THE HARD GOSPEL

DEALING POSITIVELY WITH DIFFERENCE

IN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

A SCOPING STUDY REPORT TO THE

SECTARIANISM EDUCATION PROJECT

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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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a substantial study of attitudes toward, experiences of, and needs regarding dealing positively with sectarianism and difference in the Church[1] 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.

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[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

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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 condensed[2] 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

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[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 questionnaire[4] 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 questionnaire[5] 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.

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[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 clergy[6]. 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.

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

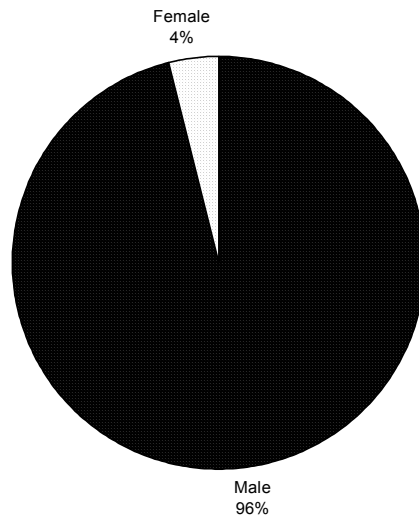© The General Synod of the Church of Ireland

- 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.
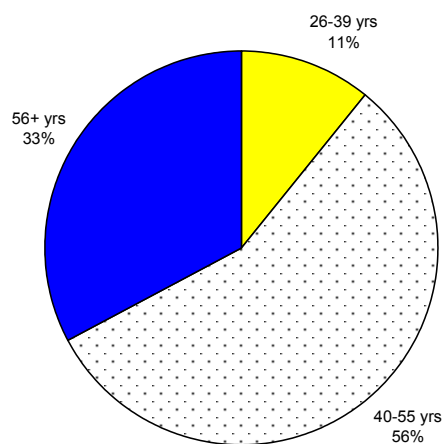
NOTE ON QUOTATIONS

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.
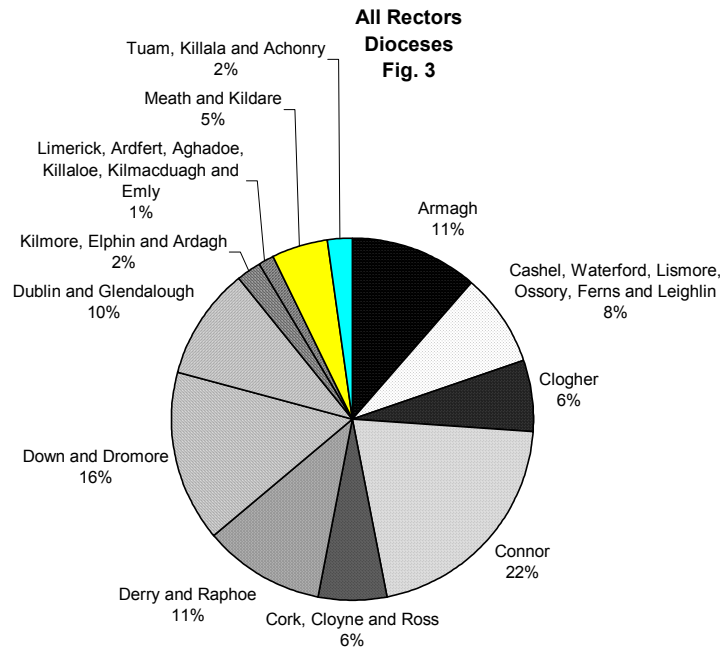
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RESPONDENTS BIOGRAPHICAL DATA[7]

All Rectors
Gender
Fig. 1

Female
4%

Male
96%

All Rectors
Age
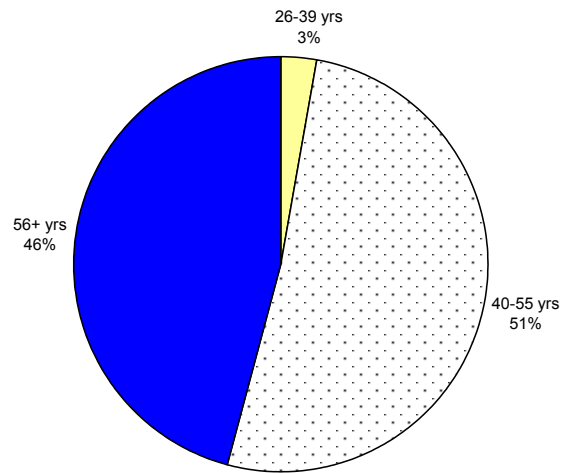**Fig. 2**

26-39 yrs
11%

56+ yrs
33%

40-55 yrs
56%

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[7] Statistics throughout this report are based on questionnaires completed by or with respondents. Charts are entitled as follows: 'Lay people' refers to the 88 lay people who participated in Focus Groups, 'Interviewed rectors' to the 38 rectors from the clergy sample, 'All rectors' to the 189 rectors who returned completed questionnaires, and 'Standing Committee' to members of Standing Committee, including those members of Standing Committee who are also rectors. Some of the statistical totals in the charts do not add up to 100%; this is due to non-completion of certain questions by some respondents. The method of sampling, and the proportion and type of respondents should be borne in mind when judging the validity, meaning, and relevance of the statistics.
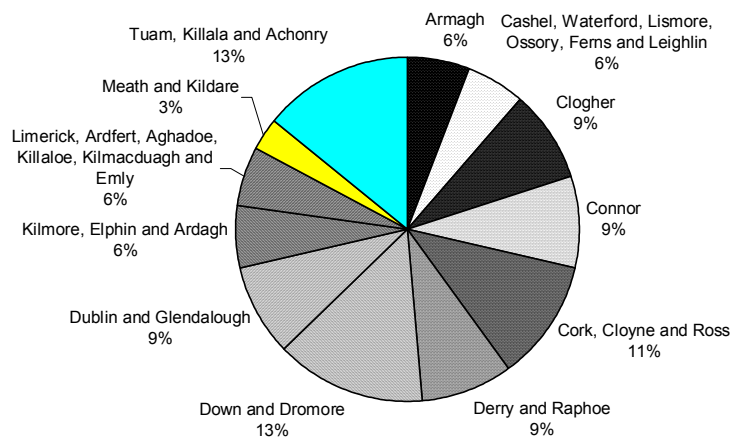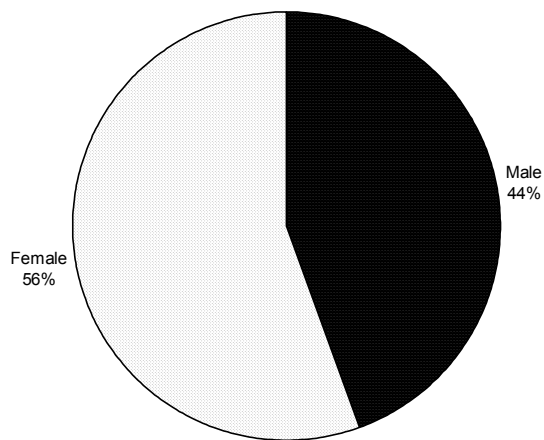
**All Rectors
Dioceses
Fig. 3**

Tuam, Killala and Achonry
2%

Meath and Kildare
5%

Limerick, Ardfert, Aghadoe,
Killaloe, Kilmacduagh and
Emly
1%

Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh
2%

Dublin and Glendalough
10%

Down and Dromore
16%

Derry and Raphoe
11%

Cork, Cloyne and Ross
6%

Armagh
11%

Cashel, Waterford, Lismore,
Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin
8%

Clogher
6%

Connor
22%

**Standing Committee
Gender
Fig. 4**

Female
9%

Male
91%

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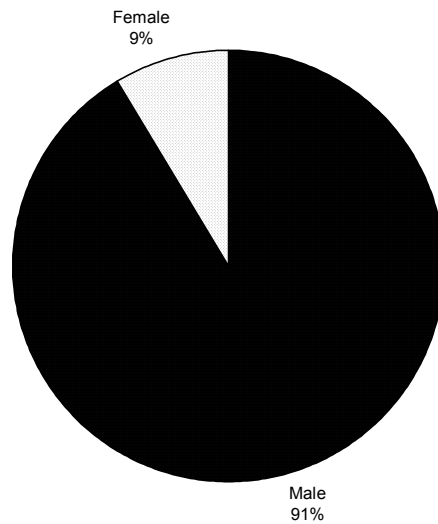
Standing Committee
Age
Fig. 5

26-39 yrs
3%

56+ yrs
46%

40-55 yrs
51%

Standing Committee
Dioceses
Fig. 6

Tuam, Killala and Achonry
13%

Meath and Kildare
3%

Limerick, Ardfert, Aghadoe,
Killaloe, Kilmacduagh and
Emly
6%

Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh
6%

Dublin and Glendalough
9%

Down and Dromore
13%

Derry and Raphoe
9%

Cork, Cloyne and Ross
11%

Connor
9%

Clogher
9%

Cashel, Waterford, Lismore,
Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin
6%

Armagh
6%

Lay People
Gender
Fig. 7

Male
44%

Female
56%

Lay People
Age Range
Fig. 8

15 - 39 yrs
24%

40 -55 yrs
30%

56+ yrs
46%
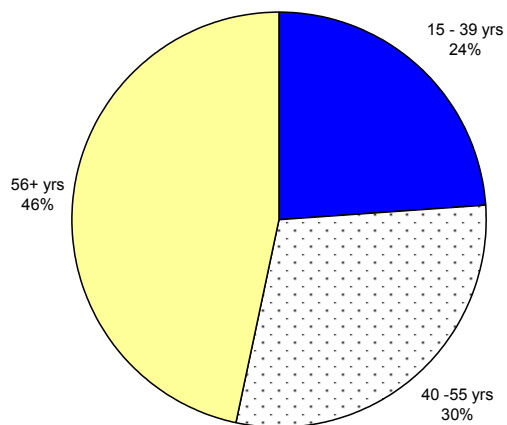
**Lay People
Dioceses of Respondants
Fig. 9**

Tuam, Killala and Achonry
3%

Meath and Kildare
1%

Limerick, Ardfert, Aghadoe,
Killaloe, Kilmacduagh and
Emly
6%

Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh
2%

Dublin and Glendalough
19%

Down and Dromore
8%

Derry and Raphoe
17%

Cork, Cloyne and Ross
0%

Connor
21%

Clogher
6%

Cashel, Waterford, Lismore,
Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin
3%

Armagh
14%
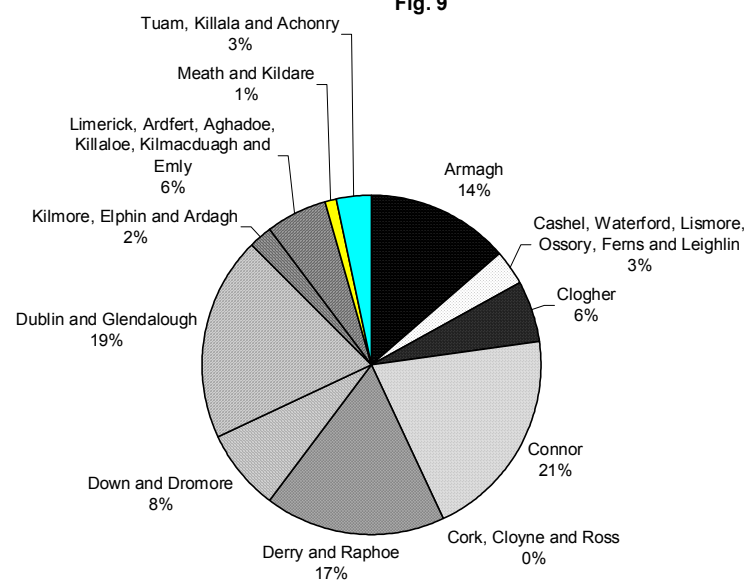
**Interviewed Rectors
Gender
Fig. 10**

Female
13%

Male
87%
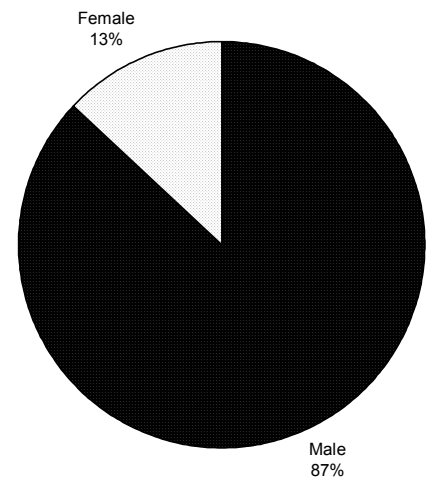
Interviewed Rectors
Age
Fig. 11
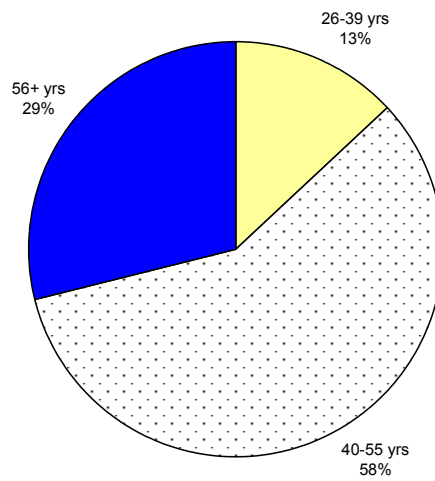
Interviewed Rectors
Dioceses
Fig. 12
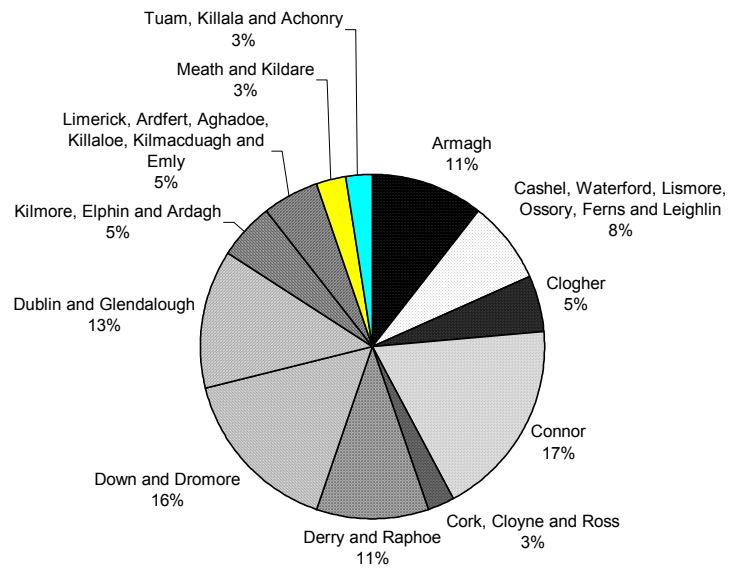
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The rest of the Scoping Study report details and assesses the findings of the research, drawn from interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. The Scoping Study is about sectarianism as experienced in these key areas; this is not, however, a hierarchy of issues. All the issues discussed in the study are important, and sometimes issues that appear to be outside the specific focus of sectarianism may help people to address the question of Protestant/Catholic difference. Issues raised in the study are analysed as follows, with issues directly pertaining to sectarianism and difference in section one, and other (no less important) issues raised in the study in section two:

