

Standing Committee – Report 2008

**APPENDIX L**

**THE HARD GOSPEL REPORT 2008**

**PRESIDENT**

The Most Reverend A E T Harper

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

Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke (A)

Rt Rev Dr Michael Jackson

Very Rev Patrick Rooke (Chair) (A)

Ms Ruth Handy (Vice Chair) (C)

Mr Terry Forsyth (Honorary Treasurer) (B)

Rev Eileen Cremin (A)

Rev Canon Dr Ian M Ellis (Standing Committee)

Mr Bernie Frayne (C)

Rev Kenny Hall (B)

Rev Paul Hoey (Parish Development Committee)

Mrs Margaret McNulty

Rev Daniel Nuzum (D)

Ms Stella Obe (C)

Rev Michael Parker (C)

Ms Kate Turner

Rev Canon Trevor Williams (D)

**Co-opted**

Rev Doug Baker (A,D)

**In attendance**

Mr David Brown (Youth Council)

Mrs Jenny Compston (Honorary Secretary)

Mrs Janet Maxwell (Communications) (C)

Rev Earl Storey (HGP Director) (A,B,C,D)

**Resignations**

Rev Canon Cecil Hyland

**Sub Committees re Hard Gospel Project**

(A) Strategy/Planning

(B) Finance/Grants

(C) Communications/Publicity

(D) Hard Gospel Sunday

**Staff**

Project Director: Rev Earl Storey

Project Officer (based in Belfast) – Mr Stephen Dallas

Project Officer (based in Dublin) – Mr Philip McKinley

## **HARD GOSPEL STRATEGY**

The vision for the Hard Gospel Project is:

*“A Church of Ireland which takes a positive leadership role in addressing the issues of sectarianism and dealing with difference that face the rapidly changing societies across the island of Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and a membership who contribute constructively to the development of transformed communities through reflecting and outworking Christ’s command to love God and their neighbour.”*

The project has four strategic aims which were included in the 2007 Book of Reports.

### **Range of Work**

The work of the Hard Gospel, now in the final year of its three year Project, is expressed through a range of action designed to:

- Enable a healthy process of self-reflection within the Church of Ireland with regard to its values, practices and structures;
- Facilitate relationship building across theological, religious, political and other boundaries;
- Facilitate new thinking and energetic public debate on key issues regarding reconciliation and community cohesion ;
- Work with parishes and other groupings to increase levels of confidence and capacity to build bridges in local communities;
- Build capacity within leadership at all levels of church life;
- Facilitate relationships with new religious and social groupings in a changing Ireland, both North and South.

### **Audit of Central Structures**

A report entitled ‘Living With Difference – A Reality Check’ was prepared by two independent consultants, with findings being presented to Standing Committee in November 2007 and January 2008. It contained three separate but related aspects:

- A Theological Reflection highlighting the importance of living with difference as a fundamental gospel value;
- A Hard Gospel Diversity Audit of the central structures to assess the balance of composition of representative bodies. This will illustrate how diverse, or otherwise, are our decision making bodies;
- A Hard Gospel Impact Framework which provides a means whereby statements, policies and activities of the Church of Ireland can be critically assessed to see if they contribute to or harm relations along lines of difference.

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The Standing Committee appointed a small group, chaired by the Bishop of Connor, to consider the implications of the recommendations contained in both the Diversity Report and the Impact Framework Document.

### **Our Kind of People**

Engagement between the Church and the loyalist community continues to be a priority in Hard Gospel work. In November 2008, a major exhibition entitled 'Our Kind of People' was held in Rathcoole, North Belfast. This initiative was a co-operative venture between the Hard Gospel Project and local churches. The aim was to provide a forum for telling stories of achievement from within the local community. The purpose was to inspire young people in the area with a sense of possibility. Some seventy stories were told with those involved ranging from a BBC Radio journalist to community activists. 'Our Kind of People' was opened by Minister for Enterprise, Mr Nigel Dodds MP.

