

APPENDIX N**ROLE OF THE CHURCH COMMITTEE****PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE ROLE AND STRUCTURE
OF THE COMMITTEE****THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH COMMITTEE**

The Role of the Church Committee originated as a working group appointed by the Standing Committee in 1970. The group was requested to study the positive role of the Church in all aspects of political, social and economic life in Ireland. The Committee continues to be elected triennially by the Standing Committee and reports to the General Synod through the Standing Committee.

In 1982, the Committee considered it necessary to appoint a secretary/researcher to support its work. Mr JTN McGaffin was appointed to this position in 1982 and continued to give very valuable support to the Committee up to his retirement in 1994. The Standing Committee decided in 1994, that the functions of research and secretarial servicing of the Committee be undertaken by the General Synod office for an unspecified experimental period. The Representative Body was requested to preserve the funding made available for the employment of a secretary/researcher.

As the position of secretary/researcher was not filled in 1994, alternative proposals for the future working of the Committee were agreed by the Standing Committee. These proposals, which are included in the 1995 report to the General Synod, may be summarised as follows:

- That membership of the Committee be divided into several small working groups.
- That the Committee itself should act as an umbrella body, overseeing and monitoring the work of the working groups.
- That working groups would be free to seek assistance from people with specific expertise outside the membership of the Committee.
- That the annual report may comprise of a summary of work being undertaken.
- That the Committee could produce occasional additional reports for consideration by the Standing Committee.
- That working groups be established for Medical Ethics, Economic Issues, Political Developments and Global Issues/Technology.

The Role of the Church Committee today operates largely on the basis of the proposals agreed in 1994. However, the working groups have changed slightly and are now as follows:

Medical Ethics,
Social/Economic Issues,
Political Developments
European Affairs.

The Social/Economic Issues Group also deals with ecological and environmental matters.

THE FUTURE OF THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH COMMITTEE

The Church of Ireland, in common with the other denominations, is expected to be in a position to produce statements for the media on topical issues, as well as carrying out in-depth research and reporting on moral and other issues. The Role of the Church Committee endeavours to carry out this function, as well as providing information on topical matters for the Archbishops. It is clear that the perceived role of the Committee has evolved since it was first established in 1970.

The Committee has been considering its overall effectiveness and it is generally agreed that it no longer serves the needs of the Church of Ireland in the present environment where expert opinion is demanded by the media on a large variety of topics. The future of the Committee was carefully considered; in particular a possible redefinition of the role of the Committee, its relationship with the Standing Committee, the two Archbishops and the media, and the resources required in human and financial terms.

The Role of the Church Committee has come to the conclusion that it is desirable to agree a blueprint for a completely restructured committee with a clearly defined role. It was agreed to submit proposals to the Standing Committee in November, and if they receive general approval, the Committee would submit a final document to the Standing Committee in January. If the proposals are approved by the Standing Committee, they will be reported to the General Synod in 2001.

NOTES ON THE PROPOSALS FOR A RESTRUCTURED COMMITTEE

The new Structure

The Committee recommends that the Chairperson of the new Committee should be nominated by the House of Bishops, although not necessarily a Bishop, and ratified by the Standing Committee.

The proposals include a core Strategy Committee, consisting of the Chairperson, the two Archbishops, two Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod, five members elected by the Standing Committee who will be Chairpersons of the Working Groups, and the researcher/secretary. It is proposed that the Strategy Group should meet up to five or six times per year to agree on priorities and co-ordinate the agendas of the working groups.

It is envisaged that the full Committee will only meet twice per year, with one meeting being held in March to approve the report to the General Synod. The full Committee will consist of the Strategy Committee (the Ex-Officio and Elected members), together with the members of the working groups.

The Working Groups

Under the present structure, the real work of the Committee is done by the Working Groups. It is felt that this method of working is satisfactory if properly resourced in personnel and expertise, and the new proposals are intended to put more emphasis on the work of the groups. This model appears to work effectively in such organisations as the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

While the proposed Strategy Committee will co-ordinate the agendas of the working groups, there will be increased responsibility on those chairing the groups to progress the work of the group in conjunction with the researcher.