SECTION ONE

- Hopes for the process
- Defining sectarianism
- Church of Ireland identity
- Church government and structure, General Synod and public leadership
- North-South difference
- Ethnic difference and asylum seekers
- Political difference
- Theological difference
- Relationship with other churches and inter-church activity
- World religions
- Peace/addressing sectarianism initiatives: priorities, attitudes, experiences
- Strategy for the Sectarianism Education Project
- The Loyal Orders and Drumcree

SECTION TWO

- Welcoming/involving new members and boundaries between believers and non-believers
- Gender differences and sexuality
- Young people
- Older people
- Responding to society in general
- Training/resourcing of clergy
- Issues outside the immediate or sole remit of the Sectarianism Education Project

CONCLUSION

SECTION ONE

1: HOPES FOR THE PROCESS

This is a process of change. The Sectarianism Education Project exists because General Synod has sought to take sectarianism and living with difference seriously. The Scoping Study is merely the next stage in this process; an attempt to 'clear the approaches', by providing a considered analysis of the issues of sectarianism and difference in the Church of Ireland. Although sectarianism and other areas of difference have often been sources of discontent and even tragedy, the SEP process is a hopeful one. It is fitting that the findings of the study begin with the hopes expressed by respondents for the process on which the Church of Ireland is embarking. Respondents generally felt that this was a potentially important project and stated their hopes that it would engender positive change. Most were in full support of the SEP, although some did raise questions about the process, usually regarding the issue of time commitment for clergy. A small number of respondents also felt that their theological perspective or previous experience of peace/reconciliation initiatives led them to hold the SEP process 'at arms' length'. Some people – usually those who would consider themselves theologically and politically conservative respondents – said that they had felt inhibited by the assumption that peacemaking and sharing worship with Roman Catholics are synonymous. That is, there are people who do not feel that they could or wish to participate in ecumenism, but are deeply concerned to be involved in moving beyond prejudice. The development of peace/addressing sectarianism initiatives over the past four decades has perhaps been remiss in not fully engaging the sincerely held reluctance of some people (certainly a minority in the Church of Ireland clergy) to equate peacemaking with sharing worship with the Roman Catholic Church. There is a need for a dialogue between the SEP and those clergy who feel that ecumenical initiatives may be imposed as a means of making peace.

At the same time, the Church of Ireland's tradition and current practice is pro-ecumenical and supporters of ecumenism should not be inhibited in their work. Indeed, the respondents to the research among the clergy who expressed principled reluctance toward the process (as distinct from reluctance on the basis of time commitment or lack of training) clearly felt that they represent more clergy than the statistics bear out. This is a minority group in the Church of Ireland and, as such, must be taken seriously and treated with respect. It is certainly possible to be involved in bridge building between communities without participating in ecumenism, and there are examples of such good community relations in some Church of Ireland parishes that would not necessarily engage in shared worship with the Roman Catholic Church. The diversity of the Church of Ireland is potentially one of its greatest strengths, but it is all too easy for diversity to become schism. The Scoping Study has revealed a concern that, although schism is not imminent, some small potential 'seeds' of such division may exist, and it is important that those who may raise critical questions about the SEP process are engaged in meaningful two-way discussion. This may be quite a simple matter, for it is reasonable to assert that some people misunderstand the SEP on the basis of prior experience of other initiatives. However,

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there may be people whose theological or other principles serve as significant inhibitors to their participation in any such initiative. Put simply, sectarianism can exist at the deepest level among those who are ostensibly most committed to its eradication. That is, it is all too easy to assert friendship and boundary crossing between Protestants and Catholics; but some Protestants have not treated their conservative co-religionists with the same respect. Whether or not this respect would be met with dialogue is a moot point. Quotations below provide a 'flavour' of the views presented:

> My hope would flow from the statement of Jesus, the truth will set you free. My hope would be that … this whole process would be a process of utter honesty, openness, where people express what they genuinely feel and think, in however they understand sectarianism…That we would be the kind of church where we would feel comfortable with difference within our own tradition; that there would be a respect for difference within our own tradition, and that that would be reflected…in the respect that we show for [people] from other traditions. **Bishop**

> If we go for practical solutions, I think that a lot will come out of it…If it's seen as a Northern thing, I think that from a practical point of view Southerners will divorce themselves from it. **Lay person, Dublin and Glendalough**

> I want people to be saying, 'It's absolutely crazy that people should be barricaded into a small area like Short Strand, or the same thing in the Ardoyne, in Glenbryn. I want them to be saying, 'we do not actually want a world where we don't listen to each other, where we don't value what each other has to say.' …I want to see us involved in *creating* a non-sectarian society, not just aspiring to it. **Bishop**

> But maybe [seeing if we're] getting worse would help us to get better. The sectarianism issue is deep, and I think the fact that we have started on it is a massive undertaking. **Lay person, Connor**

> *What would you like to see coming out of this process?*
> More communication. Because any time there's a problem, if you've a lack of communication you exacerbate it. **Curate, Armagh**

> [This] is the vehicle for providing more significant renewal in the church. Now it wasn't designed with that in mind...but it will [make] room for those other things to happen. And at the end of it, I actually think we will have a more united church than we have had for the last two decades, but the end of it is a long way off…Commissioning…research [is] the way the church has to work in the future. We have attempted to resource ourselves from within our own limited resources. **Bishop**

> There is great hurt, fear, and sense of injustice…Could there be discussions towards a major and joint act of repentance/reconciliation/forgiveness by church leaders? **Rector, Connor**

> The danger for Anglicans is that they will always go for talking about second level or third level issues…things that are relatively inconsequential and insignificant, like the moving of a pew or the putting up of a plaque, or which particular service book is used. **Bishop**

> In my view – and my experience – no church…which does not seriously address these issues can hope or expect to experience renewal. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

> [We need to] learn to be less defensive of our 'own' territory. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

> If the House of Bishops felt it was a priority of the church to seriously engage in some bridge-building at parish level, to 'seriously take to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions', then clergy like myself might sit up and take notice and begin to open up our eyes in the parishes to see how sectarian we are. Is not our spiritual health being jeopardised by it? **Rector, Armagh**

> The church should teach…the message of love our neighbour in such a way that we are all challenged to understand diversity. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

> [We must contribute to] peace because [we] know the price of violence. **Rector, Armagh**

The Scoping Study shows that there is an enormous amount of goodwill in the Church of Ireland toward dealing positively with sectarianism and other forms of difference. None of the respondents is content with 'the way things are'. All want to see change of some kind. Of course, there are differing views about the nature of that change and some respondents feel insecure about the possibility of change occurring too quickly or without adequate consultation. It is to the issues for which change may be appropriate that we now turn.

HOPES FOR THE PROCESS

- *There is an aspiration for members of the Church of Ireland to experience the freedom in the expression of their Christian faith.*

- *The building of greater understanding and sense of common purpose in the church between the two jurisdictions and between the northern and southern provinces with all their cultural and ecclesial diversity is a goal of the Sectarianism Education Project (SEP) process..*

- *Good citizenship is seen as a Christian imperative.*

- *The social impact of the church may have waned in recent years and the SEP may contribute to addressing this.*

- *Dealing with sectarianism may be painful but worthwhile.*

- *There is an aspiration to better communication around dealing with contentious issues.*

- *Respondents assert that the church should be willing to resource itself from outside.*

- *Security in the individual and communal identity and spirituality of the Church of Ireland should be an outcome of the process.*

- *Respondents hope that ways would be found at every level of church government to focus more on mission than maintenance.*

- *Holding different 'churchmanships' together is an aspiration held by many.*

- *Dealing with sectarianism may release the possibility of renewal in the church.*

- *Many respondents expressed the hope that the church would be prepared to face the cost of dealing with sectarianism, even at the risk of alienating members, or 'losing' in other ways.*

2: DEFINING SECTARIANISM

In 1999, the Standing Committee of the Church of Ireland adopted the following definition of sectarianism:

Sectarianism…

Is a system of attitudes, beliefs and structures

- *at personal, communal, and institutional levels*

- *which always involves religion and typically involves a negative mixing of religion and politics,*

which arises as a distorted expression of positive, human needs especially for belonging, identity, and the free expression of difference

…and is expressed in destructive patterns of relating:

- *hardening the boundaries between groups*

- *overlooking others*

- *belittling, dehumanising, or demonising others*

- *justifying or collaborating in the domination of others*

- *physically or verbally intimidating or attacking others*

The Committee noted that 'the definition is not perfect. Sectarianism is one of those areas in which people often know what they mean but find a concept hard to define.'[8]

Respondents were made aware of this definition before interviews began. It became clear during the research that even the *definition* of sectarianism can be contentious or confusing. As the Standing Committee acknowledged, sectarianism is a difficult concept to articulate, and may mean different things to different people. **It is therefore advisable that an early part of any sectarianism education process in the church pays particular attention to helping people understand what sectarianism is and is not.** One of the common misconceptions is that 'sectarianism' refers only to acts of violence, discrimination, or ill will against Catholics or the Catholic community, rather than being the system of difference that can manifest at many different levels, in many different directions, for many different reasons. It is clear that respondents in the Republic often reflect the prevailing popular attitude that 'sectarianism is a northern problem', although some respondents did acknowledge both their own sectarian attitudes and a degree of anti-Protestant sectarianism in their own life experience.   The Scoping Study shows that there has been a lack of reflection by the clergy on what sectarianism is, especially as a system. There are, however, both warm hearts and openness to change. **Figs. 13-18** show that, while there may be confusion over what 'sectarianism' actually means, there is a great deal of goodwill toward responding positively. (The age group of respondents is indicated on the chart legend as '15-39, 40-55, 56+'.)

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[8] Report of Sub-Committee on Sectarianism to General Synod, 1999.

SAMPLE CHART

Lay People
Sectarianism is one of the most important issues facing the Church of Ireland
**Fig. 13**
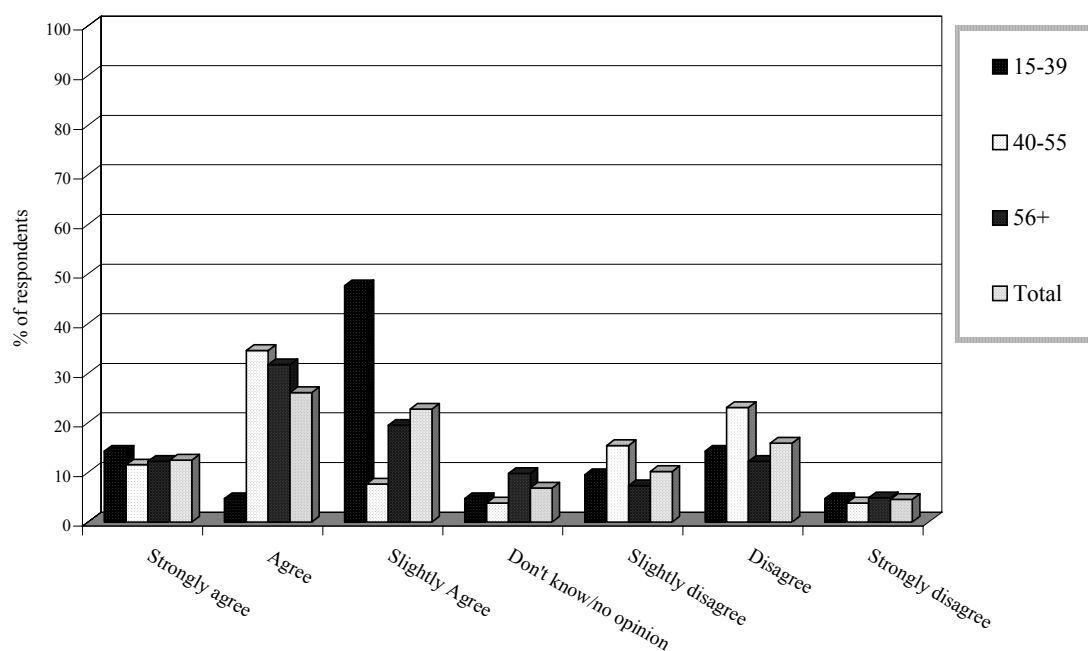
This chart is provided as an explanatory example. Charts in this study are explained as follows:

The **title of the chart** refers to the population studied (lay people, interviewed rectors, all rectors, or Standing Committee members) and the question asked. The **chart legend** on the right hand side refers to the age group and total percentage of respondents. In the interests of clarity, the top-down legend always reads from left-right on the charts, with the younger age group further to the left. Charts follow for the 'Defining Sectarianism' section of the study.

