

## **Church of Ireland Board for Social Responsibility (NI) Report.**

**Proposed by Dr Joan Turner, Diocese of Connor.**

### **Embargoed until delivery.**

In seconding this Report I want to draw attention to the work of the **Adoption Society**.

The Society is trying to respond to the government's request to consider the adoption of older children, especially those who are in care.

In these cases not only do the normal procedures have to be followed, but great care must be taken to unravel the past history of the child to be adopted. Does the child have any memory of, or attachment to, its birth parents? – if the child is in care are there any unresolved issues caused by a feeling of being abandoned? - is there any strong attachment to the present carers? – is there any history of physical or sexual abuse? - - all of which could cause bonding difficulties for the adopting parents and the child. It is crucial that adopters can sympathise with, and cope with, the past history of the child they wish to adopt. All this must be taken into consideration in the recruitment, preparation, and training of prospective parents for older children. This takes a great deal of time, but it is very rewarding work.

The Society also offers **an independent counselling service** to birth mothers whose children are being adopted by the social services. This offