

Council for Mission in Ireland. Mavis Gibbons, Diocese of Connor

“Embargoed until Delivery”

‘A church exists for mission as a fire exists for burning’ (Emil Brunner) – the purpose and the raison d’être for the church’s existence. Taking the analogy of a fire, it is a centre of attraction, draws people towards it, gives warmth, and is often used to destroy. An effective fire needs to be looked after to keep it burning

As we look today at our land, how many of these analogies would be true of the church, and are they necessary? Throughout many churches in Ireland there is a growing realisation that if we do not fulfil the purpose for which the church exists, mission, then we have little future.

Attractive being the church in an increasingly secular society, how attractive are we to those outside? Ask any group within a church what the person on the ‘outside’ thinks about the church and they easily answer. Despite the fact we are aware of these things, there is a reluctance often to do much about it.

Warmth The growing need in our individualistic society for people is to ‘belong’, yet for many coming from outside, church can be the hardest place to do this. We place expectations of dress and behaviour on them and think they should be ‘like us’. There is a call today for ‘community’ a place where people can have loving relationships. Community has to be created and it is the challenge the church must be aware of, starting with those who already ‘belong’ and drawing others in where they too have a sense of ‘belonging’ so that in turn they will ‘believe’. A living, loving, caring community draws others in.

Destroy No one likes to hear of fires that destroy property, and more especially people; but what clarity of message does the church have for the society around us? Jesus called the church to be ‘salt’ and ‘light’ and there are times when we need to do this in a way that will give the moral and ethical guidelines needed in our land today, even when it is costly to do so.

Keep burning Constant awareness is needed for the church to be relevant to the society the church has to witness to. Leadership and vision are vital in this. The message **must not** change, the market place where people are **does not** change, but the methods we use **must** change, if we are to be faithful to both the Great Command and the Great Commission.

