

GENERAL SYNOD 2009

CHURCH IN SOCIETY COMMITTEE

**Comments by the Chairperson, the Right Reverend Dr Michael Jackson,
Bishop of Clogher**

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE

The Church in Society Committee has, from its inception, sought to bring within the active life of the Church of Ireland a range of issues and events which, at General Synod and throughout the year, offers opportunities to reflect on life in the wider society beyond church buildings and church systems. We have always felt this to be important if the church is not to become so inward-looking as to cease grappling with a reality which is broader and deeper than the minutiae of the life of the church, narrowly defined. However diverse, controversial, progressive or conservative that wider reality may be, it is the place of mission and it remains under God.

THE CREDIT CRUNCH – PASTORAL CONCERN AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN AID AND MISSION

Over the last year and particularly during the last six months, events in the wider society and in the global context have overcome all of us, reducing to penury countless individuals among older and younger members of the population alike. A Credit Crunch, a Recession, eats all in front of it and takes no prisoners. The seriousness of this in relation to the morale of members of society, as we form a society, is as yet incalculable. The abject failure of those best placed to predict its coming and its repeated seismic impact on people who entrusted their personal savings and business aspirations to the financial institutions is matched only by the continued ‘toughing it out’ by these people. It is made all the more galling by their expecting so-called ordinary people to take their

explanations and self-justifications seriously. To even the amateur observer, it seems clear that a high-risk strategy in relation to risk itself turned international markets, and in particular property development and sale, into what many of us cannot call anything other than *a poker playground*.

With a clear sense that throughout Ireland the impact of recession is deepening daily, and with an equally strong realization that the poor and the exploited abroad will suffer inexplicable alienation and hardship through diminishing support for global aid and mission agencies alike, the Committee brings to Members of the General Synod a booklet entitled: *Pastoral Care in the Recession 2009*. I should like to thank Dean Wynne in particular for the alacrity with which this has been produced. We realize that the need is greater than anything which we can put on paper, but our hope is that Members of Synod will not only read it but implement its practical aspects locally in parishes and communities – ever keeping alive the urgent needs of those abroad whose plight is much worse than our own. Members of churches have a pivotal role in a response which, although it will not solve the financial difficulties in which people find themselves, can go a long way through care, support, listening and practical help. It can make a vital contribution in restoring the dignity of the human person to those who have suffered and who may well be too devastated or embarrassed to speak of what has happened to them or what they have done.

STRUCTURAL WORKING WITH OTHER COMMITTEES AND INITIATIVES

Structurally, the Committee seeks to work more closely with the Board of Social Action (NI) and the Board of Social Responsibility (RI) in order to consolidate practical action and theological reflection. Also, it is concerned not to let the insights of the Hard Gospel Project, itself endorsed by General Synod, die in the self-understanding of the Church of Ireland. The Committee will therefore work alongside the Hard Gospel Implementation Group in keeping alive the agenda of addressing difference with respect and courage. Both the Church and the society at large show signs of slippage in the directions of

exclusivity and diminishment. These attitudes of prejudice need constantly to be challenged and refuted if we are to take our place with credibility as church in society.