two types of people appear to be conflated in some people's minds, as the following findings illustrate:

**Lay People
Handling Ethnic difference
Fig. 39**

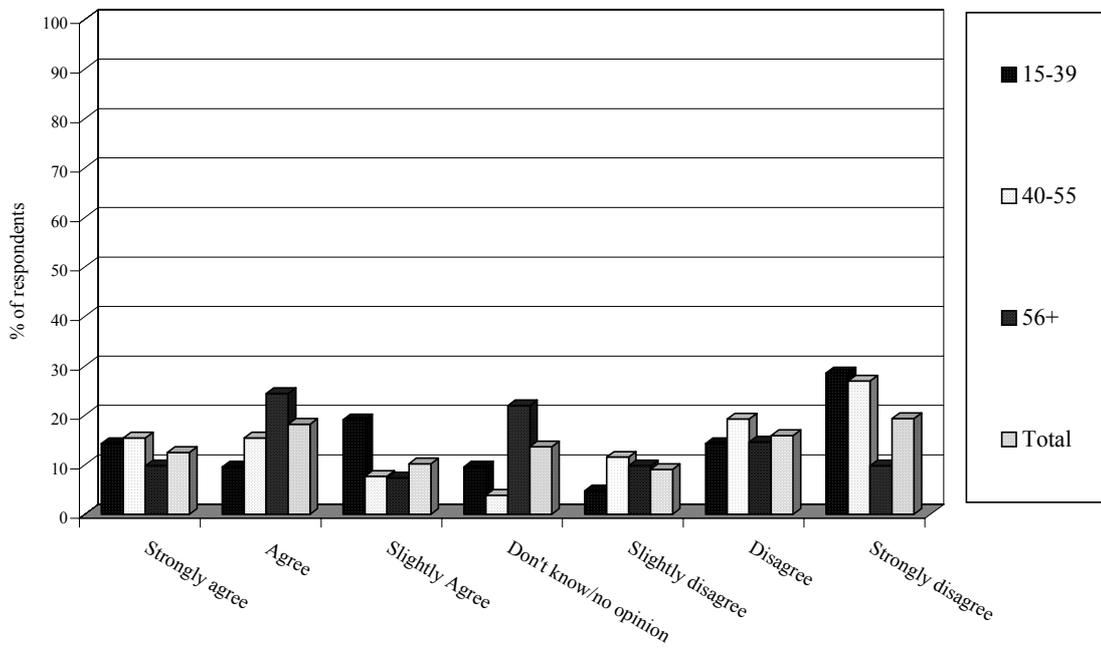


**Interviewed Rectors
Handling Ethnic difference
Fig. 40**

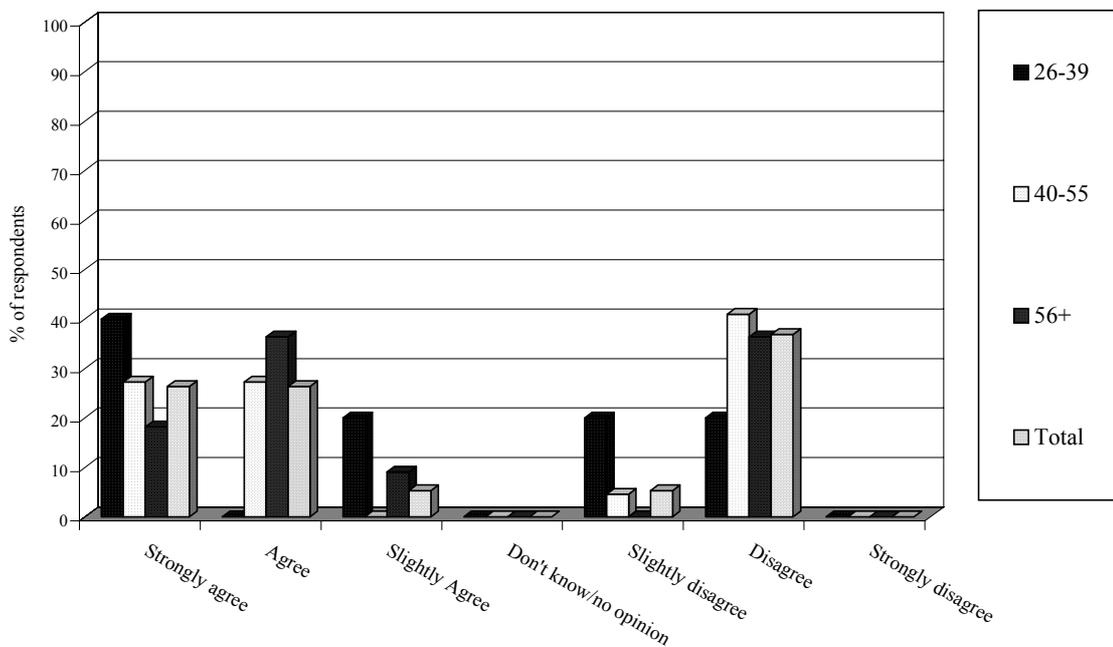


NB: An 'agreement scale' was used for the following, and later similar charts instead of simple 'yes/no' options because a prescriptive answer was not appropriate for all respondents. Levels of relationship are often a 'grey area' and not best suited to yes/no answers.

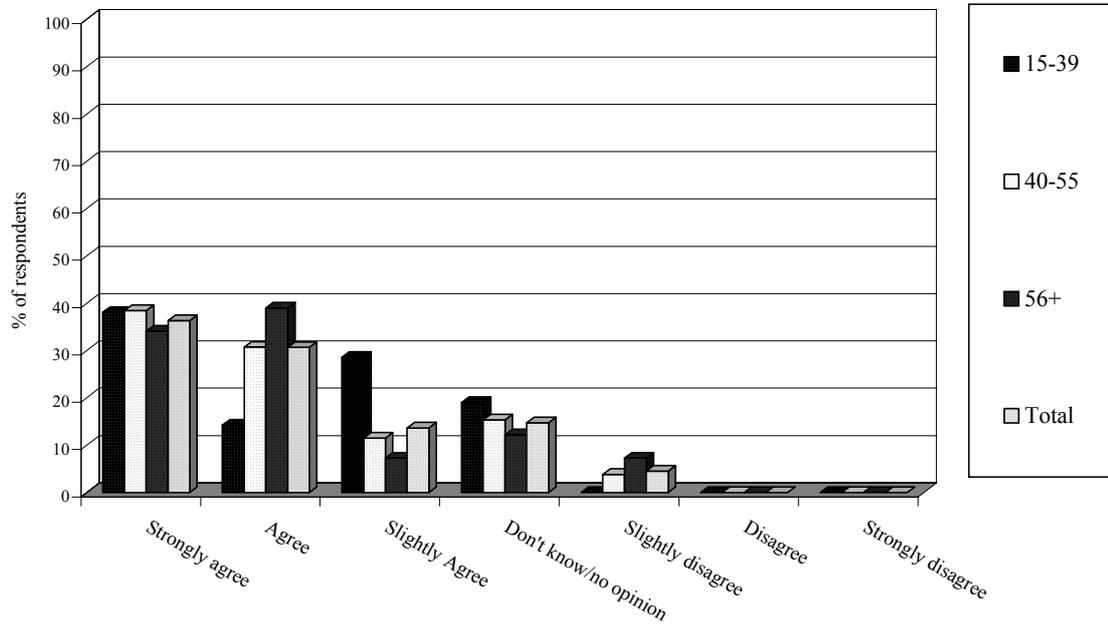
Lay People
I have at least one friendship with a member of an ethnic minority
Fig. 41



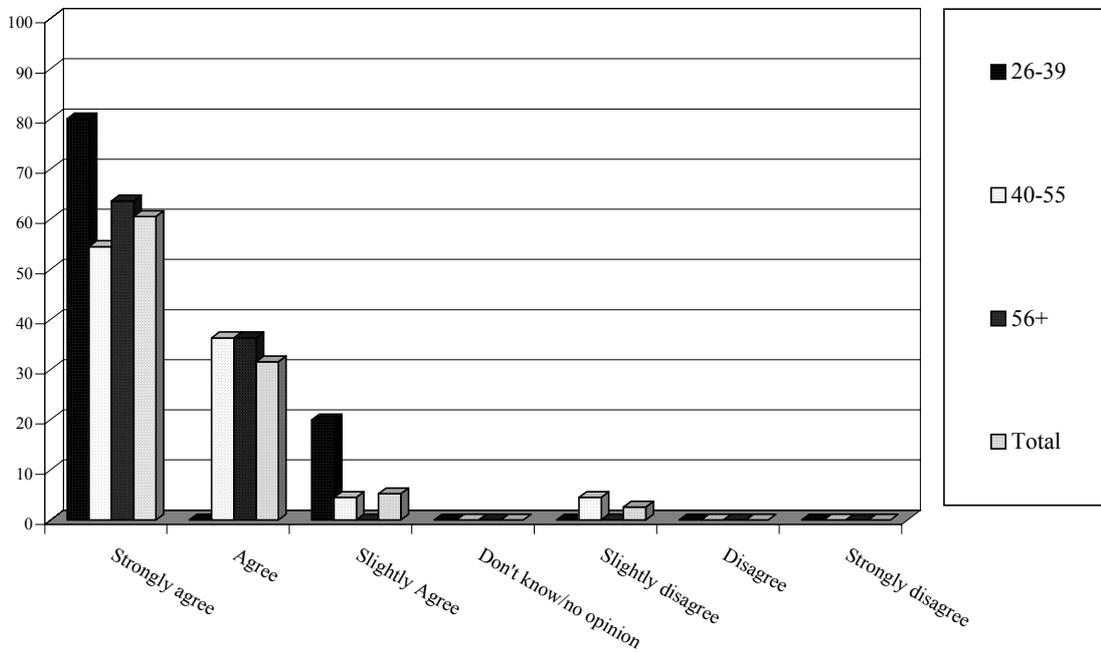
Interviewed Rectors
I have at least one friendship with a member of an ethnic minority
Fig. 42



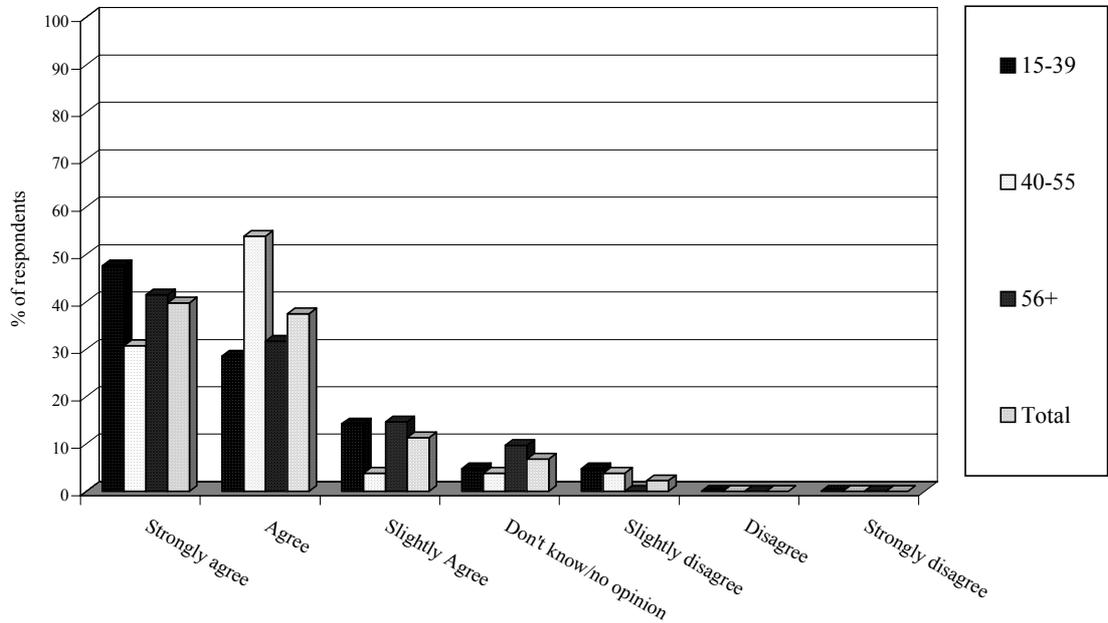
Lay People
The Church of Ireland should help its members to relate positively to ethnic minorities
Fig. 43



