

**APPENDIX D**

**BOARD FOR SOCIAL THEOLOGY IN ACTION REPORT 2011**

**Membership**

Mr Andrew Brannigan  
Mrs Anne Brown  
Rev Dr Rory Corbett  
Rev Adrian Dorrian  
Mr Kenneth Gibson  
Very Rev Kenneth Hall  
The Most Rev Alan Harper  
Mr Samuel Harper  
The Rt Rev Michael Jackson (Interim Chair)  
Rev Vickie Lynch  
Mrs Hilary McClay  
Rev Dr Judith McGaffin  
The Most Rev Dr John Neill (Retired January 2011)

**Function:**

The new Board for Social Theology in Action is proactive and seeks to identify, contribute to, challenge and develop areas of living today where the mission of the Church can be active and the love of God shared. It does this through the development of reports, resource materials and by developing projects that apply theological perspectives to public issues in a challenge to Christian living.

The new Board for Social Theology in Action is reactive and would respond to reports and documents and would be free to release statements in the name of the Board but for statements to be recognised as official statements of the Church of Ireland they would have to be submitted to the Standing Committee for ratification.

Areas of interest (not exhaustive) - the environment, ecumenics, political and European issues, legislation, health and social care and medical ethics.

**Executive Summary**

The first part of 2010 saw the official formation of the Church of Ireland Board for Social Theology in Action. The Board grew out of a process of consultation between the Board for Social Action NI, the Board for Social Responsibility RI and the Church in Society Committee. Members were appointed after application and by a process of selection that included interviews and the collection of references. The membership of the Board includes a bishop appointed by the archbishops and bishops, an Honorary Secretary appointed by the Honorary Secretaries. The archbishops and chairperson of the General Purposes Finance Committee of the Church of Ireland Board for Social Responsibility (NI) also are ex-officio members of the Board.

The inaugural meeting took place in October 2010. As per the original terms of reference, it was intended that this initial meeting would be followed up by a residential meeting during which members of the Board would draw up a new mission statement and affirm new terms of reference. This meeting, due for December 2010, was postponed as

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a result of the adverse weather conditions.

A number of working groups from the Board have collaborated on press releases on a number of issues and continue to work to respond to public consultation documents on a wide range of subjects.

In October and December 2010, press releases were issued on behalf of the Board in relation to the current economic situation in Britain and Ireland and the consultation on the relaxation of Sunday Trading Laws in NI, launched by the Minister for Social Development, respectively. These releases are appended. Both of these ongoing issues will continue to feature on the Board's agenda.

The members of the Board would like to express gratitude to those members of staff in both Church Houses (Dublin and Belfast) for their support – in particular Jenny Polden for her co-ordination of the formation process and the Church of Ireland Press Officer Paul Harron and the Press Office for their advice in relation to press releases.

The members of the Board are also keen to express their congratulations to Bishop Michael Jackson, interim chair, on his election as Archbishop of Dublin. The Board looks forward to the continuing support of the new Archbishop, as well as welcoming a new member to the episcopacy in 2011.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Board for Social Theology Comments on Current Economic Circumstances**

25<sup>th</sup> October 2010

Alongside the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the Board for Social Theology recognises that the Comprehensive Spending Review from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in London and the imminent Dublin Budget will lead to difficult times in the years ahead. The cuts to both benefits and public sector jobs will inevitably impact on lifestyles and have costs at a human level.

The Board for Social Theology calls on members of the Church of Ireland and the wider community, North and South, to remain committed to the Christian principles that underpin society at its best. We affirm the life-giving value of relational living, which has always been a premium in Irish society.

In the run-up to Christmas, we encourage all people to remember the value of living within our own means and of taking a responsible approach to the season. We ask people to remain faithful to charitable giving – conscious of those in the world, at home and abroad, who have less than nothing.

We call on society at large and particularly decision makers in Dublin, Belfast and London, to remain committed to protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

**APPENDIX 2**

**Board for Social Theology Responds to Social Development Minister’s Call for Views on Sunday Trading Review:**

20<sup>th</sup> December 2010

‘An extension of opening hours on a Sunday would put more pressure on workers, small businesses and churches and also be detrimental to family and community life.’

The Church of Ireland Board for Social Theology is disappointed to note the Social Development Minister’s recent statement considering the extension of Sunday trading hours. The current Sunday trading arrangements were reviewed as recently as 2006 across the UK and widely concluded to have struck the right balance. Given these conclusions and the extensive work required to ensure a robust review process, it seems wasteful to call for another review so soon. Research shows the current arrangements also have the support of Unions, workers, small businesses, church groups and majority of the public. It is therefore puzzling that the minister should be pushing for a review, despite no significant call for such from the community.

With increasing pressure and stress on family and community life, the current arrangements for Sundays allow a day for relationships, rest and recreation. Such a day encourages families and communities to reconnect with each other at the end of a busy week and before another busy week starts. It is also a day that takes on extra significance for the 45% of people in Northern Ireland who regularly attend church.

An extension of opening hours on a Sunday would put more pressure on workers, small businesses and churches and also be detrimental to family and community life. The minister proposes a review that seems more inclined to benefit large retail stores than small businesses and ordinary families. Recent economic events have reminded us of the importance of placing community profit above that of big business.

Government is increasingly recognising the role played by churches in Northern Ireland, but adding the pressure of more Sunday working hours will inevitably impact on people’s goodwill and their desire to contribute through church at a community level. At a time of economic cutbacks the role of community organisations, volunteers and churches is taking on increasing significance and the Minister’s proposal runs the risk of inhibiting this role.

The Board has great respect for much of the work undertaken by the minister but would urge him not to pursue any extension of Sunday opening hours. The Board is keen to meet with the Minister in order to engage with him on this and other social and community issues.