

The Church of Ireland Council for Mission

“A Wider Us”

Suggestions for Working Together towards a Deeper Engagement with Mission for the Church of Ireland

Key outcomes from the Mission Conference held in Dromantine 28 Feb. – 1 March 2014

A Framework for a Conversation

The Church of Ireland Council for Mission invited the Bishops to nominate members of their dioceses to attend a Mission Conference at Dromantine, along with representatives of key committees and groups, for the purposes of addressing the vital question: “How do we articulate the mission of the Church of Ireland in the range of contexts that exist across Ireland and in such a way that all church traditions can embrace, support and enact it?”

The following is a summary of the outcomes of the discussion. It is offered with a recognition that the journey has already started and that, in God’s providence, new things are happening but also with a desire that we should walk together where God leads, help each other make sense of what is taking place and encourage one another to continue on the journey.

The title for this document was inspired by a phrase used by the Bishop of London during his address. It seems to sum up the aspirations expressed

1. Spiritual Renewal - We cannot give away what we have not got

- It all starts with prayer and engagement with the Scriptures, elements which are easily neglected
- Parishes should be encouraged to engage in spiritual renewal beyond Sunday observance
- This is a time of unique opportunity. There is a sense of God being active in new ways and of his calling to his church to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit to join in with his mission.
- The instinct for survival or financial viability might be the means God gets our attention but our ultimate motive has to be love – for God and people

2. We want to do this together

- We know that we are family for all the family difficulties we might have.
- We recognise that togetherness is a fundamental of our calling – “by this will everyone know that you are my disciples if you love one another”
- There is a real sense from every stream and tradition of a desire to engage in mission
- Even when we place our emphasis on different aspects of mission there is a common commitment to it
- We want to give energy to that by allowing an expression of mission that includes all these emphases.

3. Recognition of the positive place of the Church of Ireland

- It emerged many times in the discussion how positive the nature of the identity of the Church of Ireland is to those seeking God
- Others seem better at appreciating who we are and the benefits of what we bring than we ourselves
- We can find ways to help each other get beyond our own insecurities
- There is a greater sense of mission being on our doorsteps as well as a global activity

4. Receptivity to Bishops’ Statement and Leadership

- Many had not heard of the Bishops statement but found it very helpful
- But it was felt it had stopped there. There had been no development beyond that
- There was an opportunity for the Bishops to give leadership in articulation and initiative

5. Planning not prescribing

- The Bishop of London’s suggestion that having an approach that offers a clear direction of travel and sense of vision combined with the freedom to move and respond opportunistically within that framework leads to something both energising and liberating might be helpful to consider in our context
- Mission plans that are overly ambitious or too prescriptive can produce the opposite to what is desired
- An encouragement to develop a mission plan of some description does mean at least that there is discussion around the family table.

6. Develop Better Communication

- 5 different examples (see under “Background to the Conference” below) of what God is doing within the life of the Church of Ireland were shared but many were not aware either of these particular examples or of similar things taking place
- Hearing how God is at work and seeing examples of how churches are responding is encouraging and helps give us ideas

- We need to think creatively about communication methods and structures too so that these encouraging stories can permeate throughout the church

7. Building on a growing culture of openness

- The culture of openness that is developing towards new ways of doing church is very much welcomed
- This emergent pattern of newer forms of church coexisting harmoniously alongside a diversity of traditional forms to mutual benefit could perhaps be **given clearer** and fuller expression
- The breadth and range of approaches illustrates how we have moved from tolerance to a willingness to give permission and towards early signs of active encouragement. The next stages would be to plan and resource such development.

8. Reviewing of Equipping and Training Structures

- People need to be equipped to be disciples in their workplace
- The current centralisation of lay training could be reviewed so that resources can be shared more effectively at diocesan and parish level
- We need to be intentional in developing the kind of leadership, at every level, that is capable of nurturing the kind of church we want for mission in today's world

9. Recognising that Deeper Engagement with Mission involves Change

- We recognise that a deeper engagement with mission will involve change and there is fear connected with change
- We must be free to express those fears but not be limited by them and to be led in love and trust
- Change and deeper engagement will in most ways include current activity, but must also always seek to transcend it
- An important task is to work out ways to help those most afraid of engagement

10. Structuring for Mission

- There is a need for diocesan structures that will enable new forms of ministry to exist beyond parochial boundary constraints as is already beginning to happen in some parts of Ireland and beyond.
- When a new cure is created in a Diocese that operates a shared system of assessment it was suggested this should not, in its early stage of development, be burdened with Diocesan and Episcopal contributions
- Do we need to adopt a radical approach to committees such as has happened in London diocese?
- Can Deaneries play a role in identifying needs and possibilities in the local area?

Next Steps

The hope of the Mission Council is that these suggestions will provide a focus for an ongoing discussion at every level in the Church of Ireland about how we can all engage in the mission of the church

They will be presented to the General Synod in May 2014 where members will have a chance to respond to the key points.

Background to the Conference

The Mission Conference was organised by the Church of Ireland Council for Mission, a body of the General Synod. It was an attempt to gather together a group of people from right across the Church who have a stake hold in its mission to have a stab at the question “How do we articulate the mission of the Church of Ireland in the range of contexts that exist across Ireland and in such a way that all church traditions can embrace, support and enact it?”

The Council was encouraged by the representative attendance, the level of participation, and by the overwhelmingly positive feedback to the event. There were approximately 60 participants made up of representatives from the dioceses and those committees of the church which have a particular bearing on its mission along with some from the Theological Institute and the Association of Mission Societies (AMS) as well as interested individuals.

The main speakers were the Bishop of London, the Rt. Rev Richard Chartres, who told the story of how his diocese had moved from decline into growth, and the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, who spoke on the theme “What is God doing in Ireland Today and how are we being called to join in?” The event was set in the context of worship.

Five examples of very different approaches to mission from various parts of the island, and with a mixture of rural and urban settings, were demonstrated during the conference. These were:

Lighthouse, Blarney, Co Cork - a local variant of “Messy Church”

Dromore Parish, Co Tyrone – a creative approach to mission in a rural parish

Holy Trinity, Rathmines, Dublin – a new church working in partnership with a traditional congregation

Redcross, Co Wicklow – a story of growth in a rural setting

Moneyreagh, Co Down – a new church plant in a local community centre.

The Council is most grateful to the Priorities Fund for its assistance in funding of the Conference and to the Bishops for their support