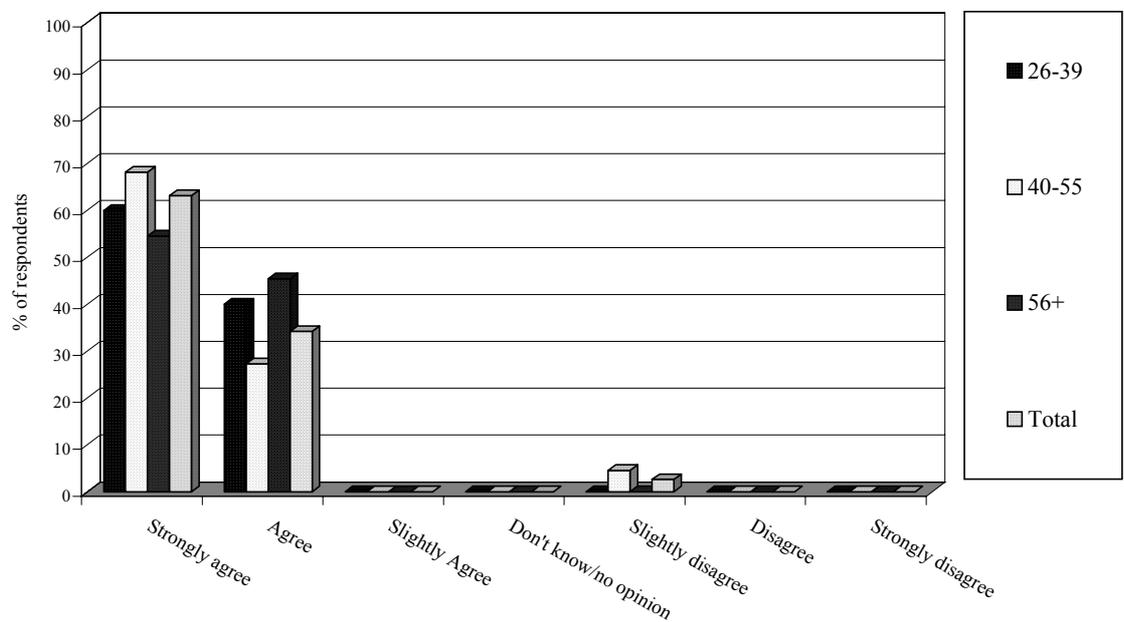
Interviewed Rectors
The Church of Ireland should help its members to relate positively to ethnic minorities
Fig. 44



Lay People
The Church of Ireland should take steps to ensure that it is welcoming to members of ethnic minorities
Fig. 45



Interviewed Rectors
The Church of Ireland should take steps to ensure that it is welcoming to members of ethnic minorities
Fig. 46



Rectors were asked how they felt ethnic differences are handled in the Church of Ireland. Responses were evenly split between well/don't know/inadequate; while 50% of lay people said they had no experience of the issue. Over 60% of rectors felt that the needs of ethnic minorities were inadequately attended to by the church, while only 22% of lay people felt these needs were well attended to (see **Figs. 39-46**). 40% of lay people, and 55% of clergy respondents said they had at least one friendship with a member of an ethnic minority. This is itself reflective of the challenge to ethnic integration faced in Ireland today. It is also noteworthy that respondents did not automatically consider the Irish travelling community to be an ethnic minority, but once this was mentioned, often made useful comments. Examples of relevant experience are noted below:

[This town] has 2000 asylum seekers and a total population of 30000. There has been a special effort to help children integrate into the school, extra English tuition etc. Nigerians have a different attitude to education than Romanians/Croatians, and so each are viewed differently by the general populace.
Layperson, Armagh

Some respondents expressed good will toward ethnic minorities and asylum seekers:

We don't question people's motives for being in this country. Obviously there are people within the parish with differing views as to whether they should or shouldn't be here, but from a parochial point of view we deal with them on the basis that they are here, that some of them are in need of help, and if we can provide it we will. **Rector, Armagh**

The Archbishop of Dublin has spoken out about the way in which minorities have been treated – I think we have a bounden duty to do that if we're true to Christ. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

We went out often enough as missionaries, all the Christian churches, and now we're reaping the fruit of our labours, so you can't very well turn around and say, 'Yeah of course we want to support the black babies, and of course we want to turn you into Christians, but we didn't want you to come over here. You can't do that.' As you sow, so shall you reap...I think dealing with an ethnic difference is an Irish problem, not exclusively an Anglican problem. And Irish people are inherently racist, especially those who have never lived outside the country.

So you think on the whole it's dealt with reasonably well?

Yes I would, because we've always had a tradition of African missionaries coming home and people – there's a greater sort of hodgepodge with it being an Anglican world community as opposed to it just being a national church. **Rector, Cashel and Ossory**

I think as far as our hierarchy is concerned – well talking about Archbishop Eames, and what he's trying to do for the refugees, I think that is – he's bang on. I think we're probably not doing enough. He is doing *something*, and sometimes you get a bishop speaking about it, but I think we're not doing enough, simply because we've never been really exposed to this problem. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

Some respondents have developed strategies to approach the issue:

Where that sits with mission, now, I'm not convinced. But certainly if the travelling community wanted a child baptised I would certainly go a long way to try and see that that would happen, and happen without ruining the integrity of the church.

Why would it ruin the integrity of the church?

That it just wouldn't breeze in and breeze out, you know...

You'd do it for anyone?

I'd do it for anyone, if they want the child's head wet they can take it out in the rain, but if they want Christian baptism I'll talk to them about Christian baptism. **Rector, Connor**

We've made a real effort to reach out to people of different ethnicity, and the churches have held collaborative welcoming parties (C of I and RC). Also on a joint basis, the local clergy do house visitations around the new housing estates giving information about church and community. **Lay person, Dublin and Glendalough**

They're not held at arms length.

Absolutely not. We here in this parish have had quite an influx of non-nationals, and at all levels of growth if you like – not only have they been accepted, but we have a sort of – I don't know what you call it – 'mentor' kind of system, where a particular Irish family would have taken a particular incoming family under their wing, and would have helped them in relation to housing, or rent, or whatever it was.

Rector, Armagh

And others emphasised the challenges of ministry (and need for fresh training/resources) in an ethnically diverse society:

I've met some Indian people who now live in Northern Ireland, and they would have said they felt very unwelcome in Church of Ireland churches. The Church that welcomed them mostly was the Methodist Church. I think too, our church is so dependent on the book that anybody with a language barrier there is going to find it hard to follow the worship, because everything has to be read. **Rector, Connor**

Racism is the broader scope of sectarianism and is something to be attended to urgently. **Bishop**

Do you have any reflections on how the church should approach the issue of ethnic minorities?

I think that if the church is going to be truly Christian, in terms of what Christ taught and the example he gave, then I think the church has got to be willing to open not just its doors, but also its fellowship and its friendship, to not just ethnic minorities but also to others who are classed as minority, or disadvantaged, or excluded from some quarters of society. **Rector, Meath and Kildare**

[Two] Nigerian families turned up two Sundays on their own, neither of whom – neither family had been spoken to or asked even – and I've been to visit them both because they were new, but they weren't complaining. They expected it because it's what they'd met elsewhere. Irish people are incredibly hospitable and very welcoming, but...I don't think people coming from abroad are not fitting in very well and easily yet. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

We ran a thing lately for all the ethnic people, or people who had come recently to Ireland, and very few people turned up, and it was for the whole united diocese. Certain people would be interested, but I mean if you ask someone within the parish to share the sign of peace during a service, they have all sorts of hang-ups about that. Touching someone else. The fact that it's a Roman Catholic tradition. If they can't shake one another's hands in a parish church, how are they going to reach [out to others]? **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

Do you feel equipped to deal with that?

No, because where I'm from I would deal with the Northern context. The traveller stuff is new to me, because I never really met a traveller personally until I came into the South, so there's a lot of it I don't understand. **Rector, Tuam, Killala, and Achonry**

In order to fully attend to the needs of or encourage the potential of asylum seekers, there needs to be a considerable degree of community education initiated and sustained throughout society in general (including the Church). When children are simply put straight into school, there is a range of issues, which can arise which in turn militate against acceptance and integration within the wider body politic. For example, in a number of cases the children of asylum seekers have not had the same advantage of immunisation programmes as indigenous children. Consequently, if an outbreak of measles or tuberculosis occurs, it is blamed on these children and they, along with their families, are ostracised by the wider community and the children experience difficulties in school which are totally unrelated to their academic progress/ability. A number of instances have already arisen where community action groups have been formed which have a negative bias towards asylum seekers. **Layperson, Down and Dromore**

[In this area] white newcomers would be accepted, but it's a different situation vis a vis asylum seekers. **Lay person, Armagh**

One parish welcomed travellers to use parish grounds but there was a lot of theft so parishioners told the rector not to allow them to stay again...They suss out houses and come back later during funerals or after accidents to thieve. I think they're a curse! **Lay person, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

There was a little bit of discussion amongst the focus group members as to why immigrants to the area were going to other denominational churches in preference to their own: - "Are they more welcoming than we are? There are more hostels in [another town] and none in [our town]...thank God!" **Focus Group report, Cashel and Ossory**

In terms of the membership of the church, if ten travelling people arrived and wanted to join the church, would it cause problems?

Well I would say probably that people would...either move, and certainly move from their seats, they might even say, 'Look, we've been sitting here before, therefore you shouldn't be sitting there, you've no business...' but I suppose it depends again on the condition of – whether they're – if they're clean, tidy, neat, that sort of thing it might not be a problem...I mean if people come to the church, then obviously you make them welcome in the church, make them welcome in the service...But then I think people are generally afraid that if they do get involved, that's their commitment. So again how much do I get involved in helping people that come over here – if we give them money at the end of the Sunday collection, we know what's going to happen next Sunday. They're going to be back again. Other people are going to be back again, and is that the right thing to do? The only thing that possibly could be done is – I don't like giving out money, but if there was say something in the church that after Sunday service we had a soup kitchen, we had sandwiches or something like that, to which they could come and join in, but the problem really is that our schedules don't permit us to be involved in that. On Sunday you have three services, your last finishes at one o'clock. By the time you're finished all you want to do is go home. **Rector, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

It is also the case in places that the church feels pressured from both the ethnic minority community to provide help, and also the 'native' community to hold the minority at arm's length:

Well I mean we have – I certainly as a leader of the local community, and clergy again, would be very much aware of how these people are stuck in the middle of nowhere, and how we should reach out and try to make them feel welcome, and try to help them in any way that we can, through all the churches in the town. And there are some dreadful crooks and chancers amongst them. But then there are also crooks and chancers in the wider community. But we've had appeals for assistance for them, providing them with record players and that kind of thing, and it's been quite a good response. But somehow I feel that the wider community by and large is not entirely with us in that regard. You hear a lot of people talking about these people, that they're living off Irish society and so on, and so forth, but they would be a bit reluctant to say that to the clergy. **Rector, Limerick and Killaloe**

A clergy respondent offered the following critique of church policy:

Do you have any other thoughts on the issue of ethnic minorities?

Not greatly, because I suppose I've never actually faced the issue at all. The other concern I would have about all this is that again, the church's public contribution to the whole debate about asylum and immigration is too easily – it becomes the voice of the political left, and it does not necessarily follow that being a Christian is equivalent to having a view on asylum laws equivalent to *The Guardian*. **Rector, Clogher**

But for most respondents, the issue has not arisen:

We have little exposure to ethnic communities. Most of the travelling community come from the RC tradition. **Lay person, Limerick and Killaloe**

Ethnic issues are for the cities. Here we are just busy in our own little world. **Lay person, Armagh**

We have very little experience of asylum seekers here. **Lay person, Tuam, Killala, and Achonry**

The SEP should be encouraged that respondents asserted, on the whole, that the Church of Ireland should seek to better address these issues, through helping its members to relate positively to ethnic minorities and taking steps to ensure that it is welcoming (including such things as offering bilingual literature and translation). Several respondents praised the public position adopted by such figures as former Archbishop Emev, and encouraged the development of a practical strategy for parishes with a significant ethnic minority/asylum seeker population. Any such strategy should stress that ethnic minorities and asylum seekers are human beings, not 'an issue' to be categorised.

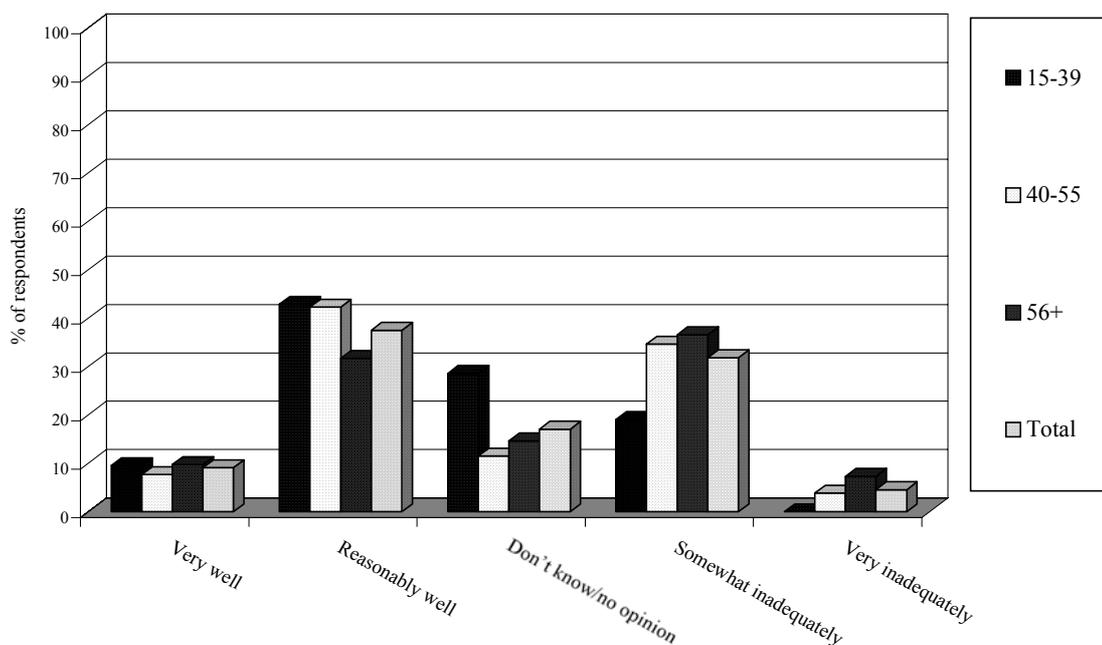
ETHNIC DIFFERENCE AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

