

Board for Social Responsibility (RI) – Report 2007

BOARD FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (RI)

REPORT 2007

MEMBERSHIP

Chairperson: Revd David Catterall
Secretary: Revd David Frazer

Mrs Ann Craig	Miss Vivienne Darling
Revd Nancy Gillespie	Cllr Leonard Hatrick
Mrs Beryl Kinsela	Mrs Freda Steward-Maunders
Revd Canon Desmond Sinnamon	Mrs Mary Thomson
Mr George Glenn (BSR NI)	

SUMMARY

The members of the Board have a vision for the future that envisages them developing practical social care initiatives on behalf of the Church of Ireland. They would wish the General Synod to affirm that vision and ensure that they have the resources to develop their work.

MEMBERSHIP

During the past year, the Board of Social Responsibility (R.I.) has gone through significant change in membership and officers. The Revd Canon Desmond Sinnamon (Dublin and Glendalough) resigned as Chairman and was replaced by the Revd David Catterall (Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh). The Board is grateful to Canon Sinnamon for his dedicated service and is pleased that he agreed to remain a member.

The Revd David Frazer (Meath and Kildare) joined the Board and was appointed Secretary. Other new members include Ms Beryl Kinsela (Mother's Union) and Mr George Glenn (Board of Responsibility NI).

Mr Jim McGaffin resigned as the Northern Board representative and will be sorely missed. The Board wishes to record its deep appreciation of his hard work and dedication.

Mrs Eunice Hall (Clogher) resigned from the Board.

There are now no members of the Board for the dioceses of Limerick, Cork and Clogher and there is significant disquiet among members over the apparent unwillingness of dioceses to appoint new members. It has been suggested that it is difficult to get people from the provinces to travel up to Dublin during the week. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that people with jobs and with family responsibilities find it impossible to commit to weekday morning meetings. The Board is, therefore, reviewing the joint issues of when and where it should meet and, in anticipation of change, would urge the Bishops whose dioceses are unrepresented to seek out new members.

A USEFUL BODY?

Until recently, the Board has operated as a ‘sounding board’ for social issues within the Church and has invited speakers from various fields of social endeavour to address its meetings. It has been agreed that this is not the best way for the Board to use the time and talents of its members and the ‘talking-shop’, ‘opinion-gathering’ function is best left to other committees. The Board members feel that the Holy Spirit is moving them away from words to action. They believe that they can best serve God and the Church of Ireland through practical projects and deeds.

The Board took a fresh look at the reason for its existence and drew up a new mission statement, which reads as follows:

‘The Board of Social Responsibility (RI) exists to identify social needs in various regions and, in interaction with other Church bodies and agencies of care, aims to develop practical projects.’

SOCIAL HOUSING

One of the issues addressed by the Board during the year was the matter of **social and affordable housing**, against the background of house prices. The increase in house prices and mortgage rates has made it difficult for many people to enter the housing market. Those who have a mortgage have found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, as interest rates have increased.

A seminar on the housing issue was planned for September but had to be cancelled, due to a number of factors - not least of which is the fact that the Board is operating without proper financing from central Church funds. Board members are angry and frustrated by the failure of the Budget and Allocations Committee to make any provision for funding of their work. An application for a grant of €4,000 was made, to enable work to proceed in the coming year but no money was forthcoming. The Board was asked to provide further details of its specific intentions regarding a Social Housing Project before funds would be released. The problem is that the Board cannot proceed in a professional manner to assess need and formulate a plan, unless it receives monies. Professionals cannot be engaged on thin air and the promise of possible future payment.

FINANCES

Board members feel that there is a lack of trust in their abilities and their stewardship of resources, on the part of the Budget and Allocations committee and are deeply disturbed by that. The failure to provide any funds means that the Board cannot perform an active and meaningful ministry. As things stand, there is not enough to even pay for secretarial expenses. The Treasurer (Councillor Leonard Hatrick) has control of a bank account that contains €90. This is an intolerable situation and it cannot continue. A realistic and reasonable amount of funding should be made available, without delay, if the Board is to continue to operate.

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The Board is cognisant of the work done by Boards of Social Responsibility and Social Action in other denominations and believes that there is much positive and practical work that it could be doing on behalf of the Church of Ireland. It wishes to have the resources at its disposal to enable it to make a meaningful contribution to the building of a better and more equitable society. The Biblical imperative is to engage meaningfully with society and address the needs of the people. The Board of Social Responsibility believes that the Church of Ireland has been inadequate in its practical response to social needs in Ireland, in recent times and wishes to rectify that situation.

PROVIDING A SERVICE

In recent times, it has been abundantly clear that government is unable and unwilling to provide the full range of social services and voluntary bodies have had to try and fill the gaps in social provision. It is important that the Church of Ireland in the Republic is seen to be making a significant, practical and meaningful contribution to voluntary social services. The Board of Social Responsibility (RI) would like to be in a position to deliver the quality care that some people require by, for example, employing a full time social worker. The Board believes that the Church needs urgently to find the funding for such a position.

Out of the small amount of money that was in its account, the Board made three small grants in 2006. €200 was given to the work of the Meath and Kildare chaplaincy at Mosney Refugee and Asylum Centre and €100 was given to PACT.