APPENDIX G

Report from Children's Ministry Working Group November 2010

INTRODUCTION

The group has met on a number of occasions and carried out research building on that recently undertaken in Connor Diocese and through fresh research with clergy. Clergy research was not carried out in Connor and Down and Dromore due to recent research in these dioceses. This report is designed as a discussion paper.

The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy, as a member of the sub-group, has agreed to lead a discussion with the archbishops and bishops at their January meeting to draw out their diocesan responses to this report.

Following discussion, analysis of the research and group members' experiences in children's ministry the following key areas and recommendations have been developed.

KEY AREAS

Growth

- Good quality children's ministry will produce strong church growth.
- Contrariwise, when children's ministry is ignored church growth declines.

Unity

- Children's ministry is a distinct ministry and must be equally valued alongside other aspects of church ministry

Service

- The ministry of those involved as leaders should be more valued through recognition, support and training.
- Leaders and clergy should have training in both faith development and practical skills before they engage in children's ministry.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Every diocese is encouraged to have a vision and strategy for developing children's ministry in their parishes.

2. A Children's Ministry Network should be set up as an official part of the Standing Committee. This group would be made up of a clerical representative from each diocese (similar to a Diocesan Liturgical Officer) plus relevant experts and practitioners. The group would be managed by a small steering group who would be responsible for:

   a. organising meetings of the network on at least an annual basis;
   b. ensuring diocesan representatives have available the most up-to-date
       information on training and resources;
   c. providing a support network for those in an employed role in children's ministry.

3. The Church of Ireland Theological Institute is requested at its earliest convenience to review the place of children's ministry in its current curriculum.

4.   When economic conditions improve the Church of Ireland should be set up a Children's Ministry Department for the whole Church.

Working Group Members -

The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy; Rev Jane Galbraith; Rev Isobel Jackson; Mr Peter Hamill; Rev John McDowell; Rev Anne Taylor; Mrs Jacqui Wilkinson.

RESEARCH RESULTS

LEADERS

258 leaders returned questionnaires, 21% men and 79% women the following were from responses on how they work:

- 63% of leaders are over the age of 40, in another survey carried out recently with youth leaders in churches 62% of youth leaders were under 30.
- 40% are in full-time employment and 28% are in part-time employment.
- 15% of leaders hold a teaching qualification, 17% hold a youth work qualification and 6% hold a theology qualification.
- 58% miss part of church due to children's ministry, 34% of those who miss church do not like missing church.
- 33% attend some other fellowship outside church.
- 17% never meet with leaders outside the children's group.
- 24% never meet with the rector as a leader team outside the children's group.
- 56% have never heard of Building Blocks.
- 65% have not attended any training events in the last year.
- 84% would welcome training in the parish, 73% would welcome training in the Diocese.

The following were the responses on opinions on ministry

- The most popular reasons for children's ministry were 'to bring children to a faith in Jesus (97% agree) and 'to build positive relationships with children' (96%) agree.
- 95% of leaders enjoy being a leader.
- 32% took on being a leader because there was nobody else to do it.
- 59% feel called to being a leader.
- 70% became leaders due to their own childhood experience.
- 53% of leaders believe the children have a faith.
- 64% of leaders are not sure if the children pray on their own regularly.
- 67% of leaders are not sure if the children read the Bible regularly.
- 70% of leaders are happy with the space / environment they work in.
- 61% of leaders would like more time to listen to the children.
- 60% feel they do not know a lot about the Bible.
- 74% would need help from other leaders if they were to change things.
- 63% are happy to be leaders for years to come.
- More than 65% feel their church appreciates what they do, understands their work, and supports them in what they do.

CLERGY

55 parishes sent in returns

Clergy reported an average of 55 children present in each parish

Number of leaders per group averaged between with 6 to 8 leaders
- 91% of parishes have a Sunday School.
- 16% have a Bible club not on a Sunday.
- 17% have a Family ministry.
- 27% have a crèche during services.
- 11% have an after schools club.
- 44% have a church sponsored uniform organisation for under 12s.
- 40% have a music / worship group including under 12s.
- 24% have a Holiday bible club.

Responses to opinion questions

	Agree	Not certain	Disagree
The Church of Ireland should have a vision for children's ministry	98%	2%	0%
My parish has a vision for children' ministry	75%	11%	14%
Working with children is not a high priority in my parish	23%	4%	73%
I need support from the diocese with ministry among children in the parish	67%	26%	7%
Children in my church feel they belong	78%	16%	6%
Building relationships is key to ministry among children	96%	2%	2%
My parish focuses more on family ministry, rather than on a specific children's ministry	36%	26%	38%

QUALITATIVE DATA

Who is responsible for children's ministry in your parish?

- *Most identified either an individual, a team of leaders or teachers.*
- *38/55 (69%) stated that clergy have some responsibility for children's ministry.*

How do you ensure it is part of the wider vision for the parish? *(these are verbatim comments made on the questionnaire)*
- *We have spent a great deal of time listening to parents and our teenagers and have implemented some of their ideas eg. Children's Church during Church,*

instead of Sunday School and bringing all pre-school and Sunday school children together this has been very successful and has increased Church attendances.

- *Inform parishioners of the vision of all levels; for children's ministry and continue communicating the message and encouragement!*
- *Firstly need Sunday school teachers with a vision for children's ministry.*
- *I think there is generally a lack of vision; focus tends to be on maintenance despite my best efforts as Rector. Parishioners welcome involvement of children in worship and activities but wouldn't imagine they see it as part of the wider vision of the parish apart from giving the parish a future.*
- *We always have some of the leaders also on the select vestry so it is always 'on the table' of the select vestry. And the rector and the respective leaders are pro-active making the children and ministry to them a priority in the two parishes. We also work hard at integrating the school into the parish life and vice-versa.*

What training would equip you to better support children's ministry in your parish?
(these are verbatim comments made on the questionnaire)

- *Anything would be a help as I feel I stand on my own.*
- *I have done training I just need more hours.*
- *Liturgical resources.*
- *Perhaps a gathering of leaders from all over Ireland to share ideas!*
- *Perhaps local training and envisioning plus more support with resources and how to use them. Finances and people resources are also an issue.*
- *None that I can think of; just need more children in Church on Sundays to exercise this ministry.*
- *I'm not sure.*
- *Not aware!*
- *Child psychology, child development, basic teaching skills, other people's experience of what works and what doesn't.*
- *Don't know at this stage!*