Lay People
Sectarianism is one of the most important issues facing the Church of Ireland
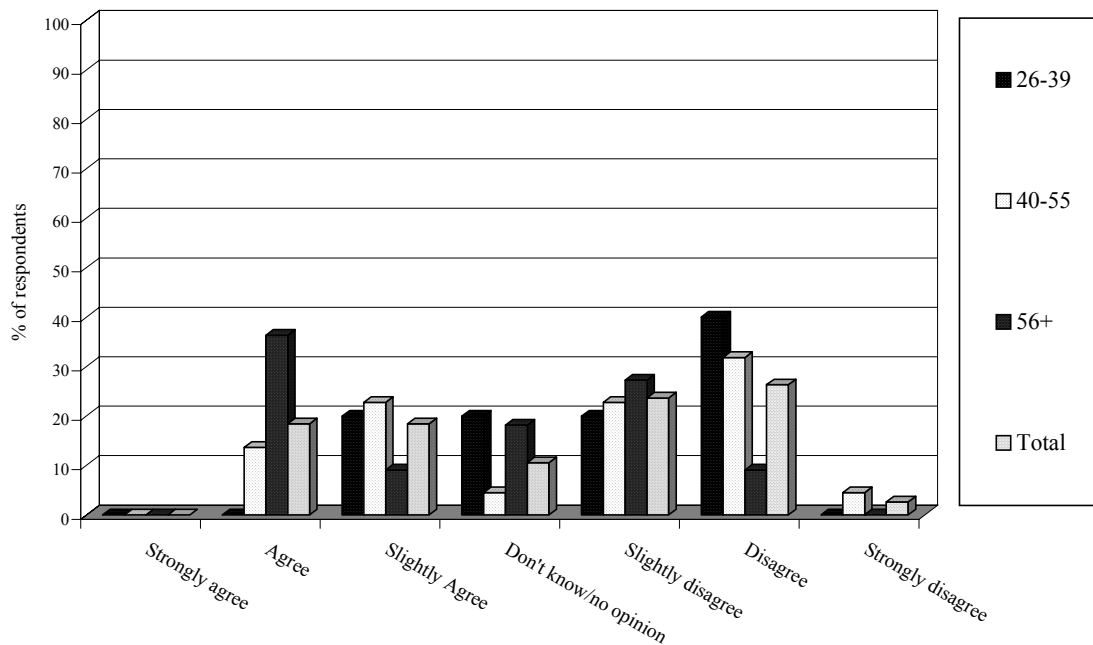**Fig. 13**
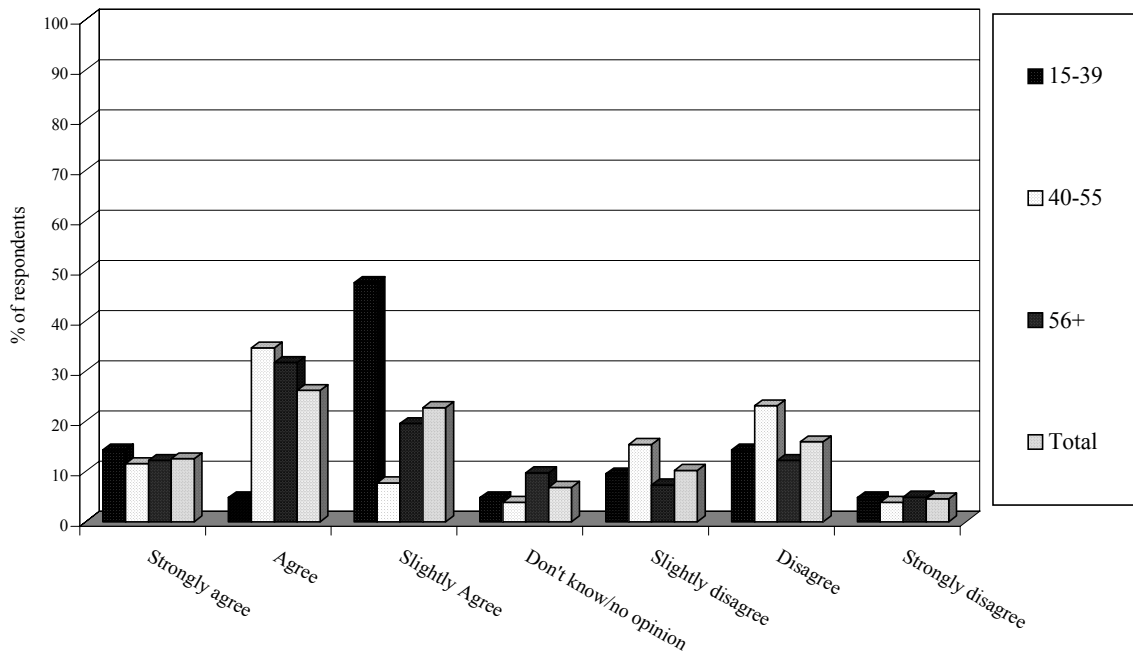
Interviewed Rectors
Sectarianism is one of the most important issues facing the Church of Ireland
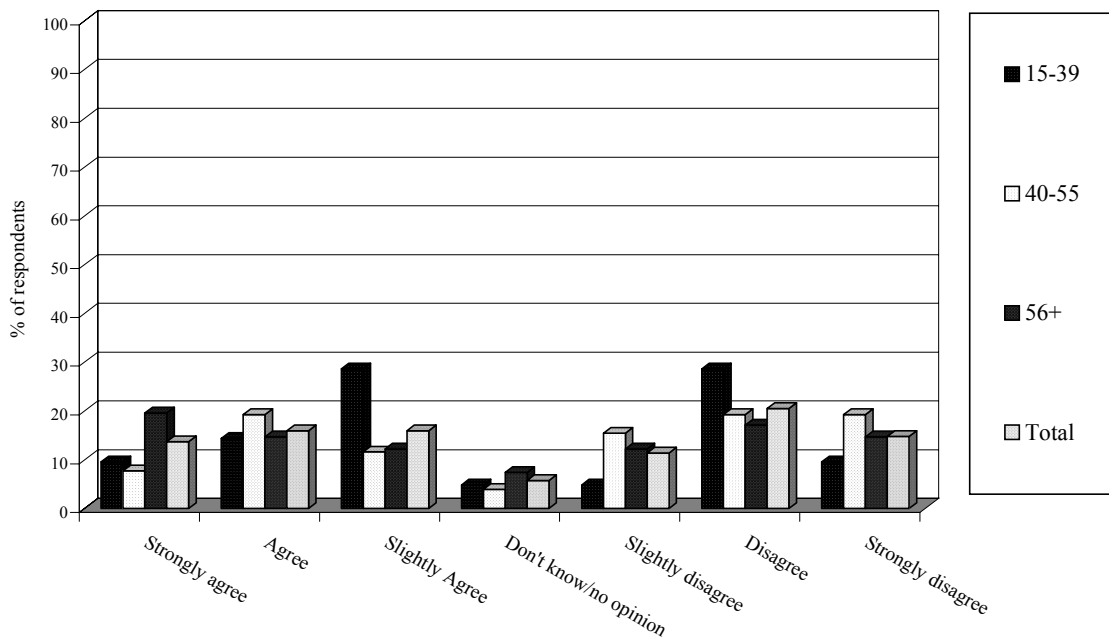**Fig. 14**
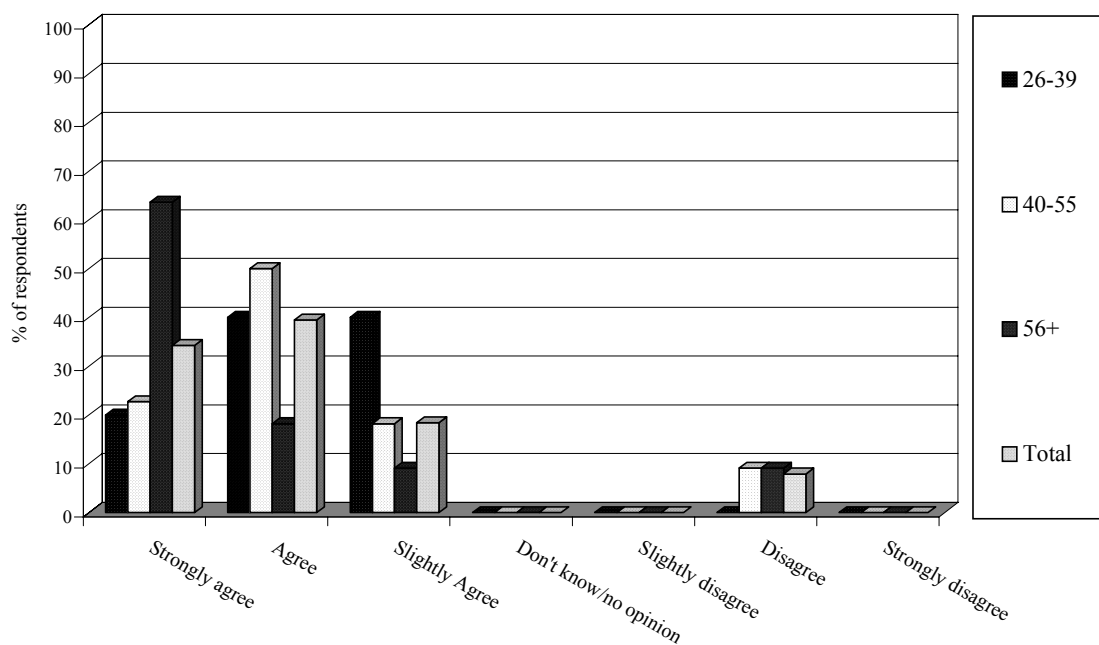
Lay People
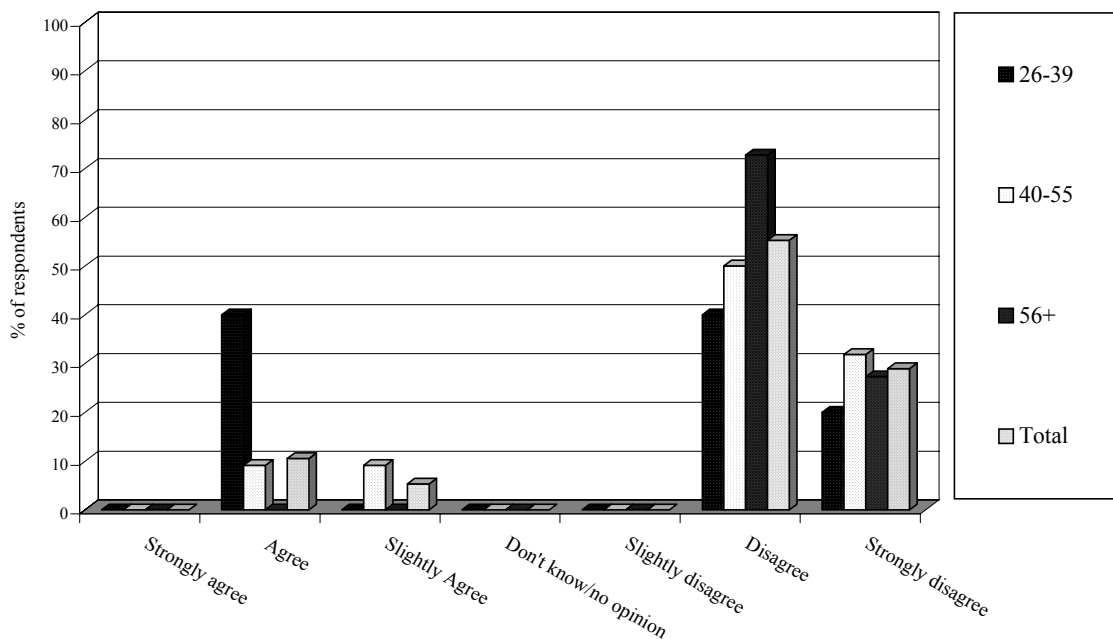**The Church of Ireland copes reasonably well with sectarianism**
Fig. 15
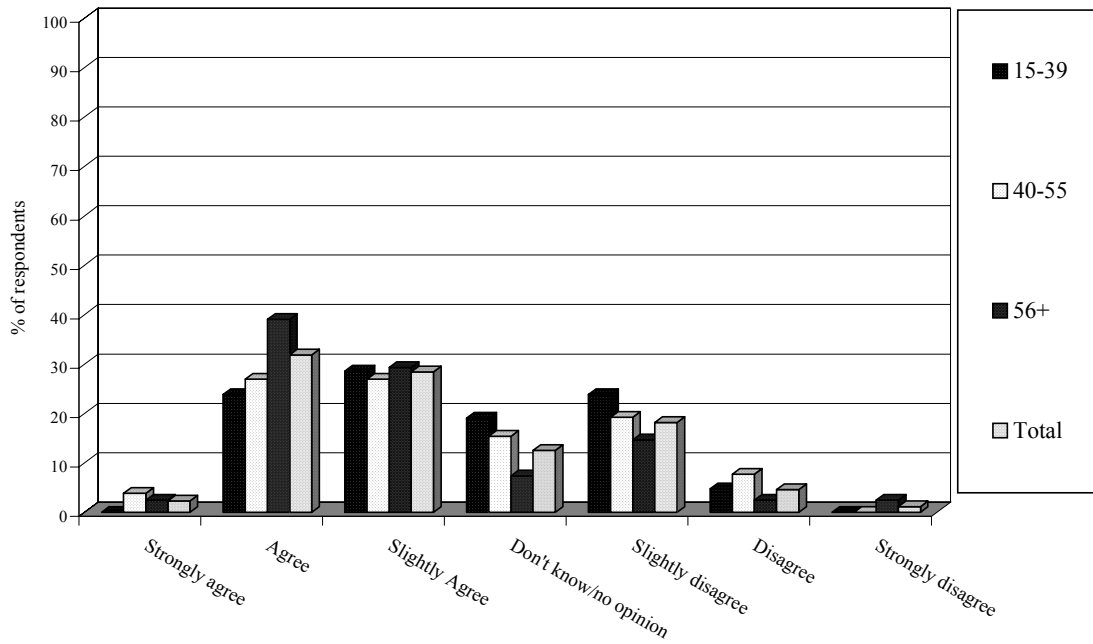
Interviewed Rectors
The Church of Ireland copes reasonably well with sectarianism
Fig. 16

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Lay People
Sectarianism is not a religious issue
Fig. 17

Interviewed Rectors
Sectarianism is not a religious issue
Fig. 18

The responses obtained to questions about sectarianism may be open to more than one interpretation. As well as those respondents who identified sectarianism closely with violence and therefore felt that if there was no violence, there was no sectarianism, there was also a range of understanding apparent in responses to the statement "Sectarianism is not a religious issue" (See Fig 18). The strong response may equally cover those who feel that sectarianism is an issue that the church ought to be tackling, as well as those who feel that sectarianism is present within the church.