- *This is a relatively new issue for the Church of Ireland.*
- *Although some good practice exists, most respondents have little or no experience in the area.*
- *Many respondents supported public leadership on this issue, particularly from Archbishops Eames and Emev.*
- *Clergy do not, on the whole, feel resourced to respond to the issue.*
- *There is mostly good will toward perceived church policy on ethnic minorities and asylum seekers, although more conservative attitudes prevail among a minority of respondents.*
- *Respondents did not automatically consider the travelling community to be an ethnic minority.*
- *Ethnic minorities and asylum seekers are often seen as 'two sides of the same coin', or confused with each other by respondents.*
- *The language barrier must be taken into account in addressing the needs of ethnic minorities.*

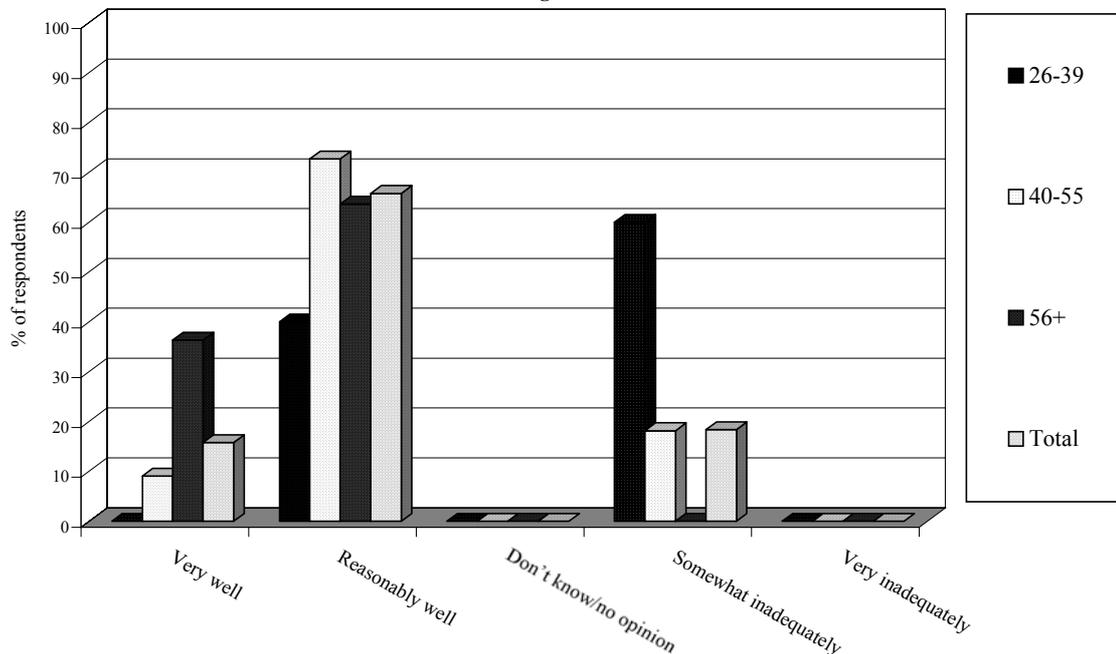
7: POLITICAL DIFFERENCE

People in Northern Ireland and the Republic are probably more highly politicised than most other Western populations. And there are obvious differences between the two jurisdictions. The church in the North has been caricatured as the 'Unionist Party at prayer', and there may be some (not necessarily pejorative) truth to this assertion, due to the complexities of political allegiance in Northern Ireland (although some have alleged that the northern church in recent years has looked more like an 'inoffensive' centre ground party). The church in the Republic is more politically diverse. There is apparently little political *conflict* in the church, but this may be due more to the fact that people are less open about their politics in church than elsewhere. 43% of lay respondents and 78% of interviewed rectors felt that political differences were well handled in the church (Figs. 47, 48).

Lay People
Handling political differences
Fig. 47



Interviewed Rectors
Handling political differences
Fig. 48



These are interesting statistics, for they imply significant disagreement between clergy and the lay people interviewed for this research. It is probably the case that the statistics reflect the fact that lay respondents were skewed toward politically interested people, who may have reason to feel that political differences are not well handled, while most lay people do not explicitly bring their politics into church. The question of the church's political identity (and its role in influencing politics and holding politics to account) is of huge importance to its ministry in the future – as is its relationship with the Orange Order. Put simply, the churches in Ireland must take seriously the sociological truism that people outside the Church are antipathetic toward *party-politicised* Christianity, although not toward socially engaged discipleship. In other words, the general public are easily alienated by the appearance of political posturing on the part of spiritual leadership, but are often attracted by non-party social engagement, such as in the form of the multi-agency 'Drop the Debt' campaign. This is the reason why the Church of Ireland must endeavour to articulate a vision for bridge building that avoids the perception of being either party-political on one hand, or too generalised to achieve anything credible on the other. These are difficult issues with which to grapple; and a nuanced response from all sides is required if the challenges of ministry in a pluralist society are to be met. However, it remains the task of the church to be socially and politically engaged without countenancing sectarianism or party politics. It will take theologians as well as sociologists to respond adequately to this issue! The SEP is well placed to advise the government of the church in this regard.

Some respondents commented on the level of politicisation within the church, and whether or not people of different political persuasions or allegiances would feel comfortable there:

A nationalist...would maybe be at home in the Church of Ireland in the South, but not so much in the North. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

So if I was an SDLP voter and joined the parish, would I need to keep my head down?

Well probably you would need to keep your head down as much as anybody else in the parish keeps their head down.

So then the question is, is that handling political differences very well or very inadequately, to not talk about them? And I don't know the answer to that.

Neither do I, because it's not an issue. Why make it an issue if it's not an issue? People's political views are their business. I'm not going to drag that potential conflict into church. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

Is God on the side of any of the political parties? Cannot a Christian who loves his neighbour be either pro- or anti-Agreement in a valid sense? The Church of Ireland needs to avoid [taking] sides in the debate. **Anonymous respondent**

In a former parish I could have had difficulty with certain members. We could have had problems there because I didn't see eye-to-eye with them, nor they with me. So depending I think on the area you're in, if there has been political tension, I think a minister's on the sticky wicket. **Rector, Connor**

Some welcomed what they saw as the political diversity in their own parish:

Your question initially was 'are there political differences within your parish,' and I would say yes. I hope that's a healthy thing if there are political differences.

And are they handled well?

I'm not conscious of any antagonism.

Are they differences [within] unionism, or are they unionist and nationalist in your parish?

To be honest I don't know. I don't think it's my business, as long as they try to live the Christian life and are not hurting or killing one another. I think a person's political beliefs are really essentially a private matter. **Rector, Armagh**

Some respondents commented on the contentious political situation faced locally by some parishes, as the following comments illustrate:

There are [loyalist] murals on the walls on either side of the church yet the church 'ignores' them. The murals are tacitly accepted as part of the surrounding community's identity...There is no way the murals will be removed otherwise they fear that the church would at best be boycotted by the community and at worst attacked. The church liases and negotiates with local community leadership around specific issues, such as the placement of "boni-wood" (bonfire wood for the 11th July) away from the gable wall of the church...As the church witnesses in this area the murals are accepted even though Christians are not happy with them [and] rather everyone turns a blind-eye to them, for instance:

'We live and let live.'

'The minister has to be sensitive in preaching at all times.'

'If someone from a Nationalist perspective were to preach then Orangemen and others would boycott the church. There would be a fear that the church would be torched.' **Focus Group report, Connor**

I would find it useful if the C of I had a policy or guidelines with regard to the use of parish halls for political parties' constituency organisations. **Rector, Connor**

Is there political conflict within the church?

To be honest I think no. When things get tense, then you know about it, because being Church of Ireland, being North – I would say 99.99% of my congregation would lean towards the Unionist Party. So no.

Do nationalists have to change culturally to feel part of the Church of Ireland?

Yes. But not a wild lot. [This] is a funny place, in that our primary school [here] is a...real [melting] pot. The board of governors is similar. And we get on very well there, but I think at the moment – talking about now, the feeling that I [detect in my] congregation is that we as Protestants are being sold down the river...You've got Drumcree on Sunday, you've the twelfth coming up and they're...sitting there waiting to see what's going to happen, and...thinking, 'We're now hard done by.' And if violence works for one side...so you've got that sort of tension. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

A minority of respondents felt that politics and religion should be kept apart:

Should the church be used to raise these issues? I think it should be done at community level. However it's difficult here to do anything without things becoming contentious or without one church taking charge. **Lay person, Armagh**

From the pulpit you're not really there to make politics your whole ministry; you're meant to preach the Gospel. **Lay person, Dromore**

And North-South differences were raised in this context too:

[These issues are] better handled in the south than the north. **Lay person, Armagh**

In the Republic people's political differences aren't that marked.

They're not that marked, and wouldn't be a source...of antagonism, or anger, or conflict, whereas political labels and political differences in Northern Ireland...mean something else – they're much more painful, much deeper. As to how we handle them in the church, I've always been pleased at least when we meet at General Synod...that despite the fact that we have people coming with diverse political views, we've held them together...We would be hugely weakened if we were to suddenly say, 'We want to cut ourselves off either way across the border. Because they're so different, we can't live together.' I'd *hate* that to happen, and we have to make sure it doesn't happen. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

I think...the six northern bishops...signed a public statement supporting the Good Friday Agreement. Now I voted 'yes'...but 40% of unionists didn't vote 'yes', and aren't given a voice within the Church of Ireland structurally...The Church of Ireland has not begun to...gauge unionist opinion at all. It was my experience in theological college, there was a group of...three of us who were fairly convinced unionists, and in any political debate you were excluded, and it's been like that each step along the way...I have not met any senior church officers, bishops, archdeacons, who I've come away from thinking they understand what makes the average unionist tick. **Rector, Clogher**

Flags and emblems were mentioned by a small number of respondents:

Flags in churches are fine if they have historical value – e.g. Second World War regiments. You should honour the flag of the country you are in, but why should it fly from a church? A flag means much more than it did – now it's political. It has lost its original meaning and it's now just used to rub the nose of the other community. **Focus Group report, Derry and Raphoe**

I like to see [flags] treated with respect. I prefer not to see it used in church circumstances. I'm not so sure even that youth organisations should be encouraged to carry flags of any sort...When the Synod asked that no flags be flown from Church of Ireland churches I reported the decisions of the Synod here. Now, they fly a flag in the church spire for a fortnight in July [here]. I have made my views clear on it, but it's still flying. I don't go up and remove it, and don't think I ever would. I'd rather get the people who put it up to see there's no need to have it flying from the church. **Rector, Armagh**

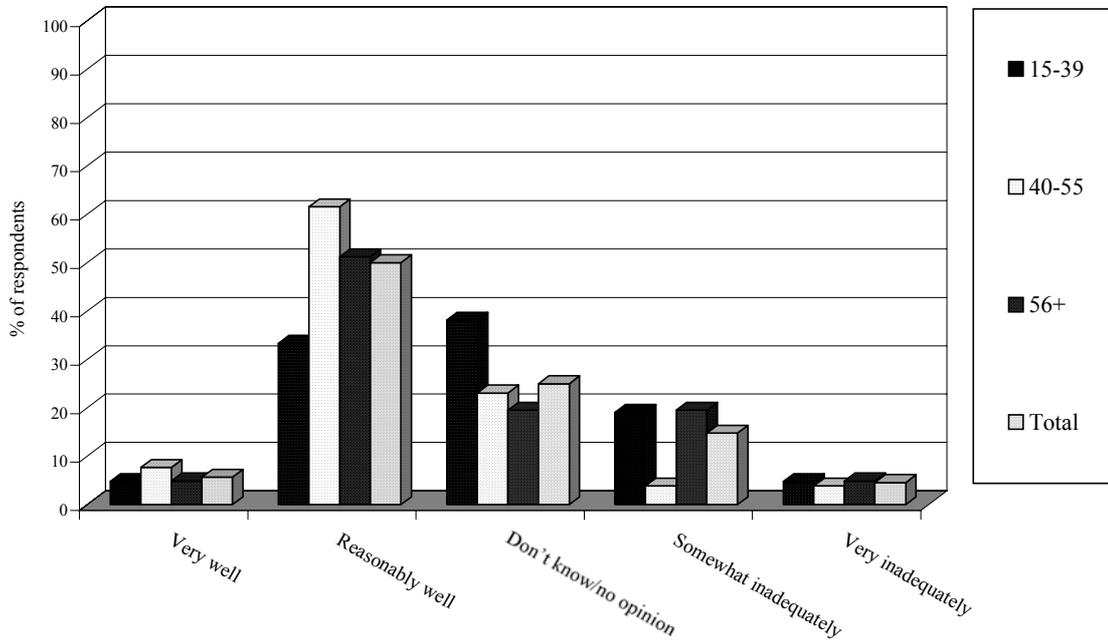
I do not want people to be distracted by symbols that are not gospel-related...It has been difficult [to address this], but has led people to reflect on 'What is a church for?' **Bishop**