Future 'Our Kind of People' type initiatives are in the process of being planned, in partnership with local parishes. The overall aim of this work is:

1. To increase the confidence and effectiveness of Church of Ireland members to love their neighbours within loyalist communities;
2. To assist parishes to build partnerships that reflect and act on identified neighbourhood needs within marginalised loyalist communities;
3. To promote the importance of understanding neighbourhood needs within the geographic and demographic area that parishes are located;
4. To enable Church of Ireland parishes to help develop stable vibrant and confident loyalist communities that view church as a relevant institution with a role to play;
5. To facilitate identified parishes to assess their ability to take action and employ the skills required.

### **Immigration**

As a response to the issues raised by an unprecedented wave of immigration in recent years the Hard Gospel Project brought to completion a programme that included:

- Diocesan Consultation Evenings: Each Bishop was requested to chair an evening where interested people in the Diocese were invited to come and talk through experiences, interests or ignorance on issues of immigration. A significant number of dioceses have completed this
- A national conference (18/19 January 2008) to build on the work of the Diocesan consultation evenings. This event focused on appropriate pastoral responses to immigration. The conference was entitled '*A Pilgrim People: Encouraging the Church of Ireland to contribute positively to issues of migration, integration and community cohesion*'. Keynote speakers included Minister Conor Lenihan TD and Minister Gerry Kelly MLA.

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Each diocese is encouraged to build upon the work of the process so far by focussing on set projects, either at a local or diocesan level. A report will be completed on the journey of exploration undertaken by the Church of Ireland to respond adequately to the challenge of immigration.

### **Border Protestants**

Funding from the Department for Foreign Affairs was achieved to conduct this project in partnership with Clogher diocese. A consultant, Mr David Gardiner, has been commissioned to oversee this project. Work commenced in January 2008 and will be completed by September 2008.

The purpose of this project, situated in Clogher Diocese, is:

1. To encourage members of the Church of Ireland community to share their personal experiences of the Troubles and aspirations for the future;
2. To encourage members of the Church of Ireland community to share their experience of the church during the Troubles and to articulate how they see its role in sustaining community in the future;
3. To encourage members of the Church of Ireland community to share their experience of being a minority community in a range of border areas, and to do so in such a way that is both heard and understood by the wider community;
4. To record and present the experiences and views of members of the Church of Ireland community to:
  - The wider community in Northern Ireland
  - The wider community in the Republic of Ireland;
5. To contribute to the building of peaceful rural community by enabling members of the Church of Ireland to engage with other communities to address issues key to peacebuilding.

### **Beyond the Box seminars**

From November 2007 to February 2008, a joint initiative was taken in co-operation with the Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic parishes of Shankill in Lurgan. A series of three public seminars were held. The purpose was to facilitate new thinking and energetic public debate on important issues that would contribute to reconciliation and community wellbeing. Topics included:

- Culture – A clash of symbols?
- Dealing with the past;
- Education and the peace dividend.

Examples of other events included:

- ‘Is there sectarianism in the Republic of Ireland?’ presentation at Trinity College Dublin

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- Workshop on ‘Gospel Music as a Tool for Reconciliation’, St Colmcille’s Roman Catholic Church, Newtownards Road, Co Down.

### **Training**

The staff team have delivered training in a range of situations including:

- A three day pre-term training course with second year students at the Theological College;
- Training for non stipendiary/laity at the Theological College;
- A Hard Gospel debate at Summer Madness chaired by Conor Bradford (BBC Radio Ulster). Speakers included the Northern Ireland Assembly Minister for Education Ms Catriona Ruane and Minister Ian Paisley Jnr;
- Staff input and involvement with Youthreach;
- Seminar at the Glenstall Ecumenical Conference;
- Seminar at the Glenree Summer School;
- A presentation to Dublin and Glendalough Clerical Training Day on Migration;
- Parishes both North and South;
- Conferences and seminars.

