

THE HARD GOSPEL

DEALING POSITIVELY WITH DIFFERENCE IN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

CRU RECEIVED
27 JUN 2003
OFMDFM

A SCOPING STUDY REPORT TO THE SECTARIANISM EDUCATION PROJECT

GARETH I HIGGINS

**RESEARCH TEAM:
MICHAEL BLYTHMAN
CATHY CURRAN
SARAH PARKINSON**

JANUARY 2003

THE HARD GOSPEL

DEALING POSITIVELY WITH DIFFERENCE IN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

A SCOPING STUDY REPORT TO THE SECTARIANISM EDUCATION PROJECT

GARETH I HIGGINS

**RESEARCH TEAM:
MICHAEL BLYTHMAN
CATHY CURRAN
SARAH PARKINSON**

JANUARY 2003

I know people in all faith and honesty are doing their best...I would go back many years...it took so long for us to walk over and shake the other person's hand, and in the same way that's where we're struggling through times [today] when we should be twenty steps on rather than where we are at the moment. And again, to be making peace, but peace on our terms, or peace with our flock in mind isn't necessarily peace, and it mightn't even be the right starting point. Making peace looks at the rightness of the situation, not trying to support our own church or our own group. And if we have to make hard decisions and we lose what we call support because of them, well that's fine. That's my view, anyway. So maybe...this [is] the first step in that. – **Rector, Summer 2002**

I want to see a return to the *hard* gospel. This is the solution to the problem of sectarianism. The *hard* gospel is...that you love God and love your neighbour as yourself. End of story. – **Retired rector, Summer 2002**

CONTENTS

<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>	5
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	13
<u>METHODOLOGY</u>	15
<u>RESPONDENTS BIOGRAPHICAL DATA</u>	21
<u>RESEARCH FINDINGS</u>	21
SECTION ONE	
<u>1: HOPES FOR THE PROCESS</u>	28
<u>2: DEFINING SECTARIANISM</u>	31
<u>3: CHURCH OF IRELAND IDENTITY</u>	37
<u>4: CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND STRUCTURE</u>	
<u>GENERAL SYNOD AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP</u>	46
<u>5: NORTH-SOUTH DIFFERENCE</u>	55
<u>6: ETHNIC DIFFERENCE AND ASYLUM SEEKERS</u>	60
<u>7: POLITICAL DIFFERENCE</u>	68
<u>8: THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE</u>	73
<u>9: RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CHURCHES AND INTER-CHURCH ACTIVITY</u>	78
<u>10: WORLD RELIGIONS</u>	94
<u>11: PEACE/ADDRESSING SECTARIANISM INITIATIVES: PRIORITIES, ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES</u>	100

<u>12: STRATEGY FOR THE SECTARIANISM EDUCATION PROJECT</u>	139
<u>13: CHALLENGES FOR THE SECTARIANISM EDUCATION PROJECT</u>	142
<u>14: THE LOYAL ORDERS AND DRUMCREE</u>	146
<u>SECTION TWO</u>	
<u>15: WELCOMING/INVOLVING NEW MEMBERS AND BOUNDARIES BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS</u>	149
<u>16: GENDER DIFFERENCES AND SEXUALITY</u>	153
<u>17: YOUNG PEOPLE</u>	161
<u>18: OLDER PEOPLE</u>	166
<u>19: RESPONDING TO SOCIETY IN GENERAL</u>	169
<u>20: TRAINING/RESOURCING OF CLERGY</u>	171
<u>21: ISSUES OUTSIDE THE REMIT OF THE SECTARIANISM EDUCATION PROJECT</u>	176
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	177
<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>	179

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a substantial study of attitudes toward, experiences of, and needs regarding dealing positively with sectarianism and difference in the Church¹ of Ireland. It is one of the most comprehensive pieces of research yet attempted into one church or denomination in Ireland. The Sectarianism Education Project (SEP) of the Church of Ireland commissioned research which involved interviewing a representative sample of clergy and lay people across the church; all the clergy of the church were also given the opportunity to contribute through written questionnaires.

