

APPENDIX R
PARISH DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP
REPORT 2010

MEMBERSHIP

Rev D Bain	Rev R Jackson
Mrs B Barrett (Administrator)	Mr AC McElhinney
Rev WKM Brew	Mrs C O’Laoire
Rt Rev KH Clarke	Mr J Tyrell
Rev DP Hoey (Chairman)	Rev AM Wilkinson

The twenty-five parishes, from across the Church of Ireland that were accepted to be part of the Church21 Parish Development Programme are currently just over the half-way stage of the two-year process.

The framework for the Church21 journey looks something like this:

- *The Team Together Day* which sets out to give an outline of the process and to encourage the parish team members to think about their role.
- A six-session preparation course designed to help the parishes identify their key areas for development.
- A three-day conference offering parishes help to shape and share their vision.
- A year-long period of facilitation with external support and accountability designed to help parishes to identify clear priorities for the future and to develop an action plan for implementing them.
- A Follow-up Day for parishes to share their stories and to identify what will help them keep motivated for development.

In practice, each parish approaches the task in a slightly different way and there is flexibility within the programme to allow for that.

Given that each parish had a different starting point, the Working Group is encouraged at reports of what is being achieved. In some cases, that is quantifiable in terms of specific new initiatives that have been started as a result of the process. In others, the progress is more easily, but no less commendably, identified by pointing to such things as a greater sense of shared decision making, an increased atmosphere of prayer or a sense that settings goals for the future is not just a helpful thing to do but is essential if spiritual progress is to be made.

In each case, the parish’s facilitator is encouraging the development of a clearly expressed vision and working with the parish team to formulate an action plan to enable the vision to be implemented over a period of time.

The Working Group, out of its reflection on the first Church21 Programme, recognised how vital to the process is the part played by the parish teams and has, accordingly, tried to offer more ongoing support and encouragement to those team members. The addition of an extra event, *a Team Together Day*, at the early stage of the process, and a regular email *Reflection* offering practical ideas and encouragement, are examples of how this support is being offered.

Standing Committee – Report 2010

Another key part of the programme is the guiding role played by the parish facilitators, a group of seventeen men and women who give freely of their time to work alongside the parish teams to ask key questions, share stories, and offer an external perspective, all with a prayerful and scriptural focus. The facilitators came together several times, before and during the programme, to avail of training and to share resources and experience.

The parishes and their facilitators have been encouraged to give feedback at each stage of the journey. Comments on the Team Day, the Preparation Course and the Church21 Conference indicated that participants found them mostly very helpful and extra comments suggesting improvements will be helpful to those planning any future programmes.

In many ways the Church21 Conference, held last September, is seen as the showcase for Church21. Again, Rev Ian Coffey made a hugely helpful contribution as keynote speaker, bringing the right balance of challenge and assurance to parishes standing on the verge of a new venture of faith. The mix of clear teaching, shared experience, and space to reflect and engage with God and each other, seemed to offer participants the motivation to move forward. An undoubted highlight for many was the experience of worship, led by Mrs Carolyn O’Laoire and Ballyholme Parish Music Group in a variety of forms, from Taize to Iona, in the beautiful chapel. And the evening with the Wicklow Gospel Choir was simply unforgettable.

A new and improved website (www.church21.org) has been set up and is being added to regularly.

In addition to the website the Working Group has sought to share some of the stories and ideas emerging along the way through the distribution of the Church21 Newsletter to every parish.

None of this would be possible without the commitment of the members of the parish teams. It is encouraging to hear many stories of how parish team members are stepping up to the line in terms of leadership, often in ways that are taking them beyond personal comfort zones.

Towards the end of 2009 the Church21 Administrator Mrs Annette McGrath stepped down in order to take up a full-time post in the diocese of Down and Dromore. The members of the Working Group and all the Church21 participants are grateful to Annette for the flair and commitment she brought to the programme. Since Mrs Brigid Barrett took up the post she has made her own stamp on it and we are fortunate to be able to benefit from her many skills.

God’s ideas, not just good ideas; this is what Church21 seeks for every parish. That we would have a clear and compelling vision, borne out of a real sense of listening to God and to one another; and that we would then have the courage to step out in faith and make it become reality; this is our aim. We have a bit further to go before we get there but we’re on the way. We’re definitely on the way. And we’re discovering that journeying can be as exciting as arriving.