The set of responses obtained in the survey suggests that more discussion needs to take place about the nature of sectarianism in order to develop a broadly shared understanding of the issues for the church. This debate might be one of the things tackled at a diocesan level. The charts show that 92% of rectors, and 67% of lay people felt that sectarianism 'is one of the most important issues facing the Church of Ireland'.

There was a broader spread of responses to the statement 'The Church of Ireland copes reasonably well with sectarianism', with, among rectors (lay people) respectively, around 50% (24%) disagreeing, 40% (62%) agreeing, and 10% (14%) indicating 'no opinion/don't know'. This may be due to the frequent assertion by some lay respondents that sectarianism 'isn't an issue round here', arising from the lack of conspicuous or explicit violence in the local vicinity.   Additionally, 80% of rectors and only 42% of lay people perceived sectarianism to be a religious issue. Some quotations follow to exemplify the kinds of responses given to the Scoping Study that reflect respondents' perception that sectarianism is 'not an issue for them'.

> Does sectarianism always include religion? Most people contributing to sectarianism are not religious. Does this definition of sectarianism include all Ireland? Because if it involves verbal abuse and attacking others, you don't see that 'down here'! **Lay person, Armagh**

> We don't really have a problem here and are keen to ensure that we will not have. We are sensitive however to the enormous challenges and problems elsewhere. **Rector, Connor**

> This definition is just appropriate to Northern Ireland. We know nothing about this. If you start thinking about these issues don't you think you're not stirring up a hornet's nest? **Lay person, Dublin and Glendalough**


DEFINING SECTARIANISM

- *Respondents are open to change. They see sectarianism as an important issue for the church and feel that the church needs to improve how it addresses this.*
- *Respondents are often unclear about what 'sectarianism' actually means.*
- *The definition of sectarianism adopted by Standing Committee has not been adequately disseminated among clergy and lay people.*
- *A vision statement, reflecting what the SEP hopes a world without sectarianism and other negative ways of dealing with difference would be like, could be of great value.*
- *Some respondents do not feel that sectarianism, as they understand it, is a pressing issue in their locality, either because they equate sectarianism with violence and, if violence is absent in their area sectarianism is not an issue, or because in the case of a number of respondents living in the Republic, sectarianism was felt to be an issue relevant to Northern Ireland only.*
- *There is also a lack of understanding of practical steps that may be taken to address sectarianism, such as those outlined in Clegg and Liechty's 'Moving Beyond Sectarianism' (Columba Press, 2001).*


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3: CHURCH OF IRELAND IDENTITY

The Scoping Study sought to ascertain the views of respondents on the nature of Church of Ireland identity. There was much agreement on this topic, with most respondents asserting that Church of Ireland identity is not exclusive and suggests good relationships with other Christian traditions. Some felt that the name 'the Church of Ireland' may be perceived to be exclusive, but none considered this important enough to warrant changing the name. The historic perception of the church as a *via media* or bridge between traditions was mentioned by a number of respondents, but the meaning of this in practice is indeed a matter of perception. Some respondents, particularly in the Republic, felt that the image of the church has been if not tainted, significantly affected by the Drumcree controversy. It is not novel to suggest that the Drumcree situation is one of the phenomena most associated with the Church of Ireland in the public mind. This, of course, is part of the reason for the commissioning of the Scoping Study and the SEP should be encouraged that respondents from both within and without the Church of Ireland were eager to emphasise other elements of Church of Ireland identity and to develop other areas of ministry, even while Drumcree remains unresolved.

Lay People
How important is the label 'Church of Ireland' to you?
Fig. 19
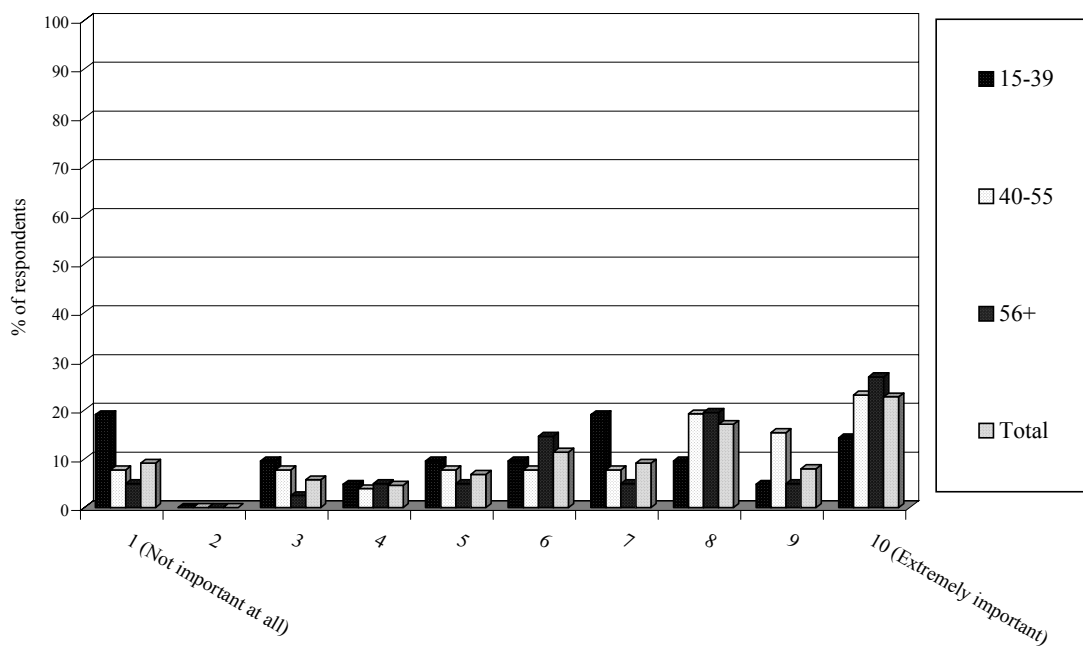
Interviewed Rectors
How important is the label 'Church of Ireland' to you?
Fig. 20
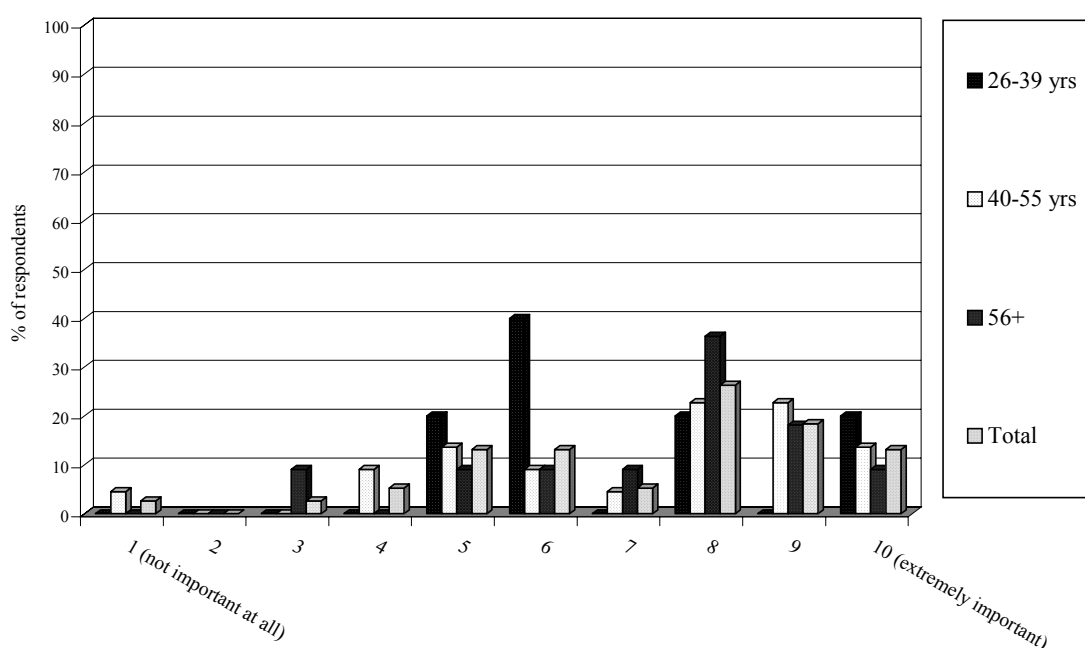
Figs. 19, 20: What does it mean to be Church of Ireland? Respondents were broadly divided across a range of responses, from seeing Church of Ireland identity as not very important, to extremely important.   However, no more than 25% of the total respondents agreed about any of the options. People feel generally loyal to the Church of Ireland, but do not consider it the 'be-all and end-all' of their identity.   In other words, Church of Ireland identity is considered basically important, although not held too exclusively by respondents.

Church of Ireland identity is clearly important to a large proportion of respondents:

> My whole life is tied up in the Church of Ireland. The way the Church of Ireland worships reflects the way I need to worship…we are both Catholic and Protestant, so we have this medium. **Curate, Armagh**

> I went to a Protestant primary school and was in a…Roman Catholic secondary school. I was one of two Protestants in it. So my Church of Ireland identity…became something that was very meaningful for me. [As for identity labels,] even 'Protestant' I think I would leave out, simply because I believe in the Catholic Church. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

The generalised inclusiveness of the church was criticised by a small number of respondents:

> I would see the Church of Ireland as very much in the catholic but reformed tradition…I would have difficulty in a sense with the word 'Protestant'…I'm not sure that the identity that I would have…would necessarily be one that all members of the Church of Ireland would share. **Rector, Armagh**

But most respondents believe that there are more important elements to identity than denominational or church background:

> I think being a Christian is more important than defining yourself as Church of Ireland…I went to see a boy [in a juvenile justice centre] who was down on the list as being Church of Ireland…and he said, 'No…I'm…Church of Northern Ireland.' He obviously thought the Ireland bit was not for him. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

[To be Church of Ireland means] to minister in and be part of a reformed Episcopal Church, with a clear confession of faith: the thirty-nine articles. The answer would have been stronger…if that understanding of the Church of Ireland was more widely shared in the Church of Ireland. **Rector, Clogher**

There certainly is [a] kind of heavy and unhealthy mix of 'we are right and nobody else is right', and I don't just mean one group when I say that….I don't know how we deal with that, but it comes out in issues about the theological college, it comes out in…General Synod, it comes out in correspondence pages of *The Church of Ireland Gazette*, and some people want to act as though it's not there. **Bishop**

The question of the relative importance of Church of Ireland doctrine was raised:

Lay People
The Church of Ireland teaches truer doctrines of Christian faith than other Churches
**Fig. 21**
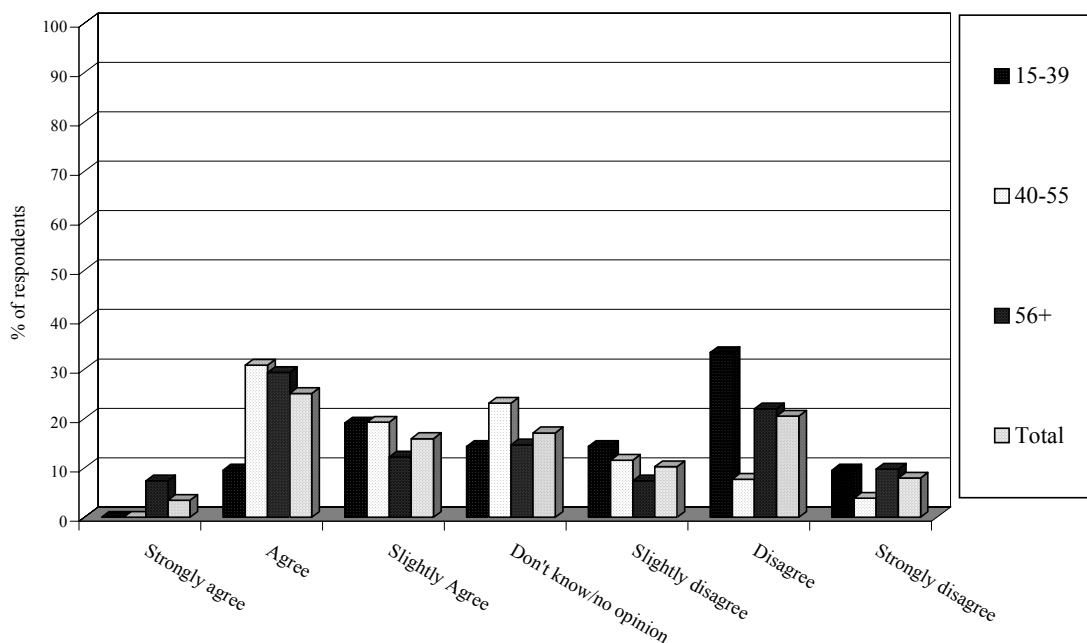
Interviewed Rectors
The Church of Ireland teaches truer doctrines of Christian faith than other churches
**Fig. 22**
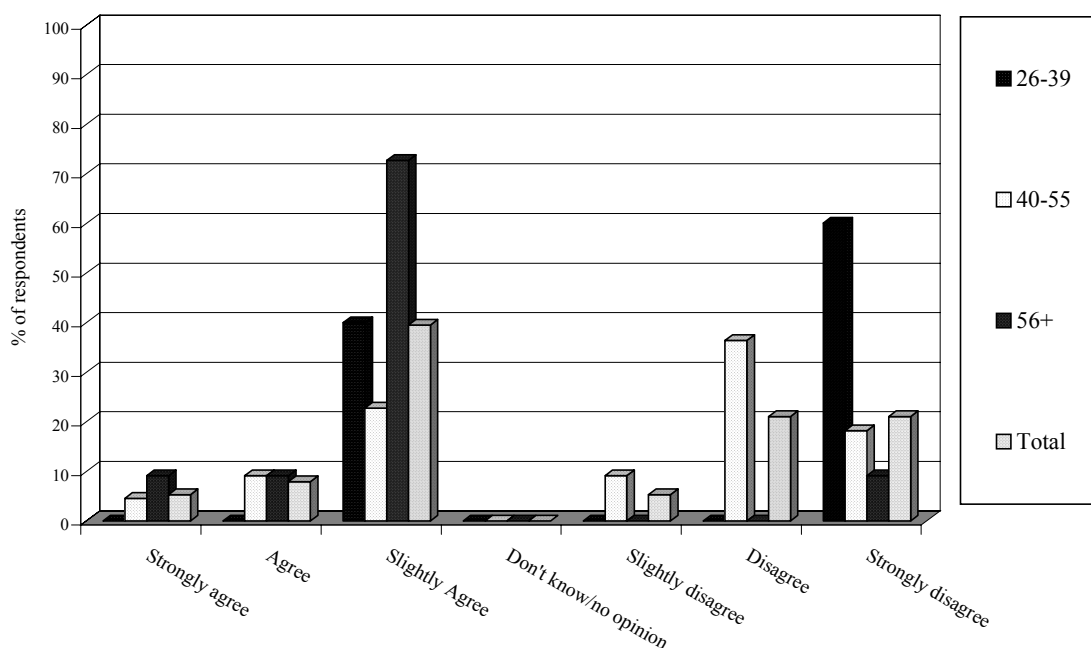
Figs. 21, 22: When considering doctrine taught within the Church of Ireland compared with that taught by other Christian churches, most clergy respondents tended toward not agreeing with the statement 'The Church of Ireland teaches truer doctrines of Christian faith than other churches', with only 38% of the total indicating slight agreement, and around 10% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Lay people were more evenly divided across a range of responses. The consensus was that the Church of Ireland is one of many valid expressions of Christian faith, and that even those who thought the church 'taught truer doctrines' did not believe this meant the church had a monopoly on Christian teaching.