Its findings are summarised and grouped in the following areas:

Hopes for the Process

- There is a clear recognition by respondents that sectarianism is not compatible with Christian faith.
- The Sectarianism Education Project represents the hope that members of the Church of Ireland would be equipped to become more confident in their inclusive Christian identity, engage in good citizenship, make a positive impact on society, and experience the freedom to be truly Christian and part of a diverse but united church.
- There is an aspiration to deal effectively with important issues in church government (rather than the potential pre-occupation with 'technical matters'). There is a recognition that dealing with sectarianism may encourage the possibility of renewal in the church.
- Respondents acknowledge that the cost of sectarianism is too high for the Church of Ireland to continue paying, and that the church must develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to equip its members to challenge sectarianism and other negative forms of dealing with difference, while articulating and living out a positive alternative.

Defining Sectarianism

- Respondents see sectarianism as an important issue for the church, feel that the church needs to improve how it addresses this, and most are generally open to change.
- Respondents are often unclear about what 'sectarianism' actually means and find it difficult to imagine what might replace it.
- Some respondents do not feel that sectarianism, as they understand it, is a pressing issue for them.
- Some respondents recognise that other forms of difference are often approached negatively and should be addressed as part of the SEP process.

¹ A note on terminology: In this report the use of the word 'church' is meant as follows: 'Church' with a capital 'C' refers to the wider Christian Church, while 'church' with a small 'c' refers to the Church of Ireland.

Church of Ireland Identity

- Respondents believe that Church of Ireland identity is inclusive and that being known as a Christian is more important than denominational identity.
- With some exceptions, respondents generally do not identify with the term 'Protestant', usually due to its perceived negative connotations in Northern Ireland.
- Respondents did not, on the whole, consider national identity to be a matter of contention.
- There are differences in Church of Ireland identity expressed in terms of those parts of the church based in separate political and legislative jurisdictions.
- The Drumcree controversy negatively colours many respondents' perceptions of Church of Ireland identity and this often contributes to misunderstanding between both those parts of the church based in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and those with little or no direct relation to or experience of the local Drumcree context.

Church Government and Structure, Synod and Public Leadership

- Parish ministry is the key vessel and core expression of the Church of Ireland, and the diocesan structure is vital to the development of the SEP.
- Diocesan strategies may tend to be reactive; the potential of the diocese for positively assisting clergy in responding to difficult issues should be explored.
- Lay ministry is not given a high priority and there is both a lack of understanding of the limits placed on Select Vestries by the constitution and regret that Select Vestries are constitutionally limited to focus on technical issues such as finance and property rather than sharing responsibility for spiritual leadership.
- There is little connection in terms of agenda, style and output between parish ministry and General Synod, often to the extent where General Synod is considered irrelevant in the context of everyday parish ministry.

North-South Difference

- There are both obvious and subtle differences between the context, experience, attitudes, and activities of those parts of the Church of Ireland based in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic.
- Most (but not all) respondents in the Republic believe that sectarianism is an issue confined to Northern Ireland.
- Some Northern Ireland-based respondents feel insecure and potentially threatened by the southern representation of church members from the Republic of Ireland at the General Synod, although most respondents appreciate the diversity such representation brings. These

responses were not simply expressed in relation to interpretations of 'democratic method' and political sensitivities, but also related to a broader range of cultural differences that are perceived to distinguish the character of the church in the two areas.

- Respondents from the West of Ireland sometimes feel isolated from the rest of the church.
- There is a lack of practical relating between the parts of the church based in Northern Ireland and the Republic and between the culturally distinct elements of the church in different parts of the island.

Ethnic Difference And Asylum Seekers

- The issue of ethnic minorities and asylum seekers has only recently emerged for the Church of Ireland and, although some good practice exists, most respondents have little or no experience in the area.
- Public leadership on this issue, particularly from Archbishops Eames and Empey, was supported by many respondents.
- There is mostly good will toward perceived church policy on ethnic minorities and asylum seekers, although more conservative attitudes prevail among a minority of respondents.
- Clergy do not, on the whole, feel resourced to respond to the issue.

Political Difference

- Although the Church of Ireland holds within it people of diverse political views, political difference is often ignored or inadequately handled.
- It is widely perceived that there is an identification of the church within Northern Ireland with the unionist world view; some respondents see this as unhealthy or unhelpful.
- Some members of the Church of Ireland who are conservative unionists may feel that the church undervalues them or does not recognise their integrity.
- Some parishes face particularly contentious political issues in everyday ministry, or at certain times of year, and may need further support from the wider church.
- The proper use of flags and emblems is an issue about which there are diverse views.