POLITICAL DIFFERENCE

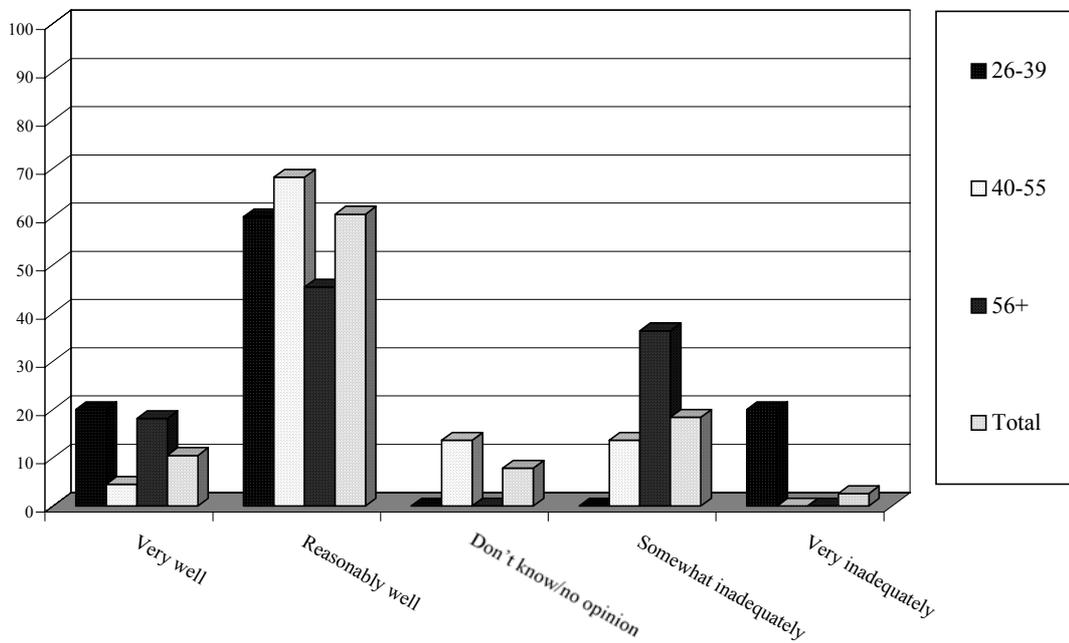
- *Although the Church of Ireland holds within it people of diverse political views, political diversity is often ignored or inadequately handled.*
- *People may also struggle to find common understanding across class differences.*
- *There is only minority objection to the church addressing political issues.*
- *It is widely perceived that there is an identification between the northern church and the unionist world view. Some respondents see this as unhealthy or unhelpful.*
- *Some members of the Church of Ireland who are conservative unionists may feel that the church undervalues them or does not recognise their integrity.*
- *Some parishes face particularly contentious political issues in everyday ministry, or at certain times of year, and may need further support from the wider church*
- *The proper use of flags and emblems is an issue about which there are diverse views.*

8: THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

Lay People
Handling Theological differences
Fig. 49



Interviewed Rectors
Handling Theological differences
Fig. 50



Theological difference within the Church of Ireland is apparently not often raised at parish level, which some people may feel is a positive thing. As **Figs. 49, 50** show, a majority of respondents felt these differences were handled well (although 22% of lay respondents indicated 'don't know/no opinion'). But the lack of conspicuous controversy or even measured debate is not necessarily a mark of health. Lay people are often not equipped by the church to engage in theological discussion or to examine the import of theology for their own lives; it is left to those lay people for whom amateur theology is a hobby to be a 'thorn in the side' of their rector or Vestry. But the recent public controversy regarding the Dean of Clonmacnoise provoked an interesting response to the Scoping Study. **Clergy, quite simply, may feel unable to express their own theological questions, not necessarily because they feel afraid of the consequences, but because there is simply no forum in which to do so.** There is great theological diversity in the Church of Ireland, on issues ranging from evangelism to pastoral care. But there are also many clergy who wish to discuss their theological diversity in a mutually beneficial environment. And semi-regular meetings with a bishop who differs theologically are not the ideal context for such discussion!

When you say theological differences are handled well. Does that mean people just live and let live, or is there a dialogue?

Well I mean if there were a bible study...maybe if something came up, they would give their opinion, but they're willing to let everybody have their own opinion and just live on. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

How well does the Church as a whole handle theological differences?

Well we had the extreme example I suppose of [the Dean of Clonmacnoise]. But in relation to theological differences within the church I would say that we haven't been doing great. I remember when I was a curate...we had a huge thing in relation to homosexuality...That was handled extremely badly, and it was almost done in a way that...is almost, put your head in the sand, pretend it doesn't exist...

So this was a clergyman who was gay, and he was exported?

He was exported, yes...So while I would say that where there are issues theologically that we need to face up to them ourselves, and deal with them ourselves.

And you don't?

We don't. **Rector, Armagh**

[The most recent public theological controversy was announced at a] clergy conference, and it was broken down into three distinct schools. People who said, 'Yeah, we got rid of that b*****.' And then there were others who were saying, 'Isn't it terrible it had to go to a court case?' And then there were people saying, 'Well now it's time to pray for him.' So he couldn't have had a more fair vision than [the bishop]...But how do you deal with a situation like that? Whereas if it was the Roman Catholics – and I'm not a batterer of the Roman Catholic Church – but I know he wouldn't have been able to open his mouth, he would have been silenced. **Rector, Cashel and Ossory**

It's disturbing that someone within our church could actually believe what [the Dean of Clonmacnoise] believed and get so far as to become a dean. Makes you wonder if those at the top are off the wall! **Lay person, Armagh**

Do people peacefully co-exist within the church that have different theological views?

We should be able to, but many of us from our wing feel that we're not given a fair say.

Our wing?

Evangelical, bible teaching. It's a well-known fact that...at the theological college...evangelicals...do not get a fair crack at the whip. The material taught is more liberal, and it's been brought up with the

Archbishop, and bishops, and committees of bishops. Nothing has been done, and I think...the hierarchy holds the higher ground and the rest of can't get near to make a difference. **Rector, Connor**

Rector: I think we underestimate the extent to which people do have theological discussions about God, not in a terribly academic way, or a terribly sophisticated way, but they can in simple terms sometimes discuss things that are really of quite deep significance.

And they handle them well?

Rector: I don't know, I think they probably feel – I suppose all of us feel at times so inadequate in matters of theology, that I think...there is a search sometimes.

Curate: There is. One of your elderly parishioners asked me the other day why – so many good, church-going people have steadily lost a number of members of family in tragic circumstances, and she asked me why I thought that had happened, and I – now she was searching. I had a very inadequate answer for her, but she would provide her own answer to her own thing.

Rector So I include myself then when I say we are all children in matters of theology. **Rector and Curate, Armagh (Interviewed together)**

Theological difference should not even exist nor should there be any wavering to and fro if we are based on the word of truth, the 39 Articles. **Lay person, Down and Dromore**

The Church of Ireland doesn't have deep enough theological discussions, and space enough for people to talk about theology in depth, and to think things through. It wasn't as if what he said was a particularly new option of theology. Well you see these are things that you can deal with obliquely, and one of the things that I'm sure you've heard said was that [recent theological controversy] it made people in the diocese.. think much more. But I feel that you can't always deal with these things in sermons, although I try to say these are the territories, and talk about [them], but having smaller discussion groups I think is a way. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

Theological differences get swept under the carpet, ignored, or the person with the difference is shouted down. **Lay person, Derry and Raphoe**

I don't remember anyone in the Church of Ireland expressing a theological opinion! **Lay person, Armagh**

I would say theological differences within the church, anyway – certainly within my own – would not be brought up. When I go back home I shall tell them my news as to what came through from the Synod, I don't expect anyone to challenge me on any theological issue on that.

Because they wouldn't, because they agree with you, or because they don't...?

They probably wouldn't be equipped to understand the ins and outs of it, and would expect me to...

And I suppose some would say that's handling differences very well, some would say it's handling them inadequately. What would you think?

Well I suppose, you see – I don't know that they've been taught to question, really. **Rector, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

I think one of the big differences that hasn't been spoken of and isn't spoken of, is – I suppose coming from my own journey...would be the need to recognise the violence that lies behind some theological attitudes...It is the difference between sacrificial understanding of passion, and a self-giving understanding...

Because sacrifice is a violent image?

It is a violence at heart that lies behind all the scapegoating – it is part of the scapegoating mechanisms, which we use in so many levels in so many ways. And so I am increasingly uncomfortable with those who talk as if the only theory of the atonement is the substitution theory, without asking who pays who for what.

Lay people don't generally have big theological differences...

No, no. Because sadly, in a way – and this is not meant to be an arrogant statement, but it's a factual statement that by and large lay people no longer know enough theology.

They're not equipped.

Yes. And so there's good and bad about that. **Rector, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

In my pastoral visiting...not one person has mentioned [theological controversy]. The thing they will mention – and this is going back a few years ago – is our bishop attending a football match on a Sunday. That would cause them far more concern than [the Dean of Clonmacnoise]. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

Surface activities are of no real use, we need more open discussion...less 'Well we're all the same anyway!'. **Rector, Cork, Cloyne and Ross**

Do lay people care about theology in your experience?

Yeah I think that overall I would look at the whole idea of sectarianism as a lack of understanding of what the gospel and theology says to us, so in other words maybe we're not challenged enough, or maybe we don't know enough to be able to make those decisions. So theological differences are very much there, but it's historical theology that they bring – they haven't maybe grown to meet society as it is today.

I believe that the Church of Ireland is losing membership because it is engaging in ecumenism without first dealing with the theological background. People are afraid of being asked to compromise their faith to achieve unity. **Rector, Connor**

We preach and teach and pray about [theological] differences, and about the inclusiveness of [Christ] but I sometimes feel there's a barrier. It's not being received. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

[We should develop] a forum for theological reflection about diversity/pluralism and the contemporary challenges in theology. **Bishop**

It is clear that theological differences exist widely throughout the Church of Ireland. The Church's diversity can be one of its great strengths, but also hamper good ministry, especially if people feel unable to discuss their theological questions openly. Some clergy in particular feel able to talk to a research consultant about matters that they would not tell either their parishioners or fellow clergy. And yet there currently exists no formal context for theological discussion, particularly regarding controversial issues, in the Church of Ireland. The following proposals made by respondents are suggestive of future good practice:

- Diocesan forums for theological discussion among clergy, with confidentiality assured, could be established.
- The General Synod could examine the uses and development of both deeper and more accessible theological discussion in the Church of Ireland among both clergy and lay people.
- Theology needs to be made accessible to lay people. Perhaps a lay theological conference could be run on an annual basis to help meet this need.

The liturgy of the Church of Ireland could be adapted to include explicit reference to the issues of sectarianism and difference. These have been named by the Church as two of the most important, if not the key issues facing society. If this is indeed the case, a response should be a cornerstone of ministry in the Church of Ireland. As the Church's liturgy is the main vessel for this ministry, it is remiss for sectarianism and difference not to be explicitly mentioned in the liturgy. It has been suggested to the

SEP that the existing litany has the potential to be employed in this respect, and that the Moravian Church's liturgy for reconciliation could be integrated into the Book of Common Prayer. This suggestion and others should be examined by the SEP. The Scoping Study findings do not, however, suggest that the task of the church is to make its lay people into expert theologians, but to equip them theologically for discipleship. To be a follower of Christ is not synonymous with being an intellectual, in spite of what some sociologists of religion might suggest!

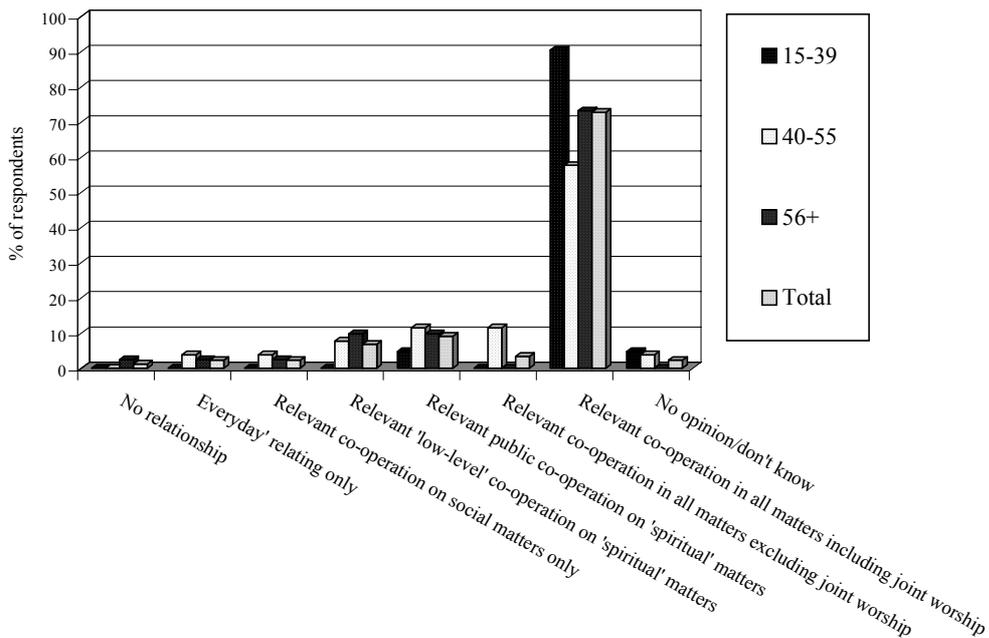
THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