### **Hard Gospel Sunday**

The House of Bishops designated 9<sup>th</sup> September 2007 as Hard Gospel Sunday. The purpose of Hard Gospel Sunday was to provide an occasion to inspire and invite commitment from a wide cross-section of parish membership to find new ways of engaging with their ‘neighbours’.

A special pack was distributed to clergy in every parish in the Church of Ireland. The pack contained:

- Suggested liturgical material;
- Commentary on the designated Scripture readings;
- Sermon outlines;
- Suggestions on ways to involve all age groups in the parish, ways to connect locally on the day with those outside the membership of the parish, and ways to relate the Hard Gospel theme to Racial Justice Sunday which also fell on that date.

### **RTE TV Broadcast Service**

The Hard Gospel Project was invited to conduct a live Sunday Service broadcast in the studios of RTE on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2007. This was an opportunity to present some of the work being carried out in all parts of Ireland. As well as prayers and live music, interviews were conducted with people involved in initiatives engaging with their local community.

### **Hymn Writing Competition**

At the core of the Hard Gospel Project is the challenge to live out Christ's command in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ireland - 'to love God and love your neighbour as yourself'. The Hard Gospel Project conducted a hymn writing competition which invited entrants to capture and translate this value into a new hymn for use in Church of Ireland churches throughout the island.

With a prize of €1000 the winning entry was premiered by the Discovery Gospel Choir at the Hard Gospel Immigration Conference on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2008 in the Emmaus Retreat Centre, Dublin. It has been published and circulated for use in Church of Ireland churches.

### **Resources**

#### **a. Welcome Posters**

Specially designed Welcome posters were provided to all parishes, to coincide with Hard Gospel Sunday. Parishes were invited to place them in their entrance porches. Each poster had the word 'Welcome' in many of the languages that may now be used by members of immigrant communities in Ireland. Space was left at the bottom of each poster for additional languages to be added.

#### **b. The Good Samaritan Course – Reflect and Act**

A special five week course was produced and distributed for use in all parishes in the Church of Ireland. As the name suggests it is designed to help parishes think through the practical implications of engaging with their neighbour. This course aims to:

- Prompt reflection on our own attitude to difference;
- Assist a parish to understand the term neighbour;
- Assist a parish to take steps to meet others outside the church community.

#### **c. Hard Gospel and the Church of Ireland Youth Department**

We have co-operated with the Church of Ireland Youth Department to produce two resources suitable for group work. The first resource entitled 'Faith and Difference' has already been distributed to clergy and youth leaders for use during Lent 2008 and beyond.

Telling stories was Jesus' favourite way of teaching. Stories were a simple way of helping the listener to learn something about God and themselves. 'Faith and Difference' consists of a pack of A5 sized postcards. Each postcard uses a photograph and a fictional story, with questions, to enable groups to discuss difficult issues such as:

- Faith and Ethnicity;
- Faith and Sexuality;
- Faith and Traditionalism;
- Faith and Patriotism;
- Faith and Class;

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- Faith and Young People;
- Faith and Paramilitaries;
- Faith and Gender;
- Faith and Age.

**d. Website – [www.hardgospel.net](http://www.hardgospel.net)**

The Project website underwent a significant redesign during this past year. As well as updated graphics a number of features have been added or enhanced. These include sections entitled:

- Hot Potatoes: This addresses difficult issues both within the wider community and Church;
- Chancing Your Arm: In order to inspire as well as to share good practice, stories are told of church initiatives in engaging with local communities.

**Evaluation**

The Hard Gospel Project appointed independent consultants, Macaulay Associates, to conduct an annual evaluation of the Project. Progress is assessed against the aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the Project.

**Funding**

Funding for the Project has been secured from a range of sources:

- The International Fund for Ireland Community Bridges Programme;
- The Department of Foreign Affairs (ROI);
- The Church of Ireland;
- The Church of Ireland Priorities Fund;
- The Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.