Theological Differences

- Theological differences exist widely throughout the Church of Ireland; and the church's diversity can be a strength but can also hamper the possibility of dialogue about controversial issues.
- Theology and culture are easily conflated; and some respondents feel that their own theological conservatism counts against them in the context of the wider church.

- There is a lack of context for discussion of theology among clergy and lay people; lay people are not usually equipped theologically beyond the basics.
- There is some understanding of sectarianism and difference as being issues that require a theological response, but this has not yet been fully developed.
- It is important to recognise that the question of sectarianism and difference is not ultimately resolvable by the church alone.
- It must always be borne in mind that addressing sectarianism and difference is a spiritual, as well as a practical, task; specific liturgical resources may be useful in helping to address it.

Relationship With Other Churches And Inter-Church Activity

- Some Church of Ireland parishes have substantial relationships with other local churches, usually Methodist, Roman Catholic or Presbyterian; although there are north-south variations.
- There are sometimes practical (distance, time commitment) and philosophical (doctrinal differences, styles of leadership) challenges to deeper inter-church relations.
- Some respondents felt relations with more conservative Protestant denominations were often negative.
- Ecumenism does not necessarily challenge difficult and emotive issues. There may be a need to define an agenda for inter-church relations that goes beyond shared worship, or enables those with a philosophical objection to participate in such relations.

World Religions

- Like ethnic minorities and asylum seekers, the issue of relating to world religions is a relatively recent development for the Church of Ireland.
- Discussions about the issue are at an early, undeveloped stage.
- There is a diversity of views within the church about relating to world religions, ranging from 'no experience' (majority view), to advocacy of cordial relations or co-operation on social matters only, to a small number of respondents who support ecumenism in an inter-faith context.
- There is a concern to maintain the church's teaching on the uniqueness of Christ without denying the possibility of learning from other world religions.
- Some respondents recognise that the issue of relating to world religions will become increasingly important for the church in the future.

Peace/Addressing Sectarianism Initiatives: Priorities, Attitudes, Experiences

- There seems to be a relationship between theological perspective and attitudes toward initiatives that aim to build peace and challenge sectarianism.

- There is openness to using such initiatives, but other time commitments may inhibit this.
- There is a consensus that Sunday services are a key resource of the church and may be the only forum in which most people encounter the SEP.
- Awareness and experience of such initiatives is somewhat limited; clergy generally do not feel equipped to facilitate such initiatives.
- There are similar philosophical challenges as with inter-church activity; perhaps especially the perception that these initiatives 'preach only to the converted', or do not get to the heart of the matter.
- Some respondents acknowledged that other forms of difference are similar to sectarianism and may be approached in similar ways.

Strategy For The Sectarianism Education Project

- The clergy are seen as the gatekeepers of change and should be involved closely in the development of, and commitment to, a sectarianism education project.
- Respondents feel that the SEP should model the values of good practice it aspires to; this includes setting realistic goals and tangible outcomes, with a defined beginning and end to the first phase of the project, and a long-term strategy for the future.
- Many respondents still feel that the relationship between the Church of Ireland and the Orange Order has not been resolved, and should be addressed as part of the SEP.
- Local strategy is required to implement the vision of the SEP and this should be developed in a partnership, rather than imposed 'from above'; different approaches may be required in different places.
- Some kind of centralised resourcing, especially regarding communication and envisioning may be required; this could include (at a minimum) both human resources and a website.
- Partnership with other agencies could be extremely valuable and help avoid the pitfalls of duplication.

Challenges For The Sectarianism Education Project

- Many respondents are wary of the bureaucracy of the church and fear that this may stifle the SEP.
- Some clergy feel unprotected or ill equipped to respond to potentially controversial issues.
- Lay people may not be sufficiently confident in their own faith identity to engage in meaningful dialogue with others.
- Some respondents have had negative experiences of peace/addressing sectarianism initiatives; this may inhibit their participation in future.
- Some feel that men may not participate.

- The time pressures of parish life may inhibit the development of the SEP.
- The temptation exists to seek an immediate solution, which may, conversely, create more challenges.

The Loyal Orders And Drumcree

- The Drumcree situation is still one of the most controversial issues facing the church, eliciting a wide range of responses.
- Some respondents acknowledge that it may be too easy to propose solutions to a problem at General Synod without the cost of having to implement them; the General Synod may not be the appropriate forum to take such decisions. It does not appear, to some, to have the authority to implement them.
- Many respondents would like the SEP to continue to address the relationship between the church and the Orange Order.
- It may be the case that the attempt to resolve Drumcree at the micro-level has inhibited the process of addressing sectarianism and other forms of difference at both wider and local levels.
- The Church's stance towards the constitutional position of Northern Ireland perhaps needs to be further clarified; it may be perceived by some that part of the church's role should be to defend the union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain.