- *Theological differences exist widely throughout the Church of Ireland. The church's diversity can be a strength but can also hamper the possibility of dialogue about controversial issues.*
- *Theology and culture are easily conflated. Some respondents feel that their own theological conservatism counts against them in the context of the wider church.*
- *There is a lack of context for discussion of theology among clergy and lay people; lay people are not usually equipped theologically beyond the basics.*
- *It is evident that the Church of Ireland is often pastorally, rather than ideologically driven.*
- *There is some understanding of sectarianism and difference as being issues that require a theological response, but this has not yet been fully developed.*
- *It is important to recognise that addressing sectarianism and difference cannot be done by the church alone.*
- *Members of the SEP have stressed the role of prayer. It must always be borne in mind that addressing sectarianism and difference is a spiritual, as well as a practical, task; specific liturgical and biblical resources may be useful in helping to address it with authority through affirming its importance, and offering opportunities for both repentance and envisioning.*

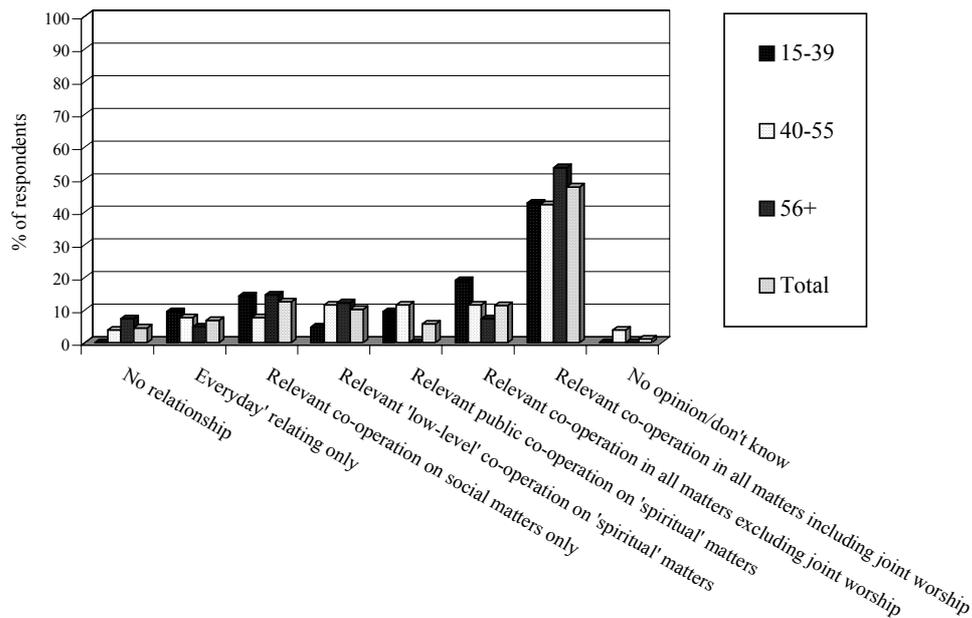
9: RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CHURCHES AND INTER-CHURCH ACTIVITY

Respondents were invited to discuss the relationship between their own parish and other Christian denominations (See Figs. 51-66).

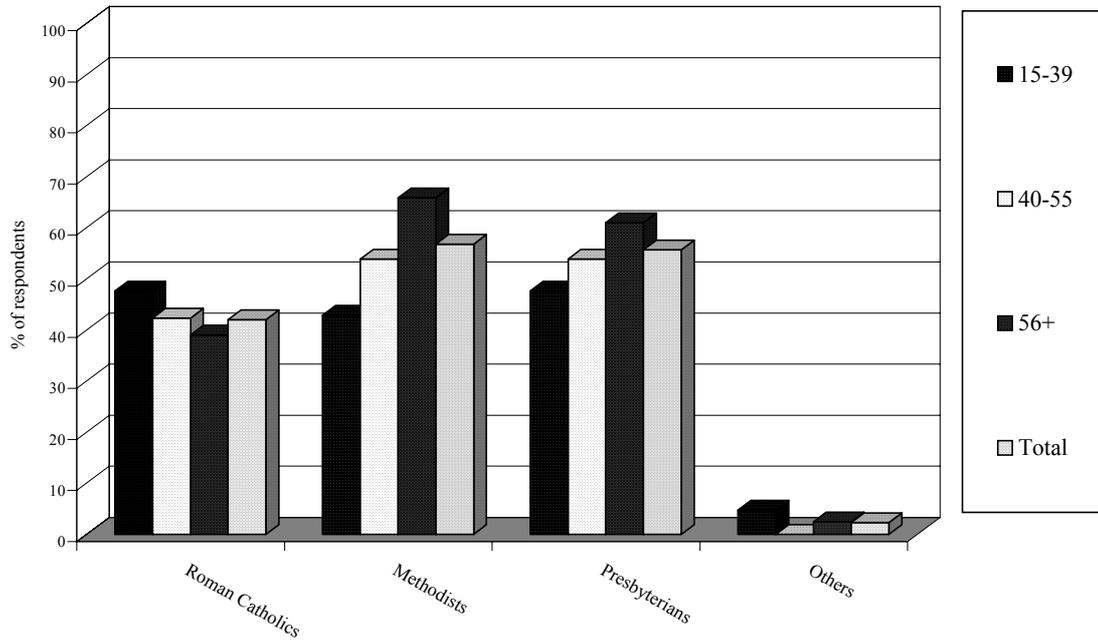
Lay People
How do you think your parish should relate with Protestant congregations in your area?
Fig. 51



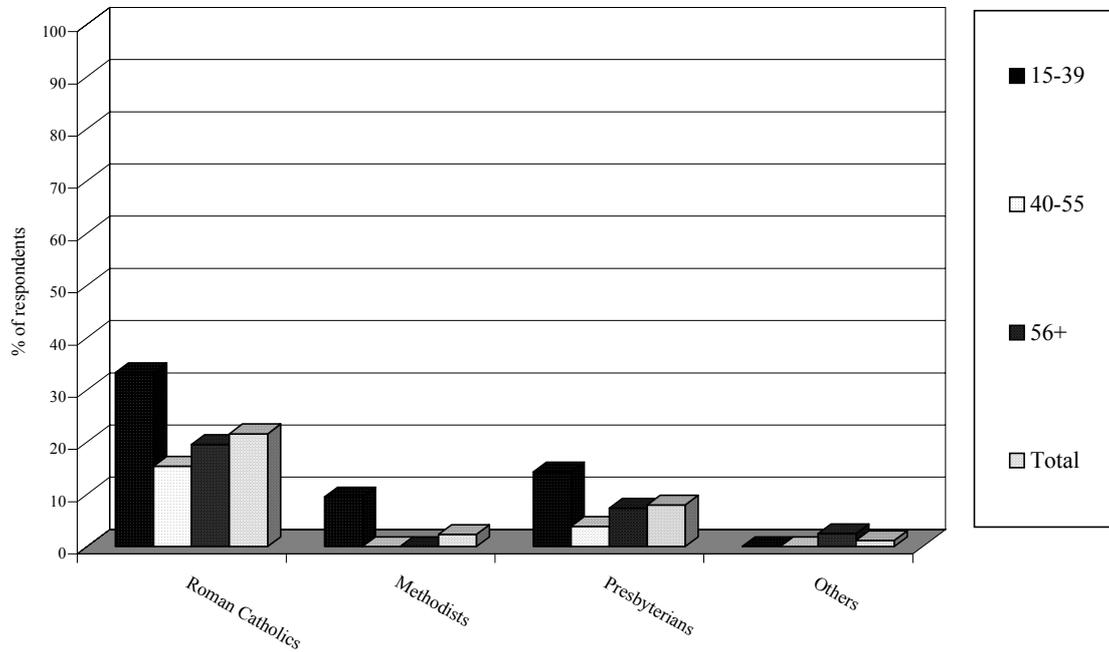
Lay People
How do you think your parish should relate with Roman Catholic congregations in your area?
Fig. 52



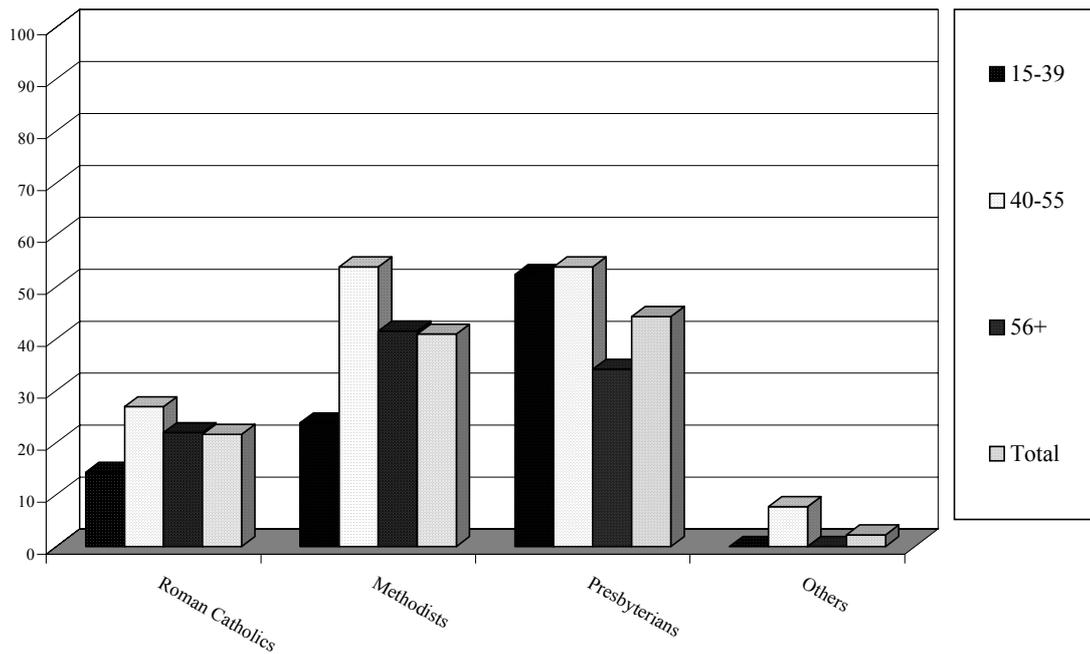
Lay People
Denominations you personally find it easier to relate to
Fig. 53



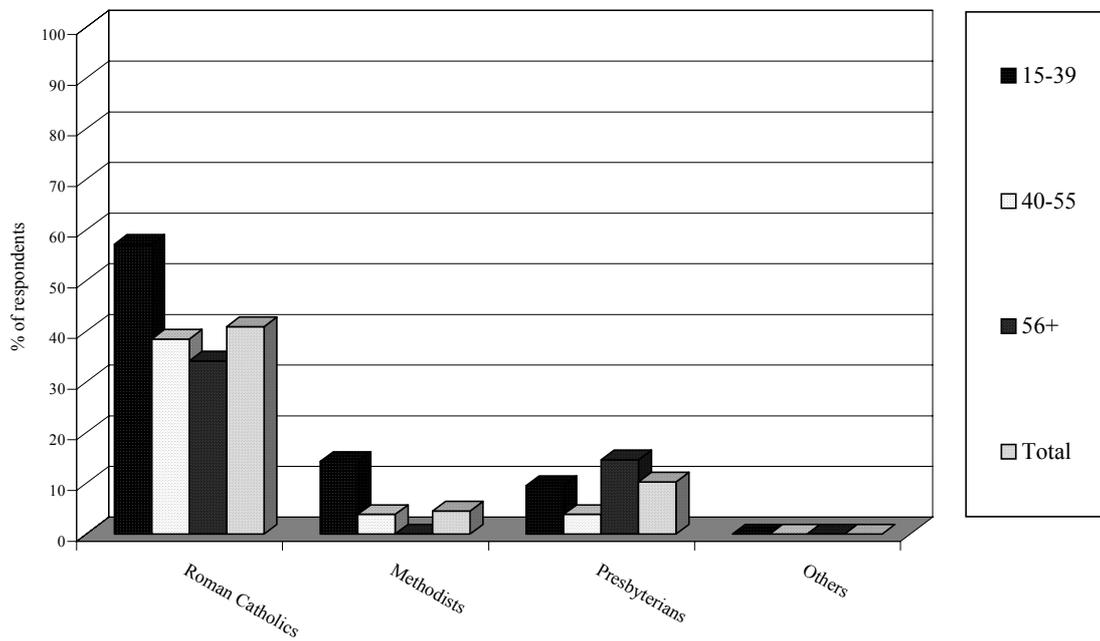
Lay People
Denominations you personally find it more difficult to relate to
Fig. 54



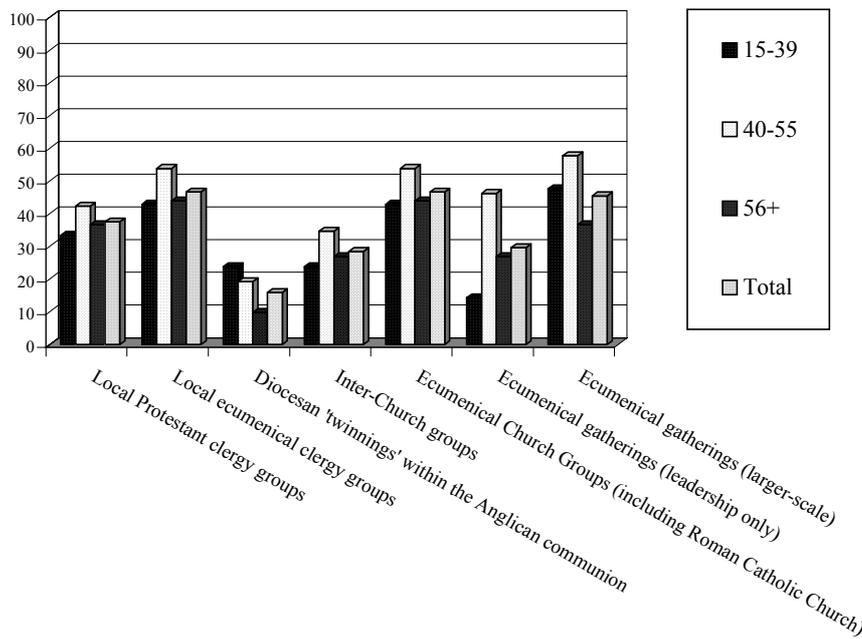
Lay People
Denominations you think it is easier for your parish to relate to
Fig. 55



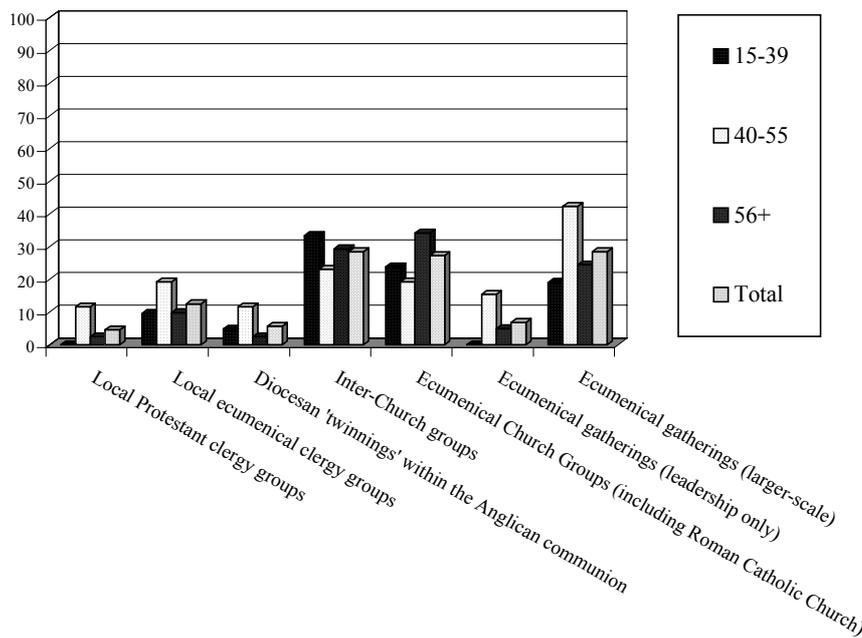
Lay People
Denominations you think it is more difficult for your parish to relate to
Fig. 56



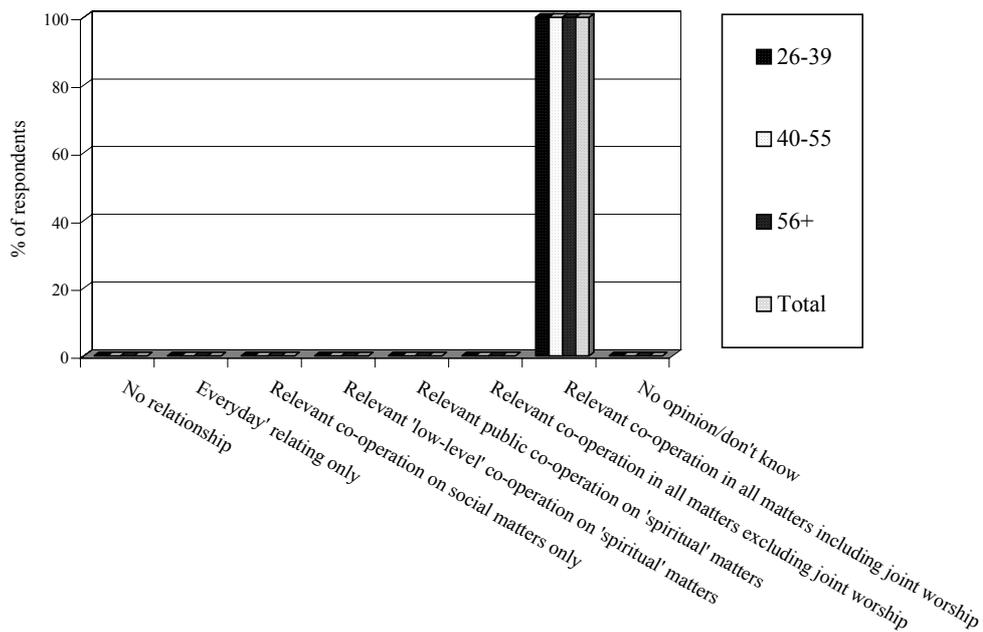
Lay People
Which do you consider to be potentially valuable?
Fig. 57



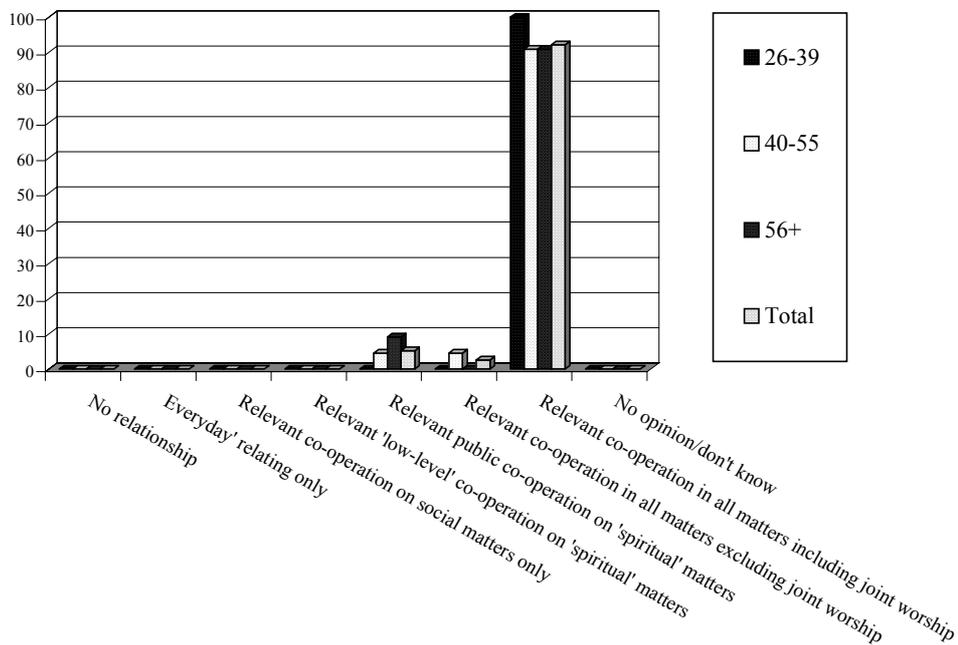
Lay People
Which do you find useful in practice?
Fig. 58



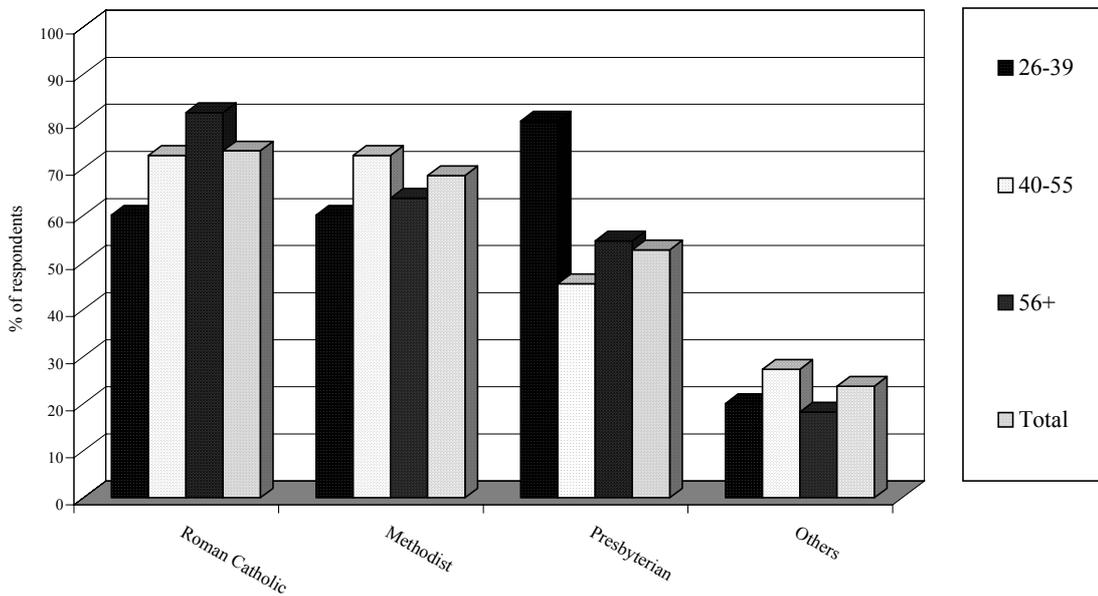
Interviewed Rectors
How do you think your parish should relate with Protestant congregations in your area?
Fig. 59



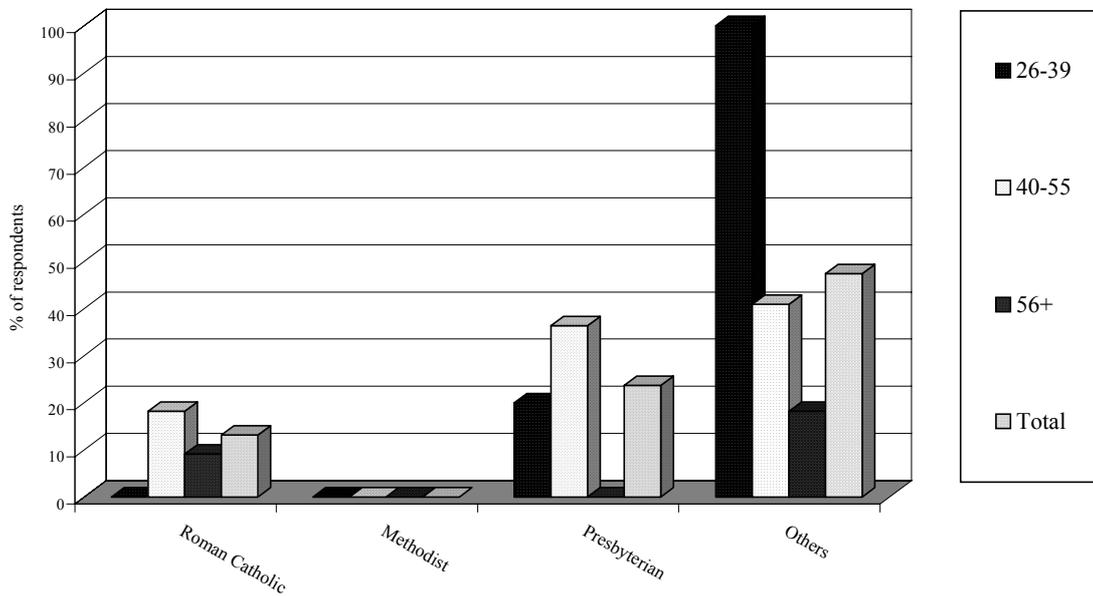
Interviewed Rectors
How do you think your parish should relate with Roman Catholic congregations in your area?
Fig. 60



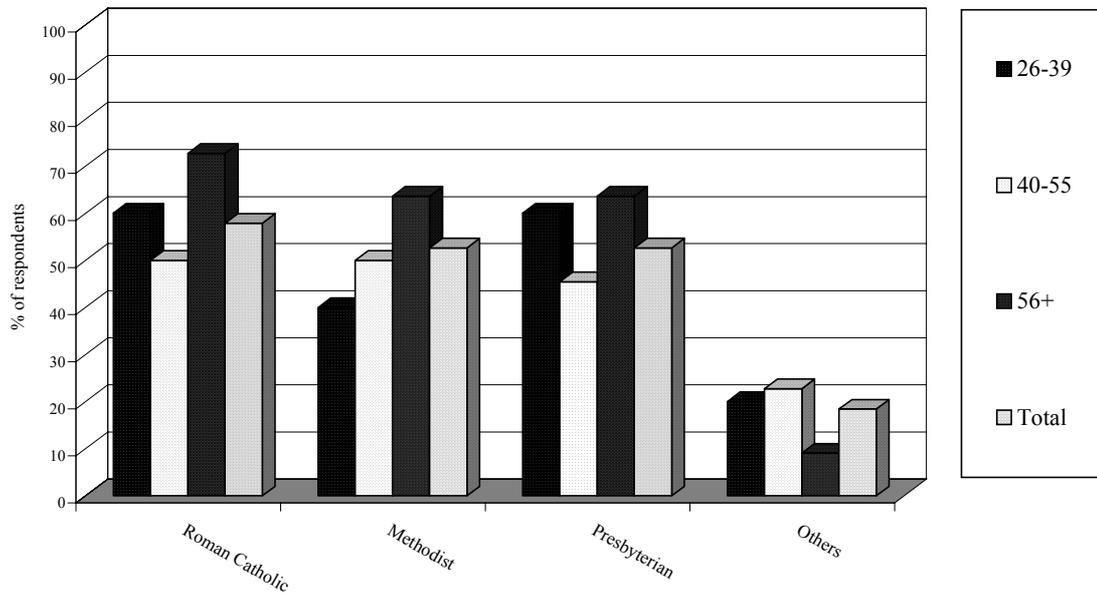
Interviewed Rectors
Denominations you personally find it easier to relate to
Fig. 61