Lay People
Could the name 'Church of Ireland' be sectarian?
Fig. 23
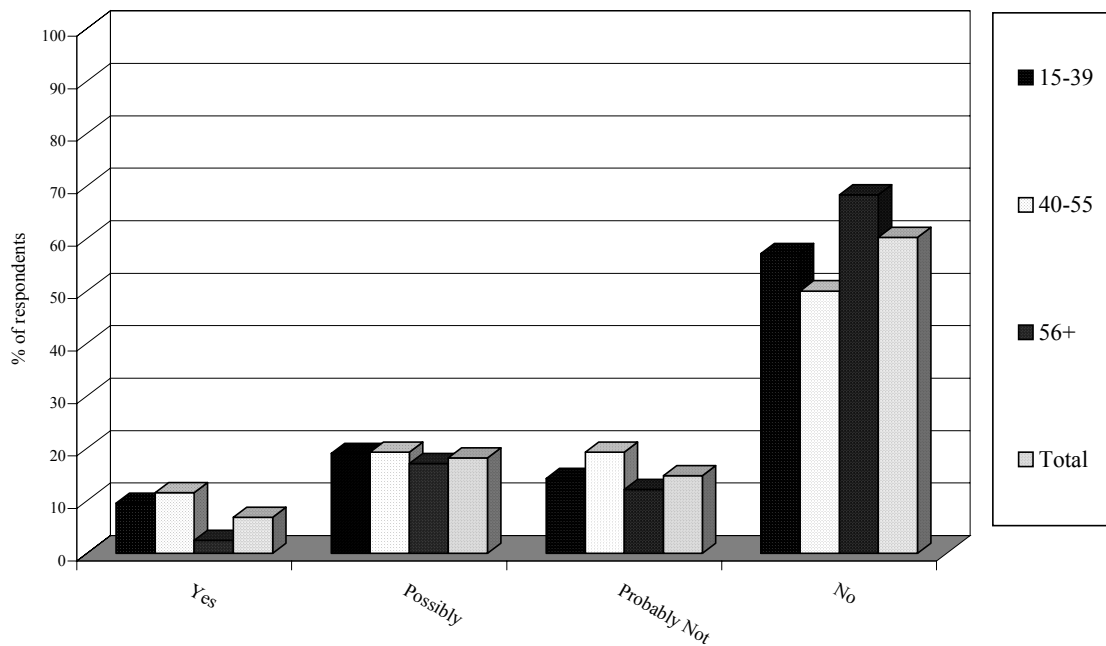
Interviewed Rectors
Could the name 'The Church of Ireland' be sectarian?
Fig. 24

© The General Synod of the Church of Ireland
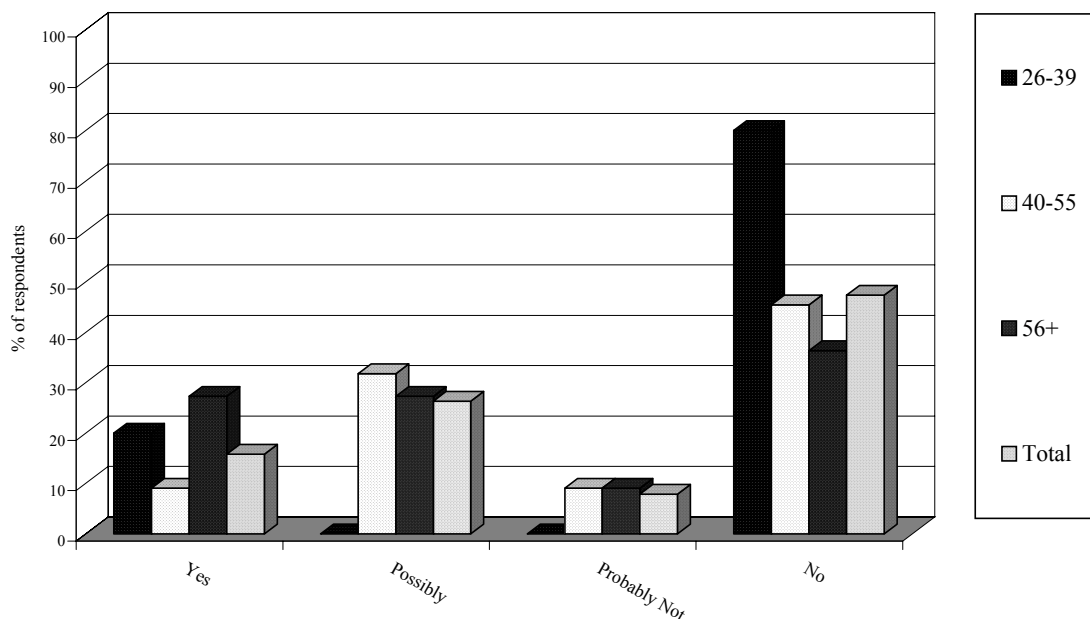
Figs. 23, 24 show that respondents were asked if they though the name 'the Church of Ireland' could be sectarian. Around 70% of both clergy and lay respondents said 'probably not' or 'no'. Many indicated that they had never considered this possibility, and some reflected that the Roman Catholic Church could be considered exclusive for the same reason as one might accuse the Church of Ireland. No one felt that the name should be changed urgently, although a few respondents said that a change from the 'Church *of* Ireland' to something like the 'Episcopal Church *in* Ireland' might be helpful.

> It's only very recently that I gave this any thought…[when] a colleague…said, 'think how the Roman Catholics must feel when we refer to ourselves as The Church of Ireland'. **Rector, Armagh**

> In no way does the Church of Ireland have a monopoly on true Christian doctrine, nor does the Roman Catholic Church. **Lay person, Armagh**

> Calling it *the* Church of Ireland may be sectarian, but it's infinitely preferable to 'Anglican'. I prefer to be called Church of Ireland as opposed to Protestant; the latter is an offensive term, obscuring denominational identity and can be used in a derogatory way, such as 'black prod'…the term is used where people are seen to be…anti-Catholic. I also consider it offensive to insist upon addressing people as Roman Catholics when their own self-identity is expressed as Catholic. **Lay person, Armagh**

> I was horrified when growing up at the terminology of 'being saved' and the notion that there [has to be] an exact time and place of the event. This was not at all my own experience. **Lay person, Armagh**

> How can it be sectarian? The question is provocative in itself. **Lay person, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

Lay People
National Identity
**Fig. 25**
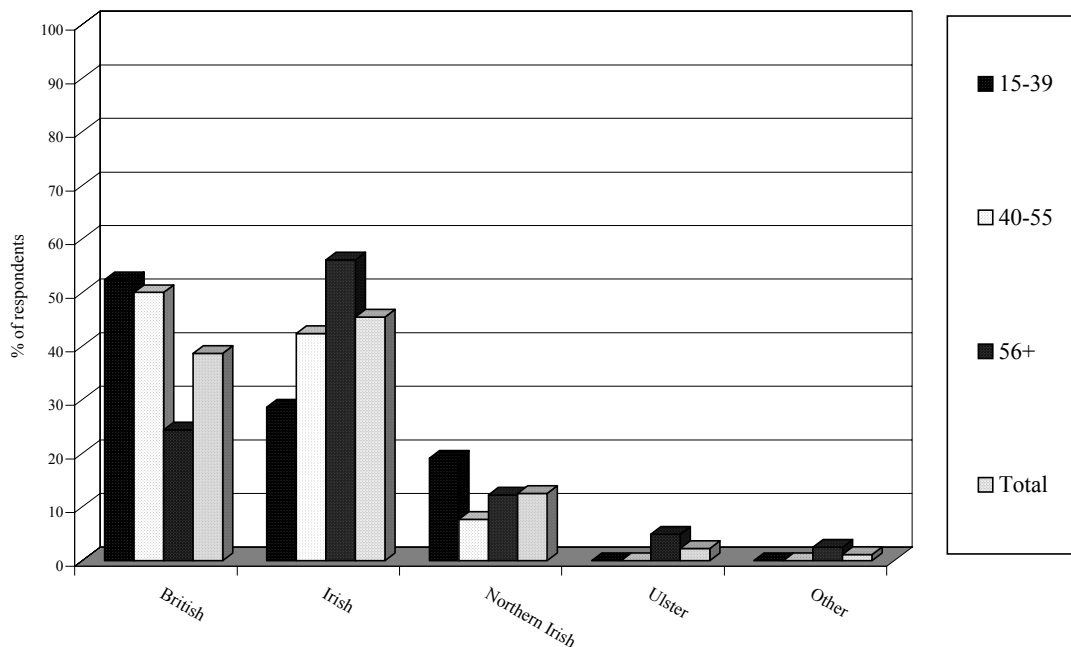
Interviewed Rectors
**National Identity**
Fig. 26
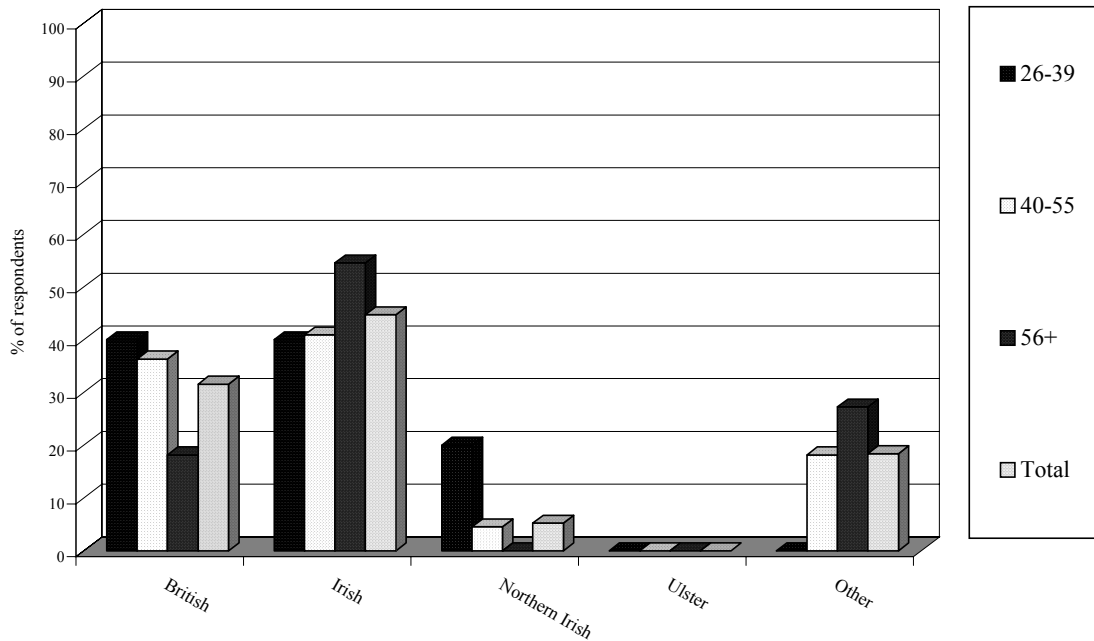
Figs. 25, 26: National identity was an uncomplicated matter, with respondents almost evenly distributed between British/Northern Irish and Irish. None of the respondents indicated any defensiveness regarding national identity and seemed to feel that their identity was not threatened and, in some cases, affirmed by the church, for instance:

> Any linkage between having to 'feel' British to be 'Protestant' in the Republic of Ireland is not as prevalent now as in times gone by. **Lay person, Derry and Raphoe**

Lay People
Please rank the following identity labels as you feel they apply to you
Fig. 27