Human Resources

The effectiveness of the new committee, particularly the working groups, will depend on increasing the human and financial resources available to the present Committee. Apart from the Chairperson, the members of the working groups will be co-opted by the Committee to allow maximum flexibility in appointing members with expertise to serve on the groups. However, it will be necessary to find new expertise which, hopefully, is available but has not yet been identified.

In addition to the membership of the working groups, the proposals include the use of a pool of expertise outside the Committee, which can be called upon when required to assist the working groups. The present Committee feels that this is an essential element of the proposals, and every effort will need to be made to find this additional expertise.

Responding to the Media

Provision is made in the proposals to provide expert advice and guidance for the two Archbishops on topical issues. A way of providing this service would be for one or two designated members in each group, together with the proposed researcher, being available at short notice to produce the necessary information and advice for the Archbishop. If it were considered desirable, certain members could be nominated in advance to be spokespersons on particular topical issues.

Reporting

It is felt that the Committee should report directly to the General Synod each year, with the report being noted by the Standing Committee in March. This procedure would allow the Committee to issue the report in its own name and include material in the report without prior approval from the Standing Committee. It would also enable the Committee to address more topical issues in the report.

There is a suggestion that the Committee should produce an in-depth report on one or two issues for inclusion in its report to the General Synod each year. With the preparation carried out by the relevant Working Group, the October meeting of the full Committee could devote a large proportion of a full day meeting to discussing the particular topics in hand.

It is also felt that the Committee, or a particular working group, acting on its own initiative, should produce more material in its own right, which is not necessarily the official view of the Church of Ireland, for discussion purposes. Publication of such material on the Internet provides a tremendous new opportunity for informed discussion, not only within the Church of Ireland, but on a world wide basis.

Employment of a Researcher/Secretary

The Role of the Church Committee employed Mr JTN McGaffin as a part-time researcher between 1982 and 1994. The assistance given to the Committee by Mr McGaffin during that period was invaluable. Since then the Committee has relied on the voluntary services of its members to research issues under consideration by the working groups. The pressure of time on the members makes this task increasingly difficult and the services of a researcher/secretary would enhance the work of the new Committee considerably.

It is suggested that the researcher/secretary could be on the staff of the new communications unit, under the Director of Communications, and could become secretary of the Committee and service the working groups.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY COMMITTEE TO REPLACE THE PRESENT ROLE OF THE CHURCH COMMITTEE

The Role of the Church Committee shall be disbanded as and from 30 June 2001.

A committee, to be known as the **Church in Society Committee** shall be elected by the Standing Committee on 19 June 2001, to serve for the period 1 July 2001 to 30 June 2003, and to be re-elected triennially thereafter.

This Committee shall research and report on issues referred to it by the Standing Committee, the Archbishop of Armagh, the Archbishop Dublin, or the Director of Communications, or other issues which may arise within the Committee.

The Committee shall submit a report on its work directly to the General Synod each year, with the report being submitted to the March meeting of the Standing Committee for noting.

The Committee shall provide expert advice and guidance for the two Archbishops on topical issues.

The Committee shall meet up to six times per year, to agree on priorities and co-ordinate the agendas of the working groups.

Membership of the Committee shall consist of the following:

- A Chairperson nominated by the House of Bishops
- The Archbishop of Armagh and the Archbishop of Dublin *Ex-Officio*
- Two Honorary Secretaries of the General Synod *Ex-Officio*.
- Up to 5 members elected triennially by the Standing Committee to chair the Working Groups
- The Secretary/Researcher

The Committee, shall co-opt members with expertise in various fields and not all necessarily members of the Church of Ireland, to the Working Groups as the agenda requires.

The Committee shall also meet, together with the members of the Working Groups, and at such other times as the Chairperson may direct, but not less than twice per year.

A researcher/secretary shall be appointed as soon as practicable after the establishment of the Committee, to act as Secretary to the Committee and assist those chairing the Working Groups. The Representative Body be requested to provide the necessary financial assistance.

The Committee, at its October meeting, shall begin to identify a pool of experts in various fields, available to the Committee and the Working Groups to provide informed opinion on issues which may arise.

The Committee shall be authorised to issue statements or papers under its own name, provided that the source of the document is clearly stated and that it does not purport to be the official view of the Church of Ireland.

The Chairperson of a Working Group may issue statements or papers under the name of the Working Group, provided that the document is approved by the Chairperson of the Church in Society Committee.