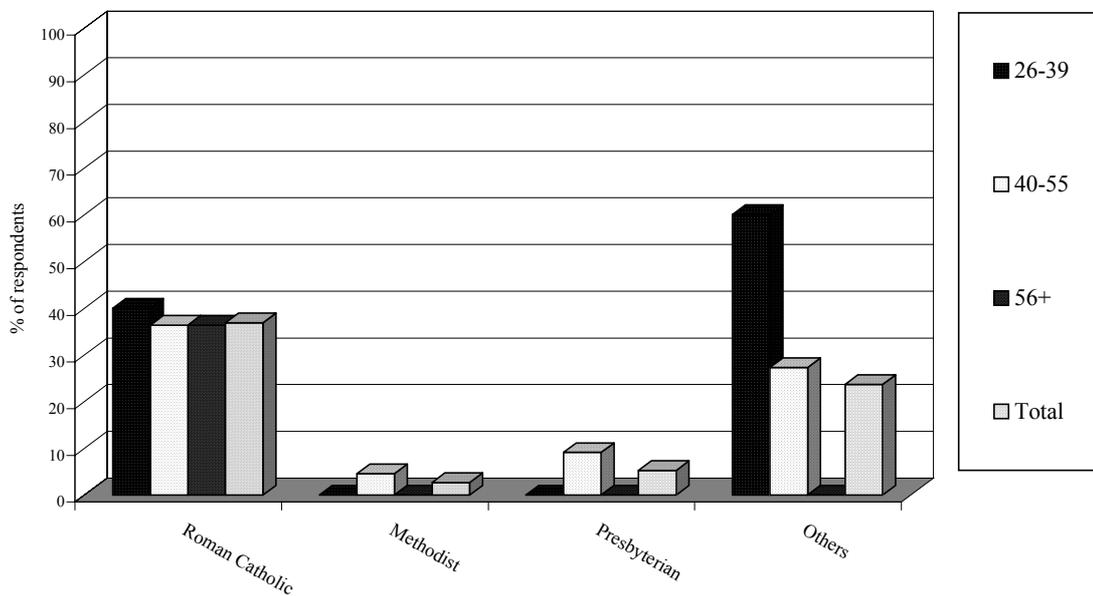
Interviewed Rectors
Denominations you personally find it more difficult to relate to
Fig. 62



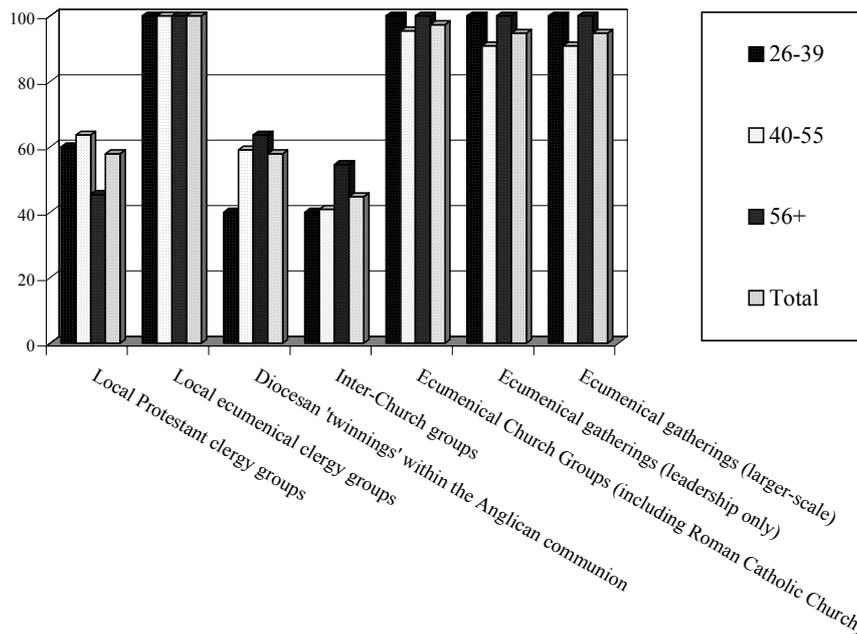
Interviewed Rectors
Denominations you think it is easier for your parish to relate to
Fig. 63



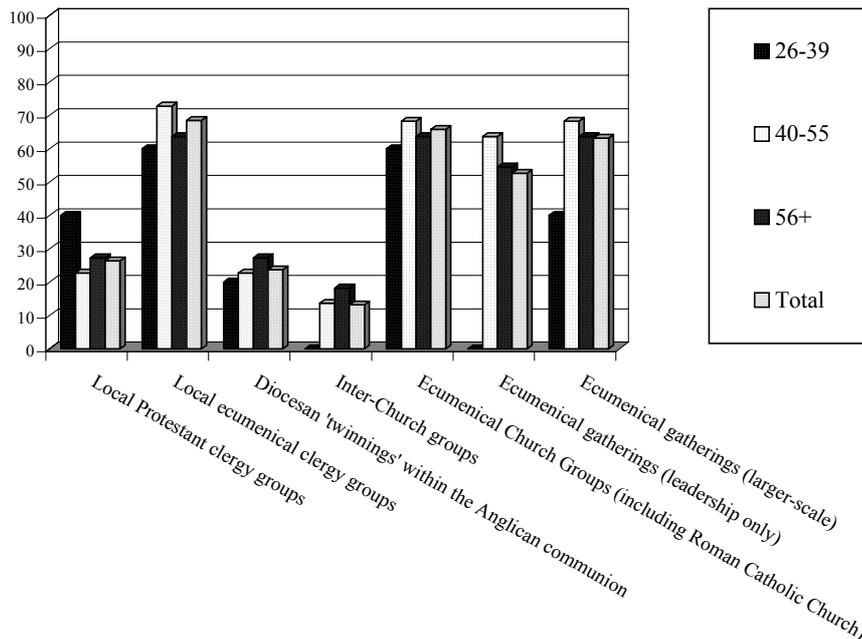
Interviewed Rectors
Denominations you think it is more difficult for your parish to relate to
Fig. 64



Interviewed Rectors
Which do you consider to be potentially valuable?
Fig. 65



Interviewed Rectors
Which do you find useful in practice?
Fig. 66



A series of questions was asked concerning relationships with other churches and inter-church activity. The results to these questions, while interesting, need to be interpreted with caution. Because of the peculiar demographics pertaining to religious populations in Northern Ireland and parts of the Republic, it is possible for a particular parish to exist in a degree of isolation from other churches. For instance, in parts of the north-east, there are fewer Roman Catholic churches. This has an obvious impact on responses in **Figs. 53, 54, 55, 56, 61, 63 and 64**, where the answers given are likely to relate to actual past or present experience and, the absence of experience of contact with a particular group may seem intimidating.

The results bear out some of the public perception of the church, with respondents generally having more affinity with the Methodist and Roman Catholic churches, followed by Presbyterians and other non-separatist Christian churches, and most respondents were happy to share worship with any other Christian denomination, although some challenges to this were acknowledged. Few respondents felt that they or their parish related well with conservative evangelical churches such as the Free Presbyterian Church or independent gospel halls, although this was often due to reluctance on the part of these other churches. Some respondents suggested that traditional forms of ecumenism had become ‘tired’ and needed to be renewed, or were in fact no longer relevant in a pluralist society. Many respondents maintained a cordial relationship with other churches, but did not engage in much practical co-operation, usually for reasons of other time commitment. It is noteworthy that the results may serve as a corrective to some of the popular perceptions of the Church of Ireland, with the vast majority of respondents, North and South saying that they aspire to good relations, and acknowledging common purpose with their Catholic neighbours. Some respondents indicated that they or their parishioners had a diversity of views on inter-church relations:

Would you say they would find it difficult to relate with the Catholic Church?
Some might.

What would the majority feel?
One third would have problems. One third would have quiet reservations but would be prepared to explore, and one third would have no problems at all. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

I think I would find it more difficult to relate to more extreme Protestant groups...

Why is that?
Well because I think they represent what would seem to me to be a negative exclusive form of Christianity. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

There were some examples of substantial relationships among local churches:

I must tell you that nowadays, the local Roman Catholic Clergy and myself, and the local Methodist minister [regularly] go out for a few pints, and we have a tremendous personal relationship between us. [We have never managed to do this until recently], because usually the Roman Catholic clergy tend to be a bit conservative. **Rector, Limerick and Killaloe**

We would have a special relationship with the Roman Catholic [parish]...At the time of a confirmation a group of our parishioners would go to their confirmation, and when it's our confirmation a group of their parishioners would come down to our service, and we find that beneficial. So certainly as far as the Roman Catholic congregations are concerned, there wouldn't be any problem about worshipping together. And I would on occasions – for example with mixed marriages we would have the Roman Catholic priest sharing the service, and even have had a baptism together as well. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

Would you feel happier if clergy groups included or excluded the Roman Catholic clergy?
I'd feel happier if it was all of them. I mean if the Roman Catholic priests had excluded themselves from coming to that, then I would still go along to it. But I wouldn't go along if it were a group that had decided to exclude. **Rector, Meath and Kildare**

Because people in the locality know we meet together [as a clergy fraternal] it sets an example and also means that clear lines of communication are maintained. **Rector, Armagh**

In principle as far as this parish is concerned we share worship with other denominations in general, for instance in united carol services, but also with denominations in particular. For example, within the past year we've had one service of evening prayer here with our own Catholic brethren, at which the parish priest has preached and I've conducted evening prayer.

Do you find ecumenical gatherings useful?

Very useful...It builds up trust between us, but also, it's helpful because for a start we have the resources of the four churches...And this year we decided that we would invite people from other world religions, and I think it is necessary for the wider community to not only appreciate the differences within itself, but can also appreciate the differences that can exist in the world around us, and I think that can more effectively be done by coming together as representative. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

There was a series of meetings within the parish together with members of the local Methodist congregation in order to discuss the proposed Methodist/Church of Ireland Covenant. The focus group members who attended these meetings reported that they had been very informative and instructive about church structures etc. They also thought that there was very little difference between the two churches/denominations. **Focus Group report, Connor**

We invite the local parish priest to Harvest and Carol Services; members of his flock also attend and we have excellent relations without our Church of Ireland ethos being compromised. **Standing Committee lay member, Tuam, Killala, and Achonry**

[Our parish] has a twice-yearly church swap with the local Presbyterian church. **Lay person, Derry and Raphoe**

We are very grateful for the support of the Roman Catholic community in our fundraising events; we could not exist without them. **Standing Committee lay member, Derry and Raphoe**

We need to commit ourselves to relate to the newer churches. **Rector, Cork, Cloyne and Ross**

The Church of Ireland should initiate an ecumenical covenant with other Christian bodies, clearly indicating the aims of mutual respect and tolerance; Christians across the island should be invited to sign this covenant. **Rector, Meath and Kildare**

We're going to have four Sundays in October and November, where all members of all congregations will be invited to one church. And the idea is...that we show members of other Christian denominations our worship...We shut down – I'll have an eight o'clock service in the morning, but my eleven o'clock will be a joint Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist. But it'll be our worship. And then because there's no Methodist Church [here], I've given the Methodists my church for their Sunday. But it'll be Methodist worship in our church, but they will conduct it. And we'll be going down to [the Catholic] Cathedral, and they will have their ordinary mass...The idea is that each denomination sees the others' worship at its best. So we'll have two weeks preparation for that here actually, we meet here and whoever wants to come to those preparatory sessions can. Normally about forty people will come to that. But we're hoping this year to reach out to a wider audience. **Rector, Armagh**

Some examples of negative inter-church relations were mentioned, such as members of one Focus Group who felt that they were treated as second class citizens by many Presbyterian people who 'look down their noses at the Church of Ireland' despite never having been inside a Church of Ireland church. One person said they felt the attitude was: 'Sure in the Church of Ireland you don't believe anything', and that 'Catholics are the only ones who don't look down on the C of I.' Other examples include the following:

sensitively engage in a respectful dialogue with the Catholic schools over this issue. On a more sinister note, some young respondents from the Republic said they had had stones thrown at them because they were Protestants. **Youth Focus Group report, Republic of Ireland**

Again personalities come into it. On occasions in parishes that I've been at, I find Presbyterians difficult to relate to. I suppose you could also say the smaller denominations, because they're always out to poach your people. So it's difficult sometimes to be completely open. **Rector, Armagh**

People seem to say that conservative evangelical churches tend to want to keep themselves to themselves, so while you might want to relate with them, it isn't reciprocated.

Well I think that's possibly true. I would find parishioners being invited to functions or even services in a church of that nature, and they might be quite happy to go. What they often find if they reciprocate the invitation, it's not accepted. **Rector, Armagh**

Possibly because in my experience I have found [Presbyterians] them to be a little bit more narrow.

A little more sure of themselves?

Yes. Having said that I've appreciated their guidance and leadership on matters in the North over the last few years. They've been very strong, and that's been much appreciated. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

Children in schools think you are not a real Christian because you belong to the Church of Ireland. **Lay person, Armagh**

[I have experienced] prejudice from others – sometimes the sentiment of being 'so close to Rome as almost to be a Catholic'...Any Baptists I have met personally are very condescending about other less 'vigorous' denominations. **Lay people, Derry and Raphoe**

It is a great pity that the Roman Catholic Church do not accept the Church of Ireland as a true church...[or] share communion with us. This needs to be dealt with at the decision making level within the Church of Ireland. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

And some respondents explained why they had difficulty relating to certain churches:

Extreme charismatics I have problems with...Some of their doctrines I think are not right. Some of them go on singing in their services and have no time for the preaching of the Bible. People who wave hands about, and want to be laying hands on everybody without listening to what God says, I really have problems with that. I also have problems with liberals from Church of Ireland or any other churches, who don't accept the authority of the Bible...I do find value in [clergy] getting together. We can talk our problems over, we can seek support from each other, and the priest could do that too. So I wouldn't have a problem with that. It just so happens that in this set-up the priest is not in it, but that's the way it's been from before I came. **Rector, Connor**

We would find it difficult to relate to Roman Catholics because of the troubles...some parishioners would resist strongly against any worship with Roman Catholics. **Lay person, Clogher**

Simply by being a Roman Catholic doesn't make someone a Christian; simply by being Church of Ireland does not make you Christian.

So it's a theological reason rather than being an anti-Catholic reason?

Yes. I believe there are certain teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that are wrong. Now that's not being sectarian or hostile. I believe that certain of their teachings are wrong. If a Roman Catholic comes to genuine Christian faith I think initially he should certainly stay in his own church, until he feels within himself that he's not being fed – if he feels he's not being fed spiritually, and if he feels that the teaching he's receiving is not according to the Bible, that would be for him to decide. But I certainly would not immediately say to someone who comes to faith from the Roman Catholic Church, 'Right, you must get out.' He may have a good influence by staying in his church. But he has to balance that by, 'Am I being taught right?' **Rector, Connor**

Members of the Roman Catholic Church are Christians only if they have a genuine personal faith in Jesus Christ, if they are born again, only in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, if they have personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord...Members of any Christian church are Christians only if they have a genuine personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. **Lay person, Down and Dromore**

Some respondents were clearly surprised that the question of how well they related with other churches (particularly Roman Catholics) was even being asked:

Are members of the Roman Catholic Church Christians? What an offensive, ridiculous question. I take umbrage against these questions. **Lay person, Dublin and Glendalough**

No wonder we have sectarianism: - this questionnaire is creating it!

This is really wrecking me because I really don't relate to much of this.

If I'd known what the Archdeacon was getting me into, I wouldn't be here. I feel guilty sitting here even considering these things and I feel as if I'm letting down my Roman Catholic friends. I would be embarrassed if they knew I was doing this questionnaire.

Is the person who designed this questionnaire from a northern background?

If I thought that I belonged to a church which had a majority of people who had these views then I would seriously consider leaving.

Doctrines are simply an accident of birth. No one denomination's doctrines are better or worse than anyone else's, although everyone thinks their own is right.

Roman Catholics are of course Christians - they believe in Christ!

The focus of the Gospel is 'love thy neighbour'.

Coming together at any time of different people from different backgrounds is very important and it helps understanding. Where there is ignorance and fear of the unknown then bigotry prevails. **Lay people, Derry and Raphoe**

How does anybody else define another's faith? Church going doesn't define Christianity. The most dangerous people are those with too much religion and not enough Christianity. Many excellent Christians never go to church. You should always treat people as you would like to be treated. **Lay person, Meath and Kildare**

And the practical and philosophical challenges of inter-church relations were raised by a number of respondents:

There are no other Protestant congregations in the area within a twenty-mile radius. **Lay person, unknown diocese**

In a...struggling inner city parish...near an interface...the need is to build confidence in their own faith and its...implications regarding respect for all made in God's image. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

Inter-church events depend on the ministers concerned. **Lay person, Armagh**

I have found that a lot of ecumenical activity is done because there is a feeling it needs to be seen to be done. **Rector, Meath and Kildare**

[Colleagues said recently] 'We don't exactly invite our Catholic neighbours for tea', and 'If Roman Catholics came to our church, there would be people in the congregation who would not be in church the following Sunday'. This is a statement of the problem from 'nice' people in a 'nice' parish, who think that they are not sectarian. **Rector, Armagh**

People in my parish are suspicious of everything that is associated with Roman Catholicism – this includes ‘sharing the peace’, distribution of ashes, candles, crosses. The Church of Ireland should clearly state the ‘official’ view on many of these issues in order that I can tell my parish. That would help a bit. **Rector, Armagh**

While the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland continues its sectarian position of non-recognition of Anglican Orders and the position of ‘Dominus Iesus’ and ‘One Bread, One Body’ then it is difficult to see much progress to full ecumenical understanding. **Rector, Armagh**

Generally these activities are the preserve of the ‘core’ of the respective faith communities. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

I may love and be kind towards my Catholic neighbour yet also believe they are in error concerning papal infallibility, transubstantiation and Marian devotion. **Anonymous respondent**

There is no support for the ecumenical prayer group from the local Roman Catholic clergy. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

The Catholic church tends to take over any project after a while: they feel they need to be in control. **Lay person, Armagh**

It would be a real breakthrough if...there were public mutual understanding in respect of marriage discipline where two churches are involved. **Rector, Cork, Cloyne and Ross**

In the town there is an invisible boundary that everyone respects and handles very courteously. **Lay person, unknown diocese**

Here in this parish, beyond co-operation on social matters there can't be any other co-operation...for political reasons. The parishioners of the [local] Roman Catholic church, even though they may never be at mass, have murdered parishioners from here. That's the bottom line. And that's the major stumbling block. My own personal, theological convictions – I would have no problems with joint civic services. I would maybe have hesitation about moving beyond that for fear of it being interpreted as a blurring of theological boundaries. **Rector, Clogher**

I would say [joint worship] – the only difficulty I would have would be in the context of a mass... In [this town] we [often] do things together...and that would include Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist...We're open with each other, we're honest with each other as well...[Although] theologically I would {struggle with} the Roman Catholic Church because...interventions that have been made by senior clerics in the Roman Catholic Church have made it very difficult, and I find myself digging in my heels and saying, ‘Okay, if you don't want us, well I certainly don't want you.’ **Rector, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

If the leadership recommends participation and attendance at inter-church events/worship then it will happen (even if on a small scale), but otherwise it will not. **Lay person, Connor**

I think there's work to be done on single identity and part of a cultural thing that is Protestant. I think that's almost the fear sometimes, ‘We can't do this, we have to know who we are ourselves.’ It's very difficult to move out with Roman Catholics or Jews or anybody, because we don't know who we are...I don't know how you bring that together...Something about leading in our own identity, and being proud of that, not always having to be something because we're not something else. **Rector, Connor**

I'd like to share worship [in the Catholic parish], but we haven't been invited. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

What about local Roman Catholic congregations, what level of relationship do you think your parish should have?

We should probably have more or less the same, but we don't...Possibly because – why would that be? Orange Order? History?

You're more open to it than the lay people are, is that what you're saying?

I'm saying that, yes. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

Ecumenical activity...is most effective on a small group basis rather than large...worship events.
Rector, Cork, Cloyne and Ross

Too much of the ecumenical movement is a bureaucratic movement that really doesn't hit at where local churches are at.

What would you like to see as a substitute, then?

There needs to be real dialogue...Beginning on our shared convictions concerning the apostolic faith...
And then a charitable dialogue about our theological differences. **Rector, Clogher**

It might be assumed by some that relations with the Roman Catholic Church are the nub of a Scoping Study on dealing positively with sectarianism and difference, but some respondents indicated the converse:

I think the nub in this is not in many Church of Ireland parishes how we relate to the Roman Catholics, but actually how we relate to Free Presbyterians, Baptists, Brethren. And my personal feeling is that in many parts of the Church of Ireland sectarianism is actually focused more on other Protestant reformed groupings...than...on Roman Catholics. I think there is a geographical dimension to this, in that there are certain parts of the island where...the focus has been primarily on our relationships with Roman Catholic folks, but outside of church it also relates to our attitudes to people who are politically...different to ourselves. What I would love to see is that we would have as much respect for those who have a different view on a united Ireland or the United Kingdom than we have, and that...that is accepted as a valid viewpoint rather than being demonised or...one of them being aligned with God's will and the other not being. **Bishop**

Respondents distinguished between good inter-church relations and co-operation on issues of common concern, and ecumenical initiatives involving shared worship. Some mentioned the challenges associated with sharing worship with the Roman Catholic Church, and the question of inter-church marriage:

The local Catholic priest is very ecumenical and turns a blind eye to inter-communion. **Lay person, Armagh**

The annual ecumenical service is not attended by the rector but some parishioners go as individuals.
Lay person, Armagh

Would you be happy to share non-Eucharistic worship?

Absolutely. I'm also a joint chaplain in the community school. The only problem with our relationships with the Roman Catholic Church on a personal level is that the parish priest has severe difficulty with what I am, a former Roman priest.

Is the issue of inter-faith marriage arising?

Inter-faith marriage doesn't arise. I'd spend a lot of my time trying to re-educate people that questions seven and eight on the Roman Catholic prenuptial enquiry form, having studied canon law for three years, it is not couched in terms that the Protestant – or non-Catholic party – must agree to the child being raised Catholic. What the person agrees to is that the child can be informed of the Catholic faith, no matter what faith it's baptised in. So I spend a lot of time doing that, and then I clash with my Roman Catholic colleagues...but it's good-natured. 'You're trying to steal my parishioners again', and vice versa...Many a truer word is said in jest, so we mark our territory in a bantering way over a pint or over a cup of tea. **Rector, Cashel and Ossory**

Would you participate in Inter-Church groups (Protestant only)?

No...because in the community you don't just have Protestant churches. I mean local clergy, Protestant clergy yes, because that's where you're living, and here that's the only other ministers I would meet, but

inter-church no, I mean I think you have to mix more. [I do have questions about Roman Catholic doctrine.] I think...the doctrine – the Mary thing, also the infallibility thing would be the main things. Because I mean, knowing the Roman Catholics that I know, they're great people, but they're just – they're just blinkered on these things. [I reconcile my views with participation in ecumenical gatherings] because they're part of the community. I may not agree with what they teach, but they're precious in God's eyes, so therefore...as long as they don't encroach on my doctrine at a worship gathering I won't encroach on theirs. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

I wouldn't see a problem if we were to come together for a carol service. There might be other areas of worship where I mightn't feel so comfortable, you know. But I think there could be some participation of joint worship that I could agree with and feel happy with. **Rector, Dromore**

I am in an inter-church marriage and my two sons have been baptised RC and C of I respectively but I have never received in a Roman Catholic Church...when the priest asks non-Catholics to come up for a blessing they mean well, but it is so patronising. **Lay person, Dublin and Glendalough**

[Shared worship] could be encouraged because I have parishioners here who are dropped off here and the partner goes to chapel, and then they're lifted up on the way home. I have no problem with it, but I think we're still not at the stage where they could happily come into my church. I do weddings in the parish, but because of the [situation] they will choose to do them in St Patrick's, which is my other wee church, because it's better for photographs, plus there's no religious or loyalist paraphernalia...I can encourage them to go to the ecumenical service during Christian Unity Week because the last year a Presbyterian was preaching and a Church of Ireland guy was preaching, but they felt it was safe to go. **Rector, Connor**

When asked about which denominations the parishes get on with more easily, one person quipped, "Just add a cup of tea and our parishioners will go anywhere!". **Focus Group report, Connor**

I feel guilty, because I know I should be supportive [of ecumenical gatherings], but I don't because I'm lazy. And I like it when there are ecumenical gatherings of the hierarchy. It's good to see the four church leaders together, more often. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

I would like to see our parish being more friendly towards another church, especially the Roman Catholic Church.

I would like to see the Church of Ireland getting its feet a little more wet. **Lay person, Down and Dromore**

North-South differences impact inter-church relations also:

But I think [there's] a feeling in the Republic that we've moved on, because those issues do not preoccupy us...In fact ecumenical efforts have dwindled, not because people have become disillusioned, but because people don't see the point of these big things. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

Historically...we did have a connection with the ecumenical movement, we had meetings of groups of lay Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland and Methodists and so on, but the thing has kind of faded out, and the whole ecumenical thing has gone rather stale...**Rector, Limerick and Killaloe**

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CHURCHES AND INTER-CHURCH ACTIVITY

- *There is a diversity of views on inter-church relations; North-South difference impacts these relationships.*
- *Some Church of Ireland parishes have substantial relationships with other local churches, usually Methodist, Roman Catholic or Presbyterian.*
- *There are sometimes practical (distance, time commitment) and philosophical (doctrinal differences, styles of leadership) challenges to deeper inter-church relations.*
- *Some maintain theological objections to shared worship in an ecumenical context, but still participate in other forms of relating with local Roman Catholic parishes; for some others, ecumenism is no longer inspires enthusiasm.*
- *Some respondents felt that relations with more conservative Protestant denominations were often negative, and should be prioritised.*
- *Respondents often feel that ecumenical relationships, gatherings and structures avoid important difficult and emotive issues.*
- *Some respondents feel there is a need to define an agenda for inter-church relations that goes beyond shared worship, or enables those with a philosophical objection to participate in such relations. What are the other things that churches can usefully do together?*