Welcoming/Involving New Members And Boundaries Between Believers And Non-Believers

- There is a perception that there are 'softer' boundaries in the Church of Ireland between believers and non-believers than other churches.
- There is a challenge to help people to make a transition from being 'visitors' to being 'family'.
- There is a challenge also to help people to make a transition from nominalism to committed faith and practice.
- There is sometimes no strategic process in place for existing members to welcome new people, and people are unsure of what will be expected of or offered to new members once they begin integrating into parish life.
- Respondents acknowledge the challenge to evangelism, but there is a wide range of views regarding this.

Gender Differences And Sexuality

- Gender differences are not generally seen as contentious, although some respondents feel that traditional stereotypical gender roles prevail within the church and some parishes would apparently not accept a female rector.
- There is a consensus that issues of sexuality are some of the most difficult to respond to and usually the most inadequately handled by the church.
- Most respondents agreed that there should be a wider discussion of these issues; such a discussion should not be seen as 'giving way' on historical teachings, but simply addressing the issues as presented in contemporary society.
- The SEP may not be able to deal adequately with the issue of sexuality; this may perhaps be approached in co-operation with the Church in Society committee.

Young People

- Young people often feel that the church is not relevant to them and many leave the church soon after confirmation. Many have a deep commitment to Christ, and wish to be involved in the life of the church, but feel excluded for a variety of reasons.
- Young people are often more engaged in peace/addressing sectarianism work than older people due to their experiences at school and through other initiatives.
- There is a lack of youth work provision in some parishes. There is a need to assess the relationship between extra-parochial youth work and parish work. Can young people be best served by para-church initiatives? Is there an unhelpful repetition of resources across various youth agencies due to lack of communication or strategic relations?
- The example of Summer Madness should be noted by the SEP. Summer Madness has not sought to be an explicit 'anti-sectarian initiative' but has organically become one.
- There is a need to examine how the church can creatively approach age differences, and the potential for inter-generational conflict or misunderstanding.
- It is vital to include young people in the SEP as part of addressing sectarianism and difference for future generations.

Older People

- Older people are one of the most valuable resources of the Church of Ireland; this may be of particular interest to the SEP, which may wish to engage retired people in the delivery of the project as resource persons or intercessors.
- Respondents generally feel that the needs of older people are well catered for by the church.
- However, there may be a lack of strategy for utilising their potential.
- The contribution of older people to the church should not be underestimated.

Responding To Society In General

- The church must find a strategic way of addressing the question of a changing society.
- Respondents are pessimistic about the credibility and effectiveness of the church in contemporary society, but maintain the belief that there is a vital role for the church to play.
- There is a need for churches and other agencies to continue to work together to meet the challenges of a changing world.
- The training/resourcing of the clergy and lay people needs to address the development of post-modernity and globalisation as the two key sociological phenomena of contemporary society.

Training/Resourcing Of Clergy

- There is a consensus that the training/resourcing of clergy requires significant adaptation to meet the changing needs and expectations of ministry in contemporary society.
- Training/resourcing in issues pertaining to sectarianism, difference and Christian peacemaking has usually been *ad hoc* rather than strategic and not considered a core part of training.
- The question of more extensive lay involvement in parish ministry may need to be prioritised at all levels of the church.
- The clergy training process may lack adequate opportunities for 'hands-on' experience in parishes before new curates are released into full-time ministry.
- Clergy want in-service training to be frequent, strategic, well thought-out, and offered in a manner that facilitates minimum inconvenience on the part of clergy participants; it should involve experts in the fields pertinent to this Scoping Study (such as Partners in Transformation, Corrymeela, and ECONI).
- Some clergy also feel that a mechanism should be created whereby they may input their perceived needs for assistance and in-service training anonymously. A website resource could also be created for the purpose of sharing information between clergy on such things as models of good practice in contemporary ministry issues, helpful resources, and so on.
- Stress amongst clergy continues to be a major issue; and some feel that bishops lack a clear strategy for resourcing/equipping and caring for clergy. The General Synod may need to urgently examine clergy roles with a view to changing patterns of life (and therefore ministry) in the 21st century.
- There is currently no liturgical/prayer resource to assist with explicitly addressing sectarianism and other forms of difference.