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Interviewed Rectors
Please rank the following identity labels as you feel they apply to you
Fig. 28
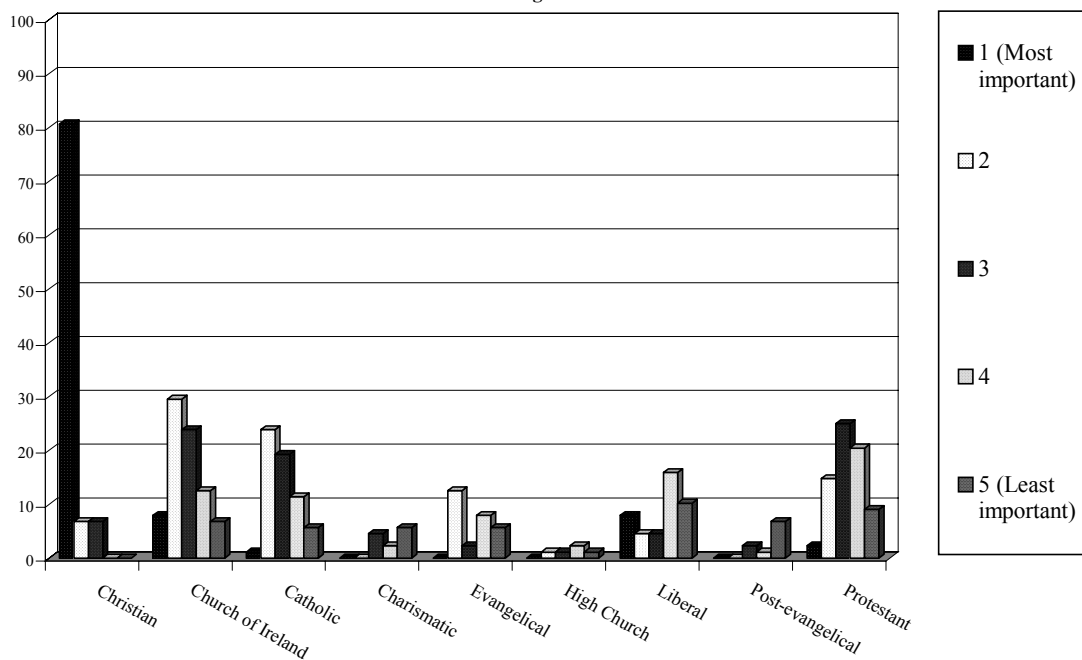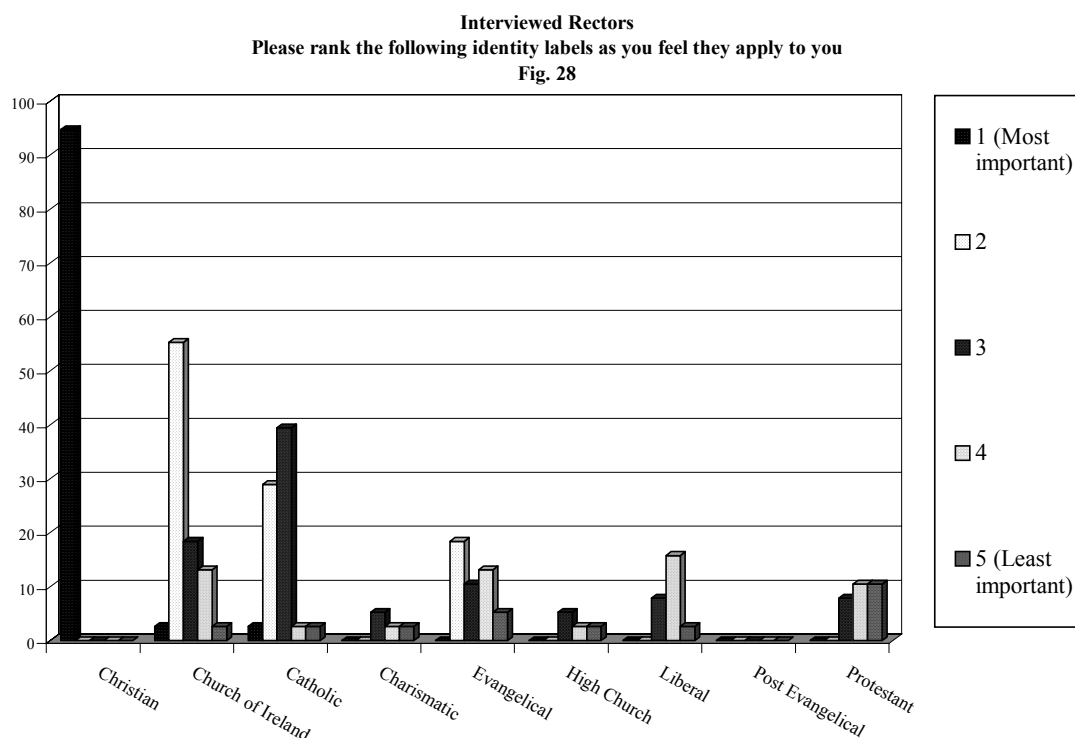
Figs. 27, 28: The range of suggested responses to the question on identity was agreed in consultation with the SEP committee. Both clergy and lay respondents considered 'Christian' to be the most important identity label that they apply to themselves. 'Church of Ireland' was the next most important, closely followed by 'Catholic' (as in 'one Catholic Church'). Rectors then indicated 'evangelical' as the fourth most important label, although lay people's fourth preference was 'Protestant'. It is noteworthy that 58% of lay respondents, but only 28% of clergy respondents, gave this label any preference at all. 'Protestant' was often considered a 'loaded' term, with negative connotations, especially in Northern Ireland. Many respondents said they preferred to see themselves as 'reformed' rather than 'Protestant' because of what they saw as the exclusive popular perceptions of 'Protestantism' in the context of sectarianism.

> I think that the single identity issue is an important one, because perhaps re-discovering or affirming your own identity can give a necessary and important contribution towards understanding the identity of others, and recognising the importance of the different outlooks, attributes coming together in a positive way for the overall good. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

> *Any on that list you would eliminate immediately? Where would Protestant come?*
> Last of all…In Northern Ireland it has so many negative connotations. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

> Being known as a Christian is more important, and being Church of Ireland is secondary. Being a follower of Jesus…having been forgiven and trusting Jesus, that's the first thing. **Rector, Connor**

> The church should address our own identity first to be clear in what it means to be a Christian; i.e. that political affiliation is not a part of faith. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

> We have to get our own…people to understand that our own history is not perfect…that we have to make a new beginning, not always referring to our glorious past. **Rector, Cashel and Ossory**

> Presbyterians are more likely to…vent anger about their denomination…whereas people in the Church of Ireland say, 'I hate the Church of Ireland, but I love it. I can't stand the bureaucratic rigmarole, but I've

a deep loyalty to it...And we're certainly more diverse than the [other churches may] think [they are]. **Youth Worker, unknown diocese.**

What does the word Protestant mean to you? Would you use it to describe yourself?
No, because I always associate the word Protestant with meaning protesting against something, and I don't see that I am. **Rector, Meath and Kildare**

Charismatic and Evangelical are labels that mean nothing to me. **Lay person, Limerick and Killaloe**

What's evangelical mean? I don't know much about it!...In [a nearby town] C of I identity isn't important, but 10 miles away it is, especially for the older people. **Lay person, Tuam, Killala and Achonry**

I think it's very important – it's an important label. I think it's just one tiny branch of Christianity, but it's the one into which I was born, and the one that I love dearly – but not in any exclusive sense, not that it's superior to any other. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

[Often] in the Church of Ireland there is a denial of the problem, especially through the use of the term 'via media'. If it's [really] a bridge, is anyone crossing it? **Anonymous respondent**

Some said that the Church of Ireland is a 'safe place to fail', but that blandness too easily becomes the order of the day:

So what's gone wrong with the Church of Ireland, and what's gone right? What do you like about it?
Freedom to fail...I saw something at our church that really thrilled me. It was a bunch of flowers...lying on the porch; it had been on the communion table – at the front of the church and the back of the church – and it really meant that no matter how dry or dead they became they shouldn't be thrown out.

Do [people] hate them being thrown out because they don't want to give the impression of being bad people, or because they really want to keep them?
I think a certain mediocrity has to be achieved in the Church of Ireland, or you'll go too far. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

It's been good to be able to fail and still be welcome, but there's a certain sort of failing that at times goes on, among congregation and leadership, in the Church of Ireland that unfortunately just drifts on by, and no-one ever asks a question or two about why...Stuff like declining numbers, and inability to impact communities, or even love people who aren't a part of us. There's a kind of failure out there that we don't ask questions about. Why, if the gospel is the power of the salvation...does it seem to be so irrelevant? And it isn't the gospel that's irrelevant, but there's something has failed about how we even live it. **Ordained Youth Worker, Down and Dromore**
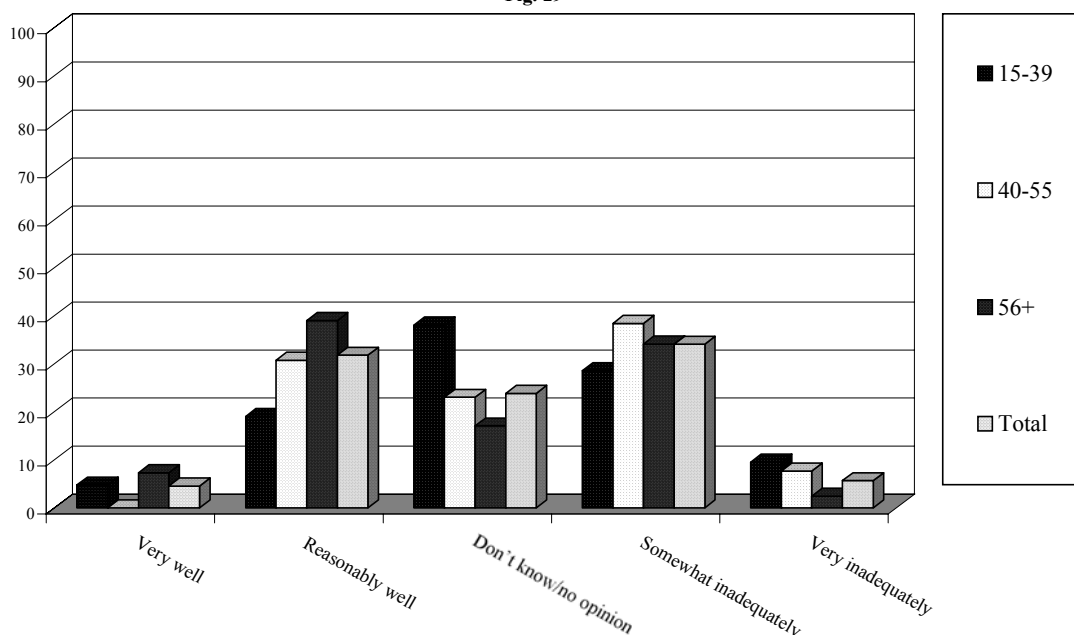

CHURCH OF IRELAND IDENTITY

- *Respondents believe that Church of Ireland identity is inclusive. There is no serious concern that the name 'The Church of Ireland' may itself be sectarian.*

- *Being known as a Christian is seen as more important than being known as a member of the Church of Ireland.*

- *Sometimes Church of Ireland members feel 'looked down on' by the members of other reformed churches.*

- *Respondents generally did not identify with the term 'Protestant', usually because it is perceived by many to have negative connotations in Northern Ireland.*

- *Respondents did not, on the whole, consider national identity to be a matter of contention.*

- *The Drumcree controversy negatively colours many people's perceptions of Church of Ireland identity.*

- *Some respondents in the Republic of Ireland do not want to 'be like' the Northern church. There is a perception that 'the north is not like the south'.*

- *The Church of Ireland can be undemanding in a positive sense, but this sometimes expresses itself at the expense of striving always for the best.*

# 4: CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND STRUCTURE, GENERAL SYNOD AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

The question of church government elicited a consensus that might be best summarised as follows: Parish ministry is the keystone of the Church of Ireland. The influence of Select Vestries at the parish level is far greater than either diocesan or General Synod. In some cases, General Synod is considered to be irrelevant to parish life. As one lay respondent from Down and Dromore said: 'Progress will depend on real commitment from the top and actual involvement at parish level'. Approximately 35% of both clergy and lay respondents felt that differences surrounding the governmental decision making process are inadequately handled (see **Figs. 29, 30**; these and other similar charts reflect responses to questions beginning 'How well do you feel the Church of Ireland handles [the following]?'). This is manifested in a range of cases, from simple 'everyday tasks' squeezing out the space for wider reflection on policy, to the perception of several respondents of inadequate consultation on the new hymn book, to the assertion by one rector that 'if my parishioners knew what the Synod thinks about Drumcree, my job would be that much harder'. A number of lay people said that the process of getting involved in church structures is cumbersome and uninviting. There is a need for better relations between parishes, dioceses, and General Synod. As one respondent said, 'There is a need for a redefinition of structures – what is the place of the various governmental agencies in the Church of Ireland? The body of Christ needs each other – sectarianism is a severed arm but [we need] a prescription for the entire body.'

