

**APPENDIX M**

**PARISH DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

**REPORT 2011**

**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Mrs Brigid Barrett (Administrator)	Mr Cyril McElhinney
The Rt Rev Kenneth Clarke, Bishop of Kilmore	Mrs Carolyn O’Laoire
Rev Paul Hoey (Chair)	Mr John Tyrell
Rev Ruth Jackson Noble	

**CONCEPT**

In essence *Church21*, the Church of Ireland programme of parish development, offers parishes a framework development along the following lines:

- participating parishes form teams of parishioners (four lay people along with the rector) to steer the parish through the two-year process;
- a *Team Together Day* sets out to give an outline of the process and to encourage the parish team members to think about their role of communication and guidance;
- a six-session preparation course is run in each parish, ideally during Lent, designed to help parishes to begin to identify key areas for development;
- a three-day conference offers parishes help with the practical skills of shaping and sharing their vision and lets them see how other churches have gone about this process;
- the core of the process is the year-long period of facilitation designed to help parishes to identify clear priorities for the future and to develop an action plan for implementing them;
- a *Follow-up Day* gives parishes an opportunity to measure process and to share their stories and ideas.

The part played by the parish teams is vital since they are the main channels of communication throughout the process.

Each parish is at a different stage and approaches the task in a different way and there is flexibility within the programme to allow for that. This is not a one-size-fits-all venture.

In general, given the variety and spread of the parishes, the Working Group is encouraged by reports of what is being achieved. In some cases, change is quantifiable in terms of specific initiatives that have been started as a result of the process. In others, 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 setting goals for the future is not just a helpful thing to do but is essential if spiritual progress is to be made.

The programme is continually being revised in the light of feedback from participating parishes and facilitators, reflection on our experience of running the programme and in the light of good practice observed elsewhere.

### **PROGRAMME THREE**

Invitations to apply for the third programme were sent out to every parish in Ireland at the start of September 2010. An information day was held in Dublin at the start of November. Applications were prioritised by the Bishops according to specific criteria and another fourteen parishes, from across the Church of Ireland, have signed up to the third *Church21* Parish Development Programme.

In contrast to the last programme, during which the majority of participating parishes were representing dioceses in the northern province of the Church of Ireland, this new batch is predominantly southern based.

The unpredictable geographical spread of parishes makes the process of finding suitable facilitators an interesting one. However, we are very grateful to have a committed and effective group of facilitators in place.

Listening is at the heart of this process; listening to God, to each other and to those around. It generally takes parishes some time to cultivate this sense of listening.

The Working Group is most grateful to those who have agreed to act as parish facilitators. They act as guides, working in close connection with 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 at intervals during the programme, to avail of training and to share resources and experience.

The positive comments about the part played by Rev Ian Coffey as conference speaker has motivated the committee to invite him to participate again.

The website [www.church21.org](http://www.church21.org), is proving to be a valuable resource for parishes and is being added to on a regular basis.

The Working Group has also sought to share some of the stories and ideas emerging from the process in the *Church21 Newsletter* an edition of which is made available twice a year to every parish in the Church of Ireland.

We wish to express gratitude to Mrs Brigid Barrett for all that she does in her role as programme administrator.

During the past year Rev Adrian Wilkinson, Mr Desmond Bain and Rev Kevin Brew resigned. The members of the Working Group are most grateful for their participation and continuing commitment to the work of parish development in the Church of Ireland.

Rev Dorothy McVeigh has taken up membership of the group.