

Church of Ireland Youth Department

Proposed by Revd Paul Whittaker Armagh Diocese

“Embargoed until Delivery”

In our written report for General Synod 2002, we described the need to simplify the running of the Youth Department; to deliver more youth work and funding ‘on the ground’ or ‘at the coal face’, and at the same time provide training and resourcing at a central level. One year on, we are very happy to report that overall our policy of the devolution of funds, reduction in administrative costs, and the provision of training and networking has been successfully implemented, and is beginning to bear fruit.

Three years ago we looked at our income and we looked at our expenditure and were disappointed to find that too much of our funding was being used for the provision of salaries and the high cost of administration. We knew back then that we had to make changes and attempt to get as much of our funding down to the grass-roots and into the dioceses and into the parishes. This process has been difficult and (extremely) painful. It’s easy enough to see the need for change, but hard enough sometimes to implement it! So, the Bishop of Tuam and I have had many sleepless nights and much prayer and reflection over the past couple of years. He, like myself, has at times wondered whether it was possible to solve these difficulties but we have been encouraged by others to persevere and pray and keep moving forward. Over the past few years in my association with the Youth Department I have been very much encouraged by Col.3:23 that reads *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for God and not for men.”*

We are very much aware of the biblical concept in John 15 where Jesus says that it is important for us to give the Father glory by bearing much fruit. So we have been asking ourselves the question, are we bearing fruit, are we bearing much fruit or are we bearing no fruit at all. We believe we are bearing fruit, much fruit and much more to follow in the next few years. Since we went down the road of ‘devolved funding’ to the Dioceses here are a few examples of what has happened or is in the pipeline, Tuam have just employed a part-time youth worker and have two large events for young people planned for this coming year, Dublin and Glendalough are seeking to appoint a full-time youth officer, Kilmore are seeking to appoint a full-time youth officer, Down & Dromore have put their funding into the ongoing work of the ‘Think Again Programme’, the ‘Catacomb Project in Calry Parish Sligo has benefited from the funding, Limerick have applied their funding to the ongoing work with young people and have employed three part-time youth workers, Connor have awarded grants to the Rural Deanerys for work on the ground in parishes and coming from Armagh I have a list of

grants made direct to parishes..... all good encouraging work that has been made possible or have been assisted by, devolved funding.

In addition to this we are seeking to discover ways of measuring and reflecting upon the fruit we are bearing in the Youth Department. If we are being effective or not being effective. What is working and what is not working? There is a need for us as individuals and as a Church to measure our progress. In business, progress reports happen every day, evaluating, reporting, budgeting, it's expected. Some would say the Church is not a business, that's okay, but we are in the Kingdom building business. Every person and organization is expected to be accountable and are constantly evaluating their progress. So, as an Executive and Central Board, we are putting in place monitoring systems, and further funding will depend on the results of these reports. We aim to be accountable and transparent and good stewards of the funding we are allocated.

As you will see from the report we have also had preliminary discussions about a possible third phase which would concern the governance and management of the Youth Department. Although, as you will see from the Report this year, the ideas were shelved for the time being, members of the General Synod may be interested to know the thinking behind proposals for some simplification that may come to pass in three years' time.

Summer Madness has grown from a small-scale summer camp attended by 250 people to a quite large, very public conference attracting almost 5,000 people. We're currently looking at a Summer Madness Limited Company Proposal and will continue our association with them in the area of programme and the festival and want to assure everyone that Summer Madness roots are still very firmly based in the Church of Ireland. We are working our way through a draft version of a Memorandum of Understanding and examining the possibility of bringing the summer camp to Dublin in 2004.

I would like to pay tribute to our new Youth Ministry Co-ordinator Mr David Brown, Revd Pat Storey the part-time field worker and Mrs Barbara Swann our Office Co-ordinator for all their hard work in the past 12 months. Pat heads up our Youth Worker Support Programme, youth workers part-time and full-time has grown from there being 3 of these workers 6 years ago to 28 of the workers currently working in the Church of Ireland and this ministry is growing.

But at the moment we have a full Central Board and an Executive of excellent people from all around the country and with a huge resource of expertise. We are keen to work hard and pray and over the next few months we will be meeting, quite a number of times, to put together a 3 to 5 year strategy.

We want to thank you the Church, the House of Bishops and the RB, especially the Chief Officer Mr Denis Reardon for all your patience, your support and your prayers for the Youth Department. We are definitely getting there and with you on our side we can do so much more.