Lay People
How well do you feel the Church of Ireland handles differences surrounding the way decisions are made in church government?
Fig. 29

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Interviewed Rectors
How well do you feel the Church of Ireland handles differences surrounding the way decisions are made
in church government?
Fig. 30
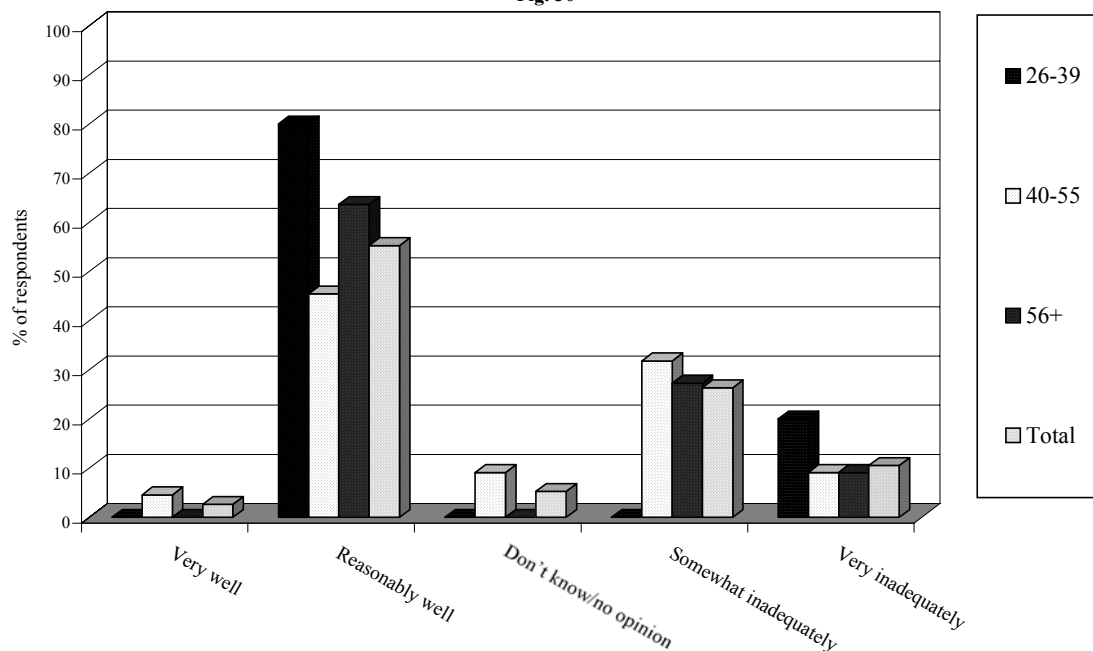
Respondents' opinions on church government and public leadership are illustrated by the following quotations:

Church government is viewed with a degree of confusion or suspicion by some:

> Vestries are like secret societies. **Lay person, Derry and Raphoe**

> There is definitely no consultation by the hierarchy when it comes to decision making and decisions are made without any information or feedback being given (referring to specific issue of property sale). **Lay person, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

> Decision-making is not generally well handled; there is often inadequate consultation or management of change. **Lay person, Limerick and Killaloe**

> The average bum on the pew couldn't care less about hierarchical level and couldn't tell you what a dean/archdeacon is(a criticism as much as an observation). **Lay person, Connor**

> It is never clear who is speaking on behalf of the church. The 'hierarchy' is sometimes a catch-all term which does not clearly identify who is voicing opinion. **Lay person, Down and Dromore**

> Not all ideas made at hierarchical level are realistic or their implications properly thought out. **Lay person, Derry and Raphoe**

The need to do more than 'say kind words' about sectarianism and difference was mentioned:

> Sectarianism will not end with the publication of findings. The Church of Ireland needs a monitor-scheme for years to come that will ask *'is there a sectarian issue?'* at each stage of our central as well as local work. **Bishop**

> What would Jesus do in the face of sectarianism? [This] must be taught and lived out by us Christian leaders. We must lead others – be an example to them. **Rector, Armagh**

The relationship between parishes and Synods, both diocesan and general was highlighted:

> I think [my parishioners] would feel part of the wider church, but there always seems to be an attitude, 'Them up in Armagh'. Now it's not necessarily critical, but it's just that decisions are made in Armagh. **Rector, Armagh**

Most of [my parishioners] would accept, bishop knows best. **Rector, Down and Dromore**

Do lay people feel they have a stake in the way decisions are made in the church?
I think on paper we all have a say. Now how that works out in practice is slightly different, and…I always get the feeling, rightly or wrongly, that most decisions have been made in advance. **Rector, Armagh**

We had our Diocesan Synod yesterday, and people don't know each other. There's really no forum for getting to know each other. **Rector, Connor**

Do lay people have a stake in decision-making?
They can do. If they're really obnoxious and wish to push their point the avenue is there to do it. But most of them don't know they can do it. **Rector, Tuam, Killala, and Achonry**

Here we are self-contained and don't need to think about other things. Maybe we are just not aware of the big, wider world. **Lay person, Armagh**

It's ok at the local level, not at the diocesan or [General] Synod level; people are intimidated by the processes. Often the same people are repeatedly elected. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

Do lay people feel that they have a stake in the decision-making process in your experience?
Yes, when it comes to parish and diocesan things…But not enough people take part in the election process.

That seems to be a common pattern…
Yes, but…in recent years, on my return [from] General Synod, [I have] given a report the Sunday afterwards, there are a number of people afterwards who say how much they value that, to be included…The biggest thing that's misunderstood [is the] fact it is put there by themselves, for themselves. **Rector, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

A distinction was made however, that the General Synod is select, since not everybody can necessarily afford to go to the Synod, or would even have the interest in going in the first place. The point was made that after Synod more information should be related back to ordinary people. **Focus Group report, Derry and Raphoe**

Church government was considered important by some, although it did not always reach its potential:

If you have sloppy government, everything falls apart as well. You do need a structure. And yet I wouldn't put that at the top of my list. But it is very important. **Curate, Armagh**

The view was strongly expressed that the issue of sectarianism within parishes must be challenged and that efforts to do this differ greatly from parish to parish, yet the church must take the lead and be seen to be doing something. **Focus Group report, Down and Dromore**

What [the] church is doing right? I believe the sectarianism document adopted by the 1999 General Synod is an excellent example of how the subject can be dealt with thoroughly and honestly. Also its investigation of the church's relationship with the Orange Order is explored with similar rigour, and arrives at clear conclusions. But, as happens so often...a problem is accurately identified, then a case of continue on the old `sweet' way. **Patsy McGarry, Irish Times**

The danger of strategy being imposed 'from above' was of concern to some respondents:

Well it shouldn't be a top-down thing, and we need to go back to make sure that the process which started this bottom-up doesn't become a top-down. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

Synod needs to change…The Synod before [last], we spent most of Synod time going through liturgy, and…one day to the best of my memory was discussing where 'the', 'and' and 'no' should be, and dots, and you name it, and commas and semi-colons. That is not the business of Synod. And whenever you get back *The Church of Ireland Gazette* talks about that, most people say, 'What a waste of time, and why do our rectors go down and spend three days in Dublin if that's all they're doing?…It's an irrelevancy,…in this parish anyway. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

> *So in your wildest dreams what would you like the Synod to say next year?*
> That denomination is no longer relevant…I will preach that from my pulpit. How can I bring tomorrow two young people to the communion rails and unite them as one, if I still think as a denominational person? It's a mockery. We have a tradition that is very valuable, and we have a way of doing things that's very valuable, but to be Church of Ireland as a name or a flag isn't the important thing to me. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

> It is unrealistic for an Archbishop of Armagh to have the international role that he has, and also to have day-to-day running of his diocese. So there should be a domestic bishop to look after the diocese of Armagh...There ought [also] to be a bishop for Belfast. There is a city split between two dioceses, and a whole range of issues. And it would be better to have somebody who's identified as giving a measure of leadership within the city. I don't believe the Archbishop is properly resourced by the church. I think it is totally unacceptable...The research facilities he has are nil, the office facilities he has are at best rudimentary: he's got a wonderful secretary, but…he has a very, very difficult diocese…You don't want to leave hostages to fortune, and he's Archbishop, so he can afford to take fewer risks than some of the rest of us…What we ought to be doing is giving him cover. **Anonymous respondent**

And the public role of the church was mentioned as an important resource that is not always properly resourced or used to its best potential:

> There was a concern that the Church of Ireland does not make enough public statements; it is not good at taking a pro-active stance in relation to social issues. **Focus Group report, Derry and Raphoe**

> We sometimes water all our leadership down by saying, 'Well each bishop has his own voice,' and whatever else. And that's where the Presbyterian Church came through very well in the last while in Northern Ireland. Whether or not it was supportive of its own grouping, it spoke out – it gave leadership. And I think we owe it to our church members to do that. **Rector, Dublin and Glendalough**

> Bishops, etc. could be more courageously outspoken and less concerned to wait for the carefully crafted statement giving the so-called 'definitive' C of I viewpoint. **Rector, Meath and Kildare**

> The church needs a structure which, while recognizing the wide diversity of its constituency, can respond to community needs with an identified voice. Who speaks for the Church of Ireland? Bishops, General Synod, etc? The creation of a new Church in Society Committee…may help – but situations often demand an immediate response. Often it is the opinion of the Primate or an individual bishop which is perceived to be the *'voice of the Church of Ireland.'* Adequate research is necessary and [the Primate] does not have access to that at present. **Bishop**

Every diocese within the Church of Ireland is different, with distinct traditions and patterns of ministry. The particular emphases of bishops clearly influence the life of the diocese, but perhaps no more or less so than questions of tradition, history, and so on. Obviously this Scoping Study cannot draw detailed conclusions on a diocesan basis, but **Figs. 31-34** show respondents' views of the characteristics of Church of Ireland identity in general, illustrated by the quotations that follow the charts. This is not an exclusive list – respondents were invited to indicate the 3 or 4 characteristics that they considered or perceived to be most important.)
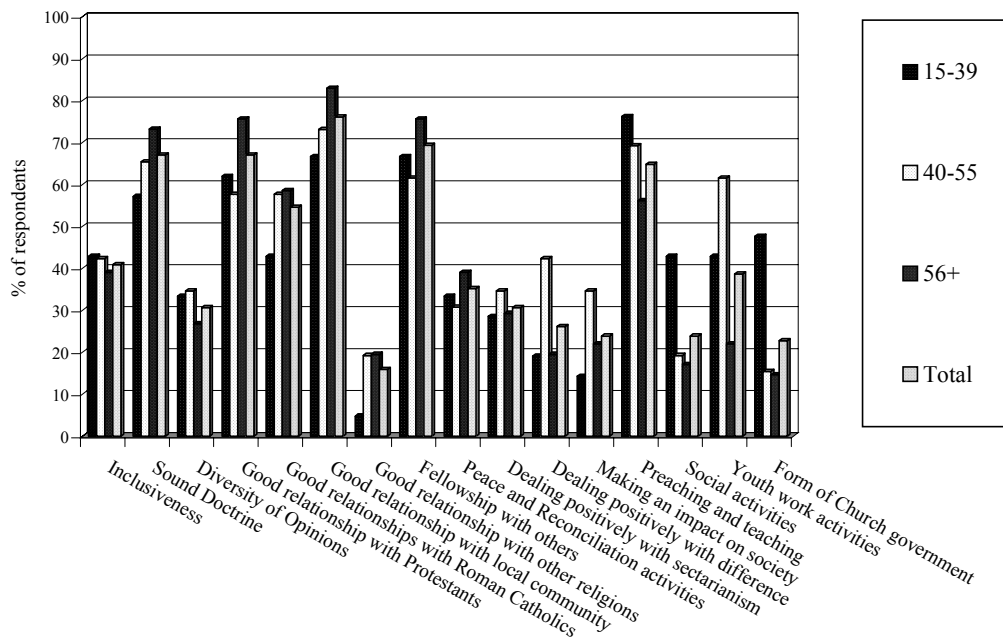
Lay People
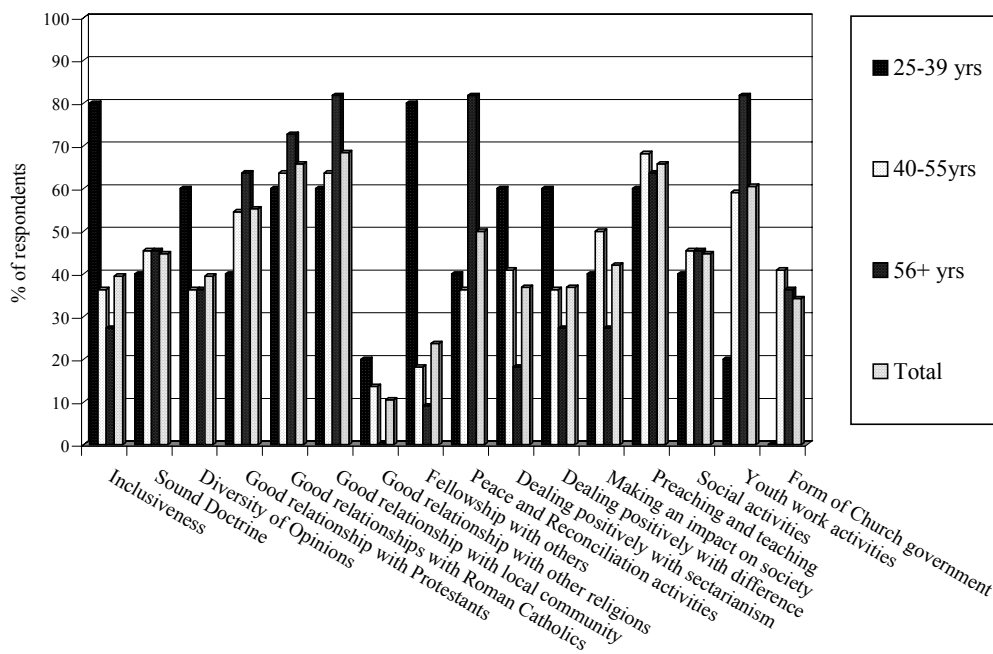**Which should be important characteristics of Church of Ireland identity?**
Fig. 31
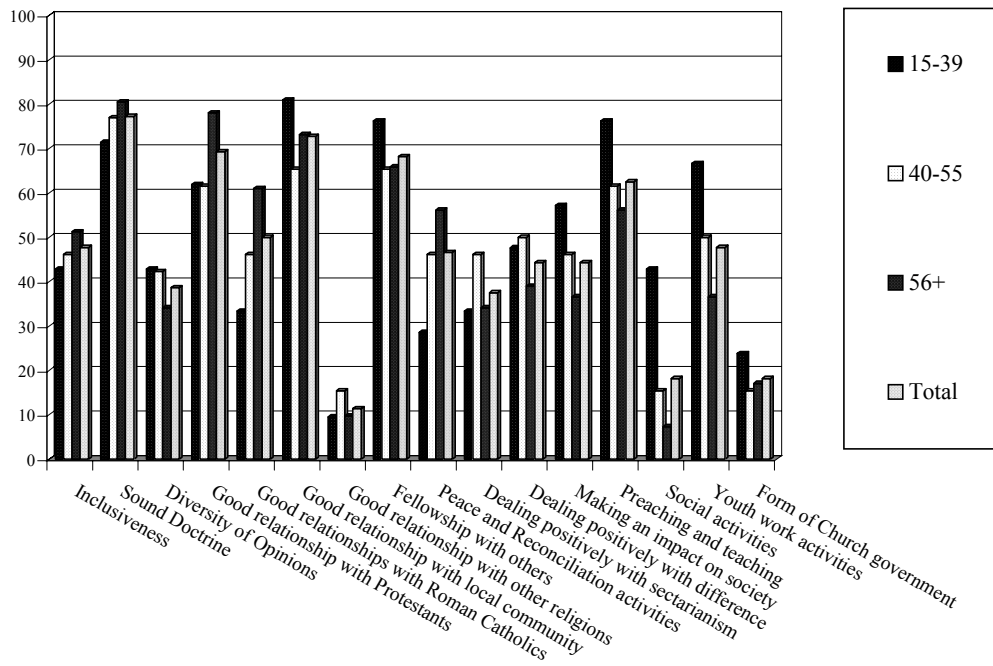
Interviewed Rectors
Which should be important characteristics of Church of Ireland identity?
Fig. 32
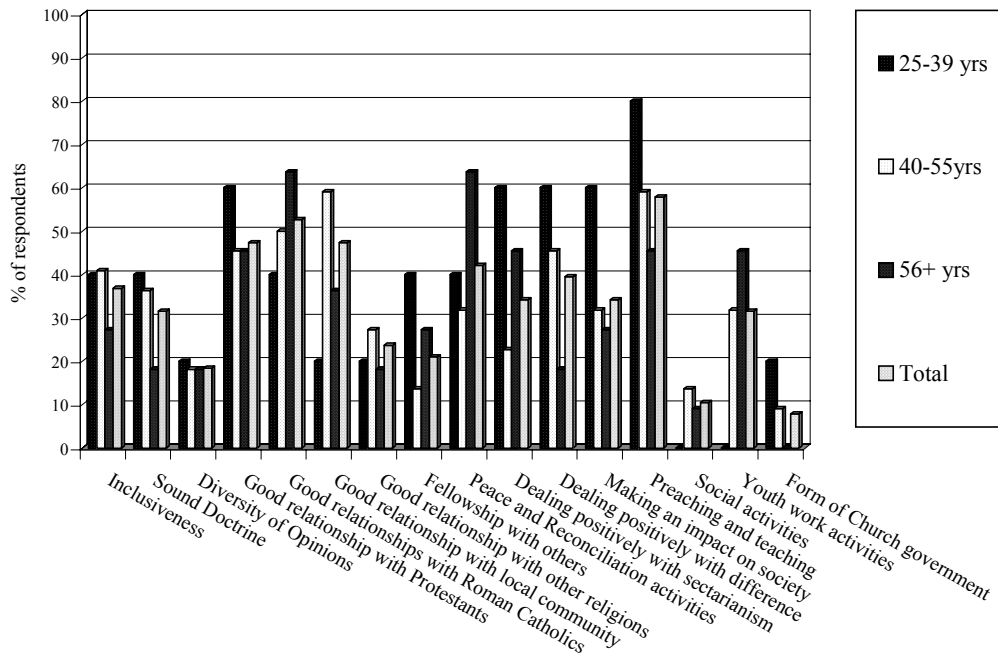
Lay People
Which are important characteristics of Church of Ireland identity?
Fig. 33

Interviewed Rectors
Which are important characteristics of Church of Ireland identity?
Fig. 34

The charts show that 40-50% of clergy respondents, and 25-35% of lay respondents felt that peace and reconciliation activities, dealing positively with sectarianism, and dealing positively with difference were currently important characteristics of Church of Ireland identity. It should be noted that **'peace and reconciliation activities', 'dealing positively with sectarianism', and 'dealing positively with difference' were ranked relatively low** on the list of characteristics that respondents considered to be the current reality in their own dioceses. On the whole, **diocesan twinnings were not considered to be of particular value** by respondents, although this may be more due to lack of experience in this area than any substantial critique. It is clear that the **diocesan context**, perhaps naturally, **impinges more on the life of parishioners than the General Synod**, and the SEP should strategically employ the diocesan structure in its future work. That said, for many in the Church of Ireland, life beyond the particular parish is difficult to imagine, and may have little or no impact on the lives of members. The most obvious implication is that the SEP must focus proportionately on life at the parochial level as well as making appropriate use of diocesan structures. While statements made at Synod, or policies adopted by Standing Committee have their place, there is no substitute for practical work at the level of people's everyday lives. Some examples of responses are provided for illustration:

> [Diocesan twinnings] tend to go over people's heads. It's a nice idea, but I'm not sure just how much it hits the ground. **Rector, Connor**

> I see very little value in [diocesan twinnings], of what we can give to them or they can give to us. I would think if there's going to be twinning – I was out in Africa last September, and we saw a church there in need – I think financially we would have a lot to give to them, and maybe historically we could have certain things to give to them. Twinnings like that, where there's going to be definite advantage one way or the other, or both. **Rector, Connor**

> Certainly I would regard the diocese…almost personified in the Archbishop himself, as encapsulating the idea that we should deal positively with difference…And part of the strength…of the whole Church of Ireland, is to try and hold in tension all of these differences, and that's done certainly at diocesan level in relation to the various theological outlooks of the clergy. **Rector, Armagh**

> Evangelism should be high [on my list]…it really means getting out there, and gospel warts and all…and if people don't like what you're saying then tough.

> *And what form do [your] peacemaking opportunities take?*
> I think not just necessarily standing on a peace line on the Garvaghy Road or anything like that, but even trying to bring peace to situations in schools, between parents and teachers or between parents and children, things like that. Not being afraid to allow yourself to be there as an intercessor if people need one, and that people would know you're accessible and available from that point of view. There are so many conflicts that need to be resolved within our every day parish situation as opposed to a paramilitary environment. **Rector, Cashel and Ossory**

> I'd have to distinguish here of course between my diocese and the diocese of Raphoe, not Derry and Raphoe; they're very different. **Rector, Derry and Raphoe**

> I think this diocese is being – I think the bishop is trying to make the diocese…in his own image, and I don't think that's going to happen. **Rector, diocese withheld**

> Inclusiveness is [considered] more important than sound doctrine. **Rector, Clogher**

The role of the clergy differs between denominations, and the role of the Church of Ireland rector is very distinctive. There is also a difference between the way the church government describes itself and the manner in which people perceive it. As one respondent said:

> The Church of Ireland most definitely does not have a hierarchy...The Church of Ireland General Synod has a House of Bishops. That is the only collective we have to describe this grouping of office bearers!...I make this point for a very serious reason. It is too easy for all of us, clergy and laity alike, to behave as though someone above us is responsible. This report is based on the premise that we all have a burden of responsibility for this issue and its resolution. **Anonymous respondent**

Lay People
Handling Clergy / Laity difference
Fig. 35
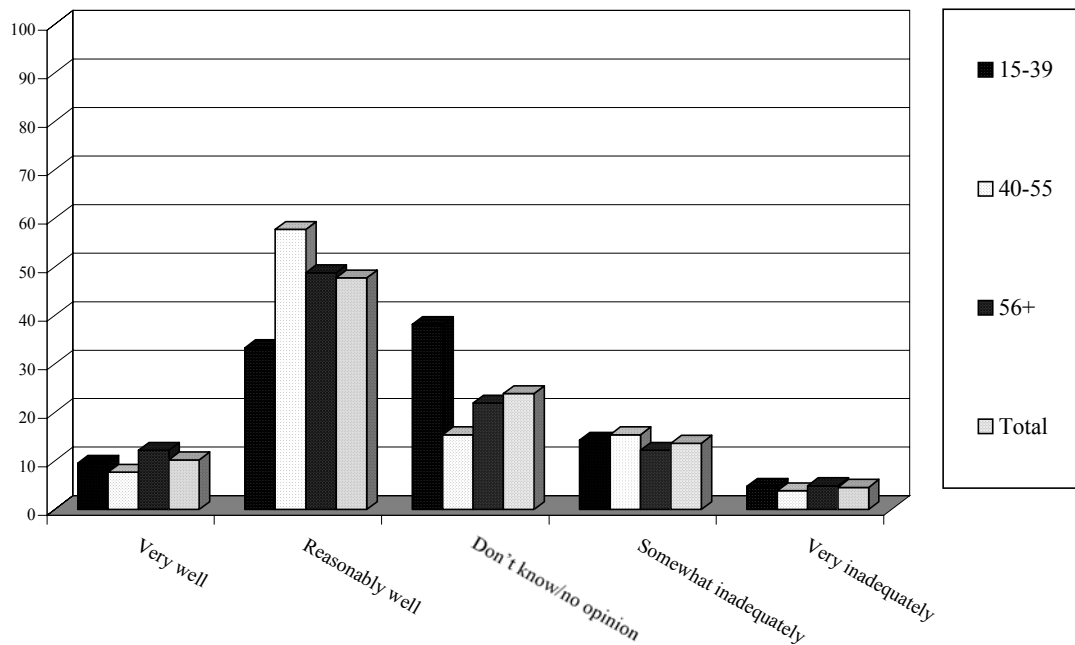
Interviewed Rectors
Handling Clergy / Laity difference
Fig. 36
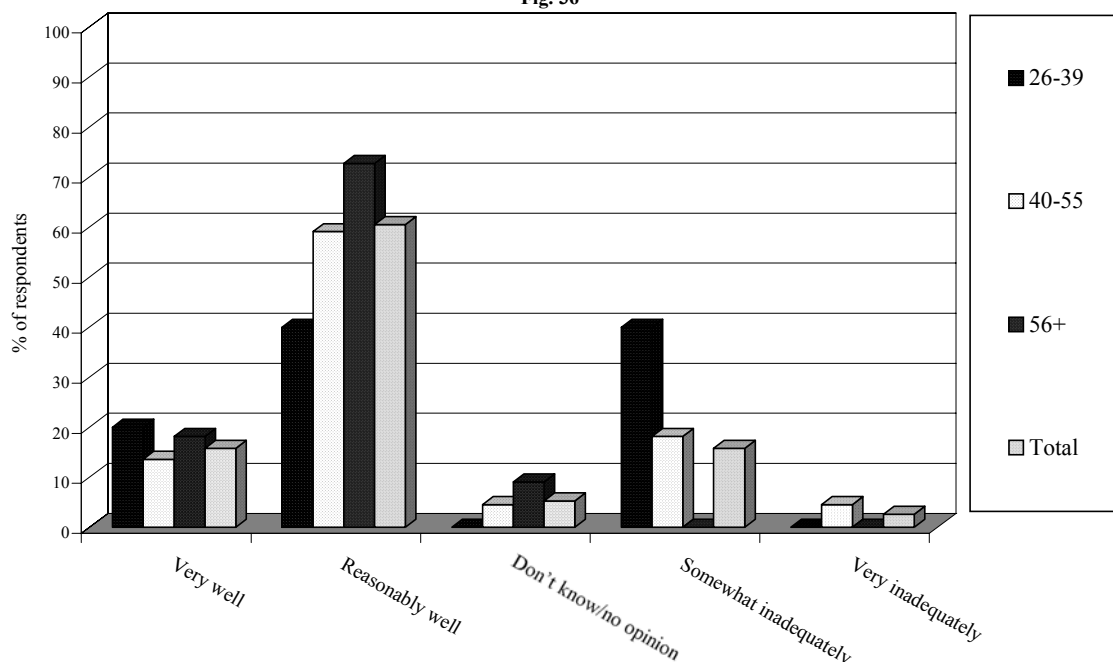
A large majority - 75% - of rectors felt that clergy/laity difference was handled well, with about 18% saying it was handled somewhat or very inadequately (see **Figs. 36, 36**). 15% of lay people felt the issue was handled inadequately, with around 55% saying it was well handled, although 20% said they had no opinion or did not know, usually due to having no experience of the issue arising. Obviously there will always be local situations of clergy/laity difference, but in everyday experience, these seem to be not too controversial. However, a few respondents related examples of some controversy, often surrounding such bureaucratic issues as church property sales, which go to the heart of the issues raised in the section on church government. And there have been several cases of pseudo-political conflict surrounding the relationship between the Orange Order and the Church of Ireland, some of which are well known to the SEP, and will be discussed later in the report. Some examples follow:

> If the clergyman wants a particular service but the lay people want something different, who wins? **Lay person, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

> There was a perception that when differences arise between clergy and lay people, what often tends to happen is that clergy are simply shunted off to a new parish. The question was asked as to whom does the hierarchy support: – clergy or lay people? **Focus Group report, Connor**

> I think this parish…looks to me as a leader, and they'll challenge [some things], but there's…a degree of trust that I'm the boy that's got the job and I have to do it, but that also means that you get everything to do…Often I feel that I know ninety-five percent of the ministry. If a difference appears with laity and me it's because they only know fifty-five percent of it. **Rector, Connor**

> My style of leadership would be to involve everybody…But because of the fact that…previous clergy…have allowed them to do their own thing, I now have a power struggle going on between myself and some of the people that don't see me as being the rector. **Rector, Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh**

CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND STRUCTURE, SYNOD AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP

- *The parish is the core expression of the life of the Church of Ireland.*

- *Lay ministry is not given adequate priority. There is regret that the responsibilities of Select Vestries are limited to focus on technical issues such as finance and property rather than shared responsibility for spiritual leadership.*

- *Every diocese is different and may require a distinct strategy. Dioceses are vital to the development of the SEP.*

- *Many people believe that dioceses are personified in the bishop; relations between bishops and clergy are key, and tend to vary according to the bishop's style.*

- *Diocesan twinnings are not, on the whole, considered useful in their current form.*

- *Diocesan strategies tend to be reactive. The potential of a diocese for pro-actively assisting clergy in responding to difficult issues should be explored.*

- *There is little connection in terms of agenda, style and output between parish ministry and General Synod. General Synod is often considered irrelevant in the context of everyday parish ministry.*