INTRODUCTION

The ministry of Christ exemplified a pattern of responding positively, and often unconventionally, to difference, from his crossing of ethno-religious/sectarian boundaries in his choice of disciples, to his welcome of traditional 'enemies' such as Samaritans and the so-called 'unclean', to his non-violent subversion of oppressive social mores. All people were welcome in his radical community. The Church, as steward of his Gospel, is responsible for the incarnation of such a welcoming, grace-filled community: to cross boundaries, to love 'enemies', to offer healing, and challenge oppression in all its forms. It is a truism that the Christian churches in Ireland have not always risen to the task. It could be argued that Ireland experiences the longest running ethno-religious conflict in European history, and no one has been untouched by its implications, from mere inconvenience or unpleasant social attitudes through to the tragedy of violence, injury, and bereavement. Many people are confused about sectarianism and difference. But many people also want to respond better to sectarianism and difference.

The Church of Ireland, among others, is leading the way of change, through the establishment of the Sectarianism Education Project (SEP), whose first project has been the Scoping Study whose results you now hold in your hands. This is possibly the most comprehensive piece of research ever attempted into one Christian denomination/church in Ireland, and has involved people at all levels of the church. It is admirable that the Church of Ireland has invited relative strangers to examine it in detail. The research consultants have been afforded a generous welcome, which is not always the case in research of this nature. This Scoping Study report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the issues surrounding sectarianism and other forms of difference and summarise some ideas of how the church might better respond to these in future. As with all good Christian documents, this report begins with a story:

Some time ago the world's leading manufacturer of drill bits found itself in a financial crisis. After decades as the market leader, the company appeared on the verge of disappearing. The company's executives were confounded at this turn of events, and did what any self-respecting multi-national corporation does these days – they engaged the services of consultants. A large consultancy firm spent six months examining the balance sheet, investigating the market and competitors, and interviewing at every level of the company. When the time came to report the (very expensive) findings of the research, the firm sent one of their top consultants to present to the drill bit company's Board of Directors. He began his presentation with a PowerPoint display. Introducing the first slide, he said, 'We have spent half a year investigating your company's problem. We have spared none of your expense to do so; the good news is, we think we have diagnosed the problem.'

Slide One appeared on the overhead screen. The company executives were somewhat surprised to find that it contained only six words:

YOU THINK YOU MAKE DRILL BITS

Just in case the directors hadn't got the message, the consultant repeated the words on the screen, savouring each word, to ensure everyone heard. Then he clicked on his hi-tech button, and presented Slide Two. It was similar to Slide One, but was one word fewer:

YOU DON'T MAKE DRILL BITS

'You don't make drill bits' repeated the consultant, barely concealing a smile. Some executives shifted nervously in their seats, while others simply looked dismayed. Was the man joking? Had they wasted hundreds of thousands of pounds for this? Before they could think about this for too long, the consultant pressed his button once more, revealing Slide Three:

YOU MAKE HOLES

The consultant went on to say that the company was losing its market position because it had failed to keep up with modern drill technology. Laser drilling was far more efficient, precise, and cost-effective for the construction industry than its manual antecedent. When the Board of Directors realised that they had become fixated on maintaining their company as the world's leading manufacturer of drill bits, rather than the world's leading producer of holes, they took decisive action. The company is now once again the market leader, having re-directed its energies and investment toward modern processes. The company had confused the drill bits with their purpose. To put this in theological terms, it had equated idols with icons, and failed to see that their historic position was more clearly found in facilitating drilling holes than manufacturing metal.

The drill bit story, although somewhat apocryphal, is a helpful introduction to this Scoping Study report. The research on which the report is based took place throughout 2002. Its purpose was to investigate the range of attitudes, perceptions, and experience of clergy and lay people throughout the church, in relation to dealing positively with sectarianism and difference. Its findings should be of significant benefit to the SEP, and the church generally, as it seeks to determine future vision and strategy for this keystone area of ministry. And although detailed findings follow, perhaps the key result of the research is illustrated in the story of drill bits and holes. If the consultants to this research were to be given enough latitude, they might make a similar three-slide PowerPoint presentation to the SEP. At the risk of raising eyebrows at the very outset of this report, it might look something like this:

IT IS EASY TO THINK YOU ARE HERE TO MAINTAIN THE MINISTRY AND STRUCTURES OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

BUT YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT HERE TO MAINTAIN THE MINISTRY AND STRUCTURES OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

YOU'RE HERE TO HELP INCARNATE THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF THIS SOCIETY

This Scoping Study report provides a comprehensive, credible, but accessible analysis of the Church of Ireland as it was in 2002. There are signs of encouragement, of struggle, of hope, of pain, of vision for the future, and hankering after the past. It is the aim of the Church of Ireland to respond adequately, and more than adequately, to the twin evils of sectarianism and intransigence. It is the SEP committee's responsibility to articulate a vision that is strategic and can excite the interest of the key stakeholders in the church. It has been a privilege to undertake the research, and it is the sincere hope of the consultants that this report will assist in that process.

Gareth I Higgins, BA (Hons.), Ph.D., Research Consultant

Michael Blythman, B.Sc., Cathy Curran, B.Ed., Sarah Parkinson, B.Sc., Research Team

METHODOLOGY

This study emerged from the work of the Church of Ireland Sectarianism Committee and its report to the General Synod of 1999, as well as the work of the Education Sub Committee. Having been invited by Standing Committee in 1998 to develop a programme responding to the issue of sectarianism and living with difference, a Scoping Study was commissioned, to ascertain the attitudes toward, needs regarding, and experiences of approaching sectarianism and living with difference in the Church of Ireland. Rev. Doug Baker and Dr Cecelia Clegg of Partners in Transformation and Dr Gareth Higgins were retained as consultants to the project. Dr Higgins was commissioned to develop a methodology for the Scoping Study, which was approved by the Project Committee in January 2002. The Scoping Study was carried out by Dr Higgins, with research assistance from Mr Michael Blythman, Ms Cathy Curran, and Mrs Sarah Parkinson. Partners in Transformation was commissioned to assist the Committee in the development of appropriate actions in response to the Scoping Study.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The two main aspects of the programme envisaged by the Committee are:

- Assisting parishes throughout the island to increase their capacity for dealing positively with sectarianism and difference.
- Exploring how dealing positively with sectarianism and difference will impact the decision-making level within the Church of Ireland.

It was recognised early in the process that the question of difference *per se* should be included in the Scoping Study rather than maintaining an exclusive focus on sectarianism. Many people do not identify with the issues surrounding sectarianism, especially in the Republic of Ireland; 'difference' generally, is, however, an issue with which most people can recognise. And it is likely that similar methodologies could be employed in approaching both sectarianism and other forms of difference. Whether the issue is Protestant/Catholic, ethnic, world religions, theological controversy, or otherwise, the main purpose of the SEP is to help people deal positively with difference, and live together more peaceably. The main aim of the Scoping Study is to provide a picture of attitudes and identify what is happening throughout the Church of Ireland in response to the issue of sectarianism and difference.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Scoping Study was four-fold:

- To 'map the landscape' of the Church of Ireland, North and South, in relation to the issue of sectarianism and dealing with difference.
- To ascertain the attitudes, experiences and needs of clergy and lay people, throughout the Church of Ireland, regarding this issue.
- To articulate this analysis in a manner that provides a sound basis for the Project Committee to respond by, among other things, commissioning programmes and initiatives that serve the

church in regard to sectarianism and living with difference, and for Partners in Transformation to assist the Committee in developing appropriate materials and actions. In other words, the Scoping Study aims to provide a foundation for the Committee to build on, with the appropriate involvement of Partners in Transformation.

- To ensure that this analysis is representative of attitudes, needs and experiences throughout the Church of Ireland. The Committee was concerned that all levels of the church had the opportunity to participate in the Scoping Study, including younger members.

PROJECT PLAN

The Scoping Study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods (in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups). A representative sample of parishes in the Church of Ireland was selected and studied in detail, but all clergy throughout the church were also invited to complete a questionnaire, and offered the chance to participate further if they wish. The results of the Study have been condensed² and are presented here in a document that includes both statistics and qualitative narrative.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The comprehensive methodology was as follows:

- Background reading of relevant literature produced or affirmed by the Church of Ireland on the issue of sectarianism and living with difference, and the terms of reference for this Scoping Study. This included policy statements and the definition of sectarianism adopted by Standing Committee in 1999.
- Collation of sampling frame from the church database. Put simply, this is the total number of dioceses and the proportion of parishes within them.
- Construction of representative sample of 10% of the parishes,³ sampled according to size of diocese, and clergy profile (age group and gender). There were 474 parishes/parish unions in March 2002. This resulted in a representative list of 48 parishes. This list was submitted to the chair of the Committee, the chair of the Working Group and two other members of the Working Group to confirm its reliability. Five substitutions were made on the basis of biographical factors such as age. The list was confidential to these representatives of the

² Interview transcripts, completed questionnaires, and focus groups have all been comprehensively assessed. Both the confidentiality agreed with respondents, and the sheer volume of data accrued make it impossible to include these verbatim.

³ 10% is a relatively large sample in social scientific research, and is widely accepted as being more than adequate to provide credible results. Any concerns about how this sample may exclude parts of the Church are addressed as the sample was broadly representative of the dioceses in terms of their respective sizes, and the age group and gender of clergy, and all clergy throughout the Church of Ireland were given the opportunity to participate by completing a questionnaire.

Working Group and the consultants. All interview and Focus Group respondents' identity have been kept confidential, and quotations are anonymous, with only the diocese and role of the respondent recorded in this report.

- Questionnaire design. A comprehensive questionnaire⁴ was designed to collect statistical information on the needs in relation to, experiences of, and attitudes concerning sectarianism and living with difference. This questionnaire was submitted to the SEP Committee for its input before being distributed to all rectors and lay people in the representative sample. A condensed version of this questionnaire⁵ was sent to all incumbents and bishops in the Church of Ireland, and all members of Standing Committee. The response rate to the condensed questionnaire was high; with 189 Questionnaires being returned by incumbent clergy (of whom there were 404 in total). This is a response rate of 47%. In social science research, a response rate of around 30% is considered good, so the Committee should be encouraged that Church of Ireland clergy have been willing to respond in such large numbers. The response rate among members of the Standing Committee was 63.3%, as 38 out of a possible 60 members (of whom 12 respondents were rectors) returned questionnaires.
- Interview structure design. A comprehensive in-depth interview structure was designed for use with the 48 clergy in the sample. 41 of the 48 clergy in the sample agreed to take part and were available for interview. 38 of these 41 respondents completed in-depth questionnaires which form the basis of the statistics marked 'Interviewed rectors'. Of the remaining 7, 2 declined to participate, and the remaining 5 were either uncontactable, or the parish had become vacant during the period between sampling and carrying out the research, or no time could be arranged to suit both the consultant and the clergy. This represents an extraordinarily high response rate of 85%. The ten bishops and two archbishops of the church were contacted and invited to participate in an in-depth interview; both archbishops, and seven bishops participated, while the remaining bishops completed a questionnaire. The interview structure included reference to experiences, attitudes, and needs in relation to sectarianism and dealing positively with difference; respondents were invited to indicate the full range of their perspectives, including positive and negative responses. The interview structure was piloted and revised with representatives of the Working Group before being used in the research proper.
- Focus Group structure and content design. A comprehensive but accessible structure was designed for use in Focus Groups to maximise the information received from lay respondents. The comprehensive questionnaire used in clergy interviews formed the basis for discussion at Focus Groups.

⁴ Copies of the questionnaire are available from the SEP.

⁵ Copies are available from the SEP.

- Focus Group sampling frame design. Focus Group respondents were drawn from each of the parishes in the representative sample, with one lay leader, and two lay people (approximately) from each. These respondents were accessed through their respective clergy, and provide a broad representation of church members (from a wide range of ages, beginning at secondary school age), from a wide range of backgrounds and leadership roles in the church, including (but not exclusive to) youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, and members of Select Vestry. Attempts were made to involve some less active parishioners in some of the Focus Groups. Two supplementary Focus Groups were carried out with young people from Northern Ireland and the Republic respectively. Out of a total possible number of 144 participants, 88 (49 men, 39 women) actually attended Focus Groups, representing a high response rate of 61%. Despite this, some Focus Groups proved difficult to arrange; this may reflect a number of factors, such as apathy among lay people, the lack of commitment of some clergy to arranging Focus Groups, and simple human forgetfulness. It does, however, indicate the challenge of persuading lay involvement in the programme envisaged by the SEP.
- Advice of Working Group on which other groups and individuals to include in the research. Representatives of the Corrymeela Community, ECONI, and the ISE were interviewed to ascertain their assessment of working with the Church of Ireland in relation to sectarianism and dealing positively with difference. Other appropriate individuals or bodies in the church or outside it who are relevant to this research were interviewed. 22 such interviews were conducted, with, among others, members of Standing Committee, retired Church of Ireland clergy, clergy from other denominations, heads of relevant agencies, journalists, a teaching psychologist, youth workers, and academics.
- Letter to all clergy, informing them of the research, and inviting a response from all clergy to the condensed version of the questionnaire. This letter was from the SEP Committee, and included a brief outline of the context for the Scoping Study. This was an attempt at ensuring genuine action in response to the Scoping Study from throughout the church, and to enable those who may feel that their voices are not always 'heard' to participate.
- Article in *The Church of Ireland Gazette* to inform the whole church of the existence, value, potential outcomes and needs of the Scoping Study. This article included an invitation for anyone in the church to respond. This invitation was taken up by a small number of people, who either emailed or telephoned their comments.
- Construction of Focus Group sample in consultation with clergy in the Scoping Study sample.
- In-depth interviews with representative sample of parish clergy⁶. Interviews usually took place at the rectory or office of the respondent, although some were carried out at the General Synod. The consultant travelled widely in Ireland in the process.

⁶ Respondents' age, gender, and dioceses are outlined in **Figs. 1-12**

- Focus Groups with sample of lay people from the representative sample of parishes. All Focus Group respondents completed the comprehensive questionnaire for statistical data. Two of the research assistants travelled long distances to carry out a total of 17 Focus Groups, which ranged in size from 2 to 9 participants each. 88 lay people participated in these groups, out of a possible total of 144 (3 from each of 48 parishes). Groups included among male participants, 1 youth group member, 1 youth leader, 1 church warden, 6 ordinary lay members, 1 church secretary, 2 organists, 1 Sunday School teacher, 3 secretaries of Select Vestry, 11 members of Select Vestry, 1 parish reader, 2 parochial nominators, 2 General Synod delegates, 1 member of diocesan council, 1 secretary of a fund-raising committee, 2 diocesan lay readers, 4 choir members, 3 Glebe Wardens, 2 Hon Treasurers, 2 Diocesan Synod representatives, 1 Parish magazine representative, 1 Member of Standing Committee, and 1 Member of Diocesan Council. Female participants included 1 Parish Reader, 2 Secretaries of Select Vestry, 15 members of Select Vestry, 2 members of the Safeguarding Trust committee, 1 Brownie leader, 2 Hon Sec/Treasurers, 12 Sunday School Teachers, 3 Sunday School Superintendents, 1 Organist, 3 Youth leaders, 1 Boys Brigade Officer, 1 Member of Lady's Guild, 1 Member of Diocesan Youth organisation, 1 Sexton, 1 Parish administrator, 12 members of Mother's Union, 1 Mother's Union executive member, 2 Mothers Union secretaries, 1 Chair of Mother's Union, 1 Crèche leader, 1 Children's singing group leader, 1 Youth worker, 9 Choir Members, 6 Lay members, 5 church wardens, 2 Diocesan readers, 1 Member of Diocesan Synod, 1 Member of Diocesan council, 1 member of Glebes committee, 1 Diocesan press officer, 1 Secretary of women's fellowship, 1 Parish reader, and 1 Trainee lay reader. Focus Groups were somewhat difficult to arrange, with some rectors unable to provide lay people to participate, although others were extremely helpful. There was a still a very good attendance rate of 61%. The research associates, Ms Cathy Curran and Mr Michael Blythman carried out the task of Focus Group facilitation, travelling extensively in the process.
- Background reading of relevant policy documents, public statements, Synod documents. A selection of documents relevant to the issue of sectarianism and living with difference (including the report of the Sectarianism Steering Group, etc.) was employed to provide background information to the consultant.
- Regular meetings with representatives of Working Group to update and advise on progress, etc. The consultant met at least monthly with the Chair of the SEP to update on progress and verify invoices.
- Write-up of the Scoping Study report.
- Outcomes to be determined by the SEP.

NOTE ON QUOTATIONS

Quotations in this Scoping Study report are made in a personal capacity and do not necessarily represent the opinions of any official body in the Church of Ireland. Quotations are attributed by role in the church and diocese. The diocesan attribution has been withheld in a small number of cases because the quotation may identify others.