

APPENDIX H

Hard Gospel Implementation Working Group

Interim report and proposals from the Hard Gospel Implementation Working Group to the Standing Committee, March 2009.

The Hard Gospel Implementation Working Group has met on six occasions and presents its interim report and proposals to the Standing Committee regarding the implementation and mainstreaming of the main themes of the Hard Gospel Project in the Church of Ireland. Two of these meetings were by teleconference, which the group found very effective as a working method.

The Working Group expresses its thanks to the members of the Hard Gospel Committee, its Chairman, the Very Revd Patrick Rooke, the Archbishop of Armagh, the Revd Doug Baker and the Revd Earl Storey for the generosity of their time in working with the Implementation Group and assisting it in the development of its proposals, along with the inputs from the Standing Committee group chaired by the Rt Reverend Alan Abernethy.

The Hard Gospel project reminds us that we are loved unconditionally by God, so we are called to love one another unconditionally, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, race or background, and therefore we put forward the vision of a Christian Church that affirms the value of diversity. The committee focused on how our organisation can be developed to work in such a way that this vision of our Church shines forth.

The Working Group considers that many of the proposals emerging from the three years of the Hard Gospel Project reflect the need for a combination of organisational and cultural change.

Organisational change means change to our systems, structures and processes. Cultural change means a change in attitude and how we live. The Hard Gospel is a movement of the Spirit within the Church of Ireland, not just a programme to introduce new rules and policies.

Successful change needs to be championed by each of us. It is an opportunity for active witness. The Hard Gospel asked the question: “Who is our neighbour?” Now, as a Church, we need to highlight the answer to that question in terms of the key themes and values that apply within the Church and wider society.

The aims outlined in the Bishops’ Mission Statement have been of value in defining the three key themes to inspire our Church’s work – growth, unity and service. These now need to be

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considered alongside the values of the Hard Gospel Project – living positively with difference, being accountable and reflecting Gospel valu

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9.22	External relations
a	Proactive, engaging wider society
b	Dialogue, Loyal Orders, loyalist communities, GAA, Travelling community, victims groups, gender
c	Relationship building with African/new Churches
d	Maintaining anti sectarianism and pro-diversity themes at heart of communications strategy
e	Leaders to speak out on hate crime
f	Develop inter-faith work

Proposal 3

The Archbishops and Bishops of the Church are asked to consider the following items:

For the consideration of the Archbishops and Bishops	
9.21 - internal	
i	Senior clergy to give leadership
b	Guidelines for diocesan selection processes, raise diversity
m	Diocesan action plans to be developed
n	Parish co-ordinators to be appointed
m&n	Could benefit from engagement by Parish development, CIYD, Children's ministry, to reach all generations in the Church.
k	Training re diversity issues for clergy, dioceses, parishes
p	1999 Declaration to be widely used
9.22 External	
a	Proactive, engaging wider society
e	Leaders to speak out on hate crime

Proposal 4

The Theological Institute is asked to consider the following items and to recommend objectives with a timeframe and resourcing plan, which are to be returned to the Hard Gospel Implementation Working Group:

For the consideration of the Theological Institute	
9.21 - internal	
k	Training re diversity issues for clergy, dioceses, parishes
p	1999 Declaration to be widely used

The Future of the Hard Gospel

The challenge of dealing with difference is now a universal concern. Through the Hard Gospel Project the Church of Ireland has led the way in examining itself, its membership and its structures on how we deal with difference. As a Church we have to thank the Hard Gospel

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Project team for all they have done. The Project has come to an end. Now, as a Church we have to decide whether this is the end, or the end of the beginning.

The Revd Doug Baker speaking at General Synod in 2007 said *“Success (of the Hard Gospel Project) would involve an integration of the themes and priorities of the Hard Gospel into the ongoing work of every board, committee, and agency of central church structures, and of every group in each parish – so that whenever the Hard Gospel staff, committee and name fade from memory in the Church of Ireland its essence remains. Can the Church of Ireland do it? Absolutely. There is high level support from key leadership and there is plenty of easily identifiable action for every person here to get on with now...”*

This was quoted by the author of the Final Evaluation of the Hard Gospel Project who concluded “that the Church of Ireland should put in place the necessary structures, strategies and resources to continue its Hard Gospel process as a long-term mainstream initiative within the Church that will create both internal change and practical action in local communities on diversity issues”.

So this is not the end but only the end of the beginning. Each of us has a duty to continue the Hard Gospel Process. After all it was Jesus who gave us the command “to love God ... and your neighbor as yourself”.

HARD GOSPEL - DIVERSITY AUDIT

9. Conclusion/Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

The following recommendations are based upon our analysis of the views expressed qualitatively or quantitatively, during the period of the Diversity Audit. They draw together a number of suggested actions set out in previous sections of the report.

We believe that our recommendations should be examined at length and adopted by the Church of Ireland as the foundations for a detailed action plan that will equip the Church of Ireland to take forward its mission in these changing and challenging times.

9.2 Recommendations

We have set out our recommendations in terms of internal and external issues for ease of reference. In doing so we hope that the Church will see past cultural and procedural norms and show leadership and character in taking forward these recommendations which we believe will strengthened the witness and ministry of the Church of Ireland.

9.21 Internally

9.21a Review of central structures should adopt approaches to increase participation from laity, especially from younger people, women and ethnic minorities. In particular:

- Consideration should be given to establishing a target % of female laity on each committee.
- A programme should be commenced to encourage those of other nationality/ethnicity to develop through the clergy and laity of the Church.

9.21b Dioceses should be provided with guidelines for selection of committee nominees designed to increase involvement from those under represented.

9.21c Review of central structures should adopt approaches to ensure balance on committees is reflective, in a balanced way, of all Dioceses and of Church's membership in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

9.21d Committee meetings need to be reviewed and adjusted to maximise opportunity for laity to attend including holding more meetings at weekends and more outside of Dublin.

9.21e Length of committee service should be restricted (unless other nominees are not forthcoming).

9.21f Committees should communicate plans/outcomes clearly to Central Communications so that parishioners can be involved in key plans/developments.

9.21g Church should play an active role in addressing prejudiced racial attitudes.

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9.21h An agreed, sensitive approach should be implemented in relation to the church's ministry to gay and lesbians within the church and in wider society.

9.21i Senior clergy should openly recognise challenges of diversity and provide unified, clear and accountable leadership.

9.21j Need to create dialogue space at all levels of the Church with central dialogue occurring through a forum that engages representatives of all central structures/committees. This should be chaired by a senior member of the clergy and act as an advisory body to Standing Committee, potentially facilitated by the Hard Gospel Project.

9.21k Training on how to approach diversity issues and engage in dialogue should be provided to all clergy and made available via Dioceses to parishes.

9.21l A diversity good practice guide should be developed and made available throughout the Church.

9.21m Dioceses should identify key diversity challenges for their area and develop appropriate Diocesan action plans.

9.21n Each parish should appoint a voluntary co-ordinator to promote and develop their parishes contribution to the Hard Gospel objectives.

9.21o In developing new approaches the Church should draw from good practice in the Anglican Communion and in other Christian denominations.

9.21p As part of the policy review, the Church should agree to use more widely the 1999 Declaration on the Articles.

9.22 Externally

9.22a The Church must be more proactive in engaging wider society on a regular and informative manner.

9.22b A vehicle for dialogue must be created and maintained to address sensitive issues with Loyal Orders and loyalist communities.

9.22c Relationships should be built with the growing African/ new church sector across Ireland but especially in Dublin.

9.22d Publicising the work the Church is doing to address sectarianism and prejudice should be an integral part of the Church's communication strategy.

9.22e Leaders need to provide strong Christian leadership in their communities by being quick to speak out on hate crime.

9.22f The church should seek to expand its understanding and engagement with other world faiths that are becoming more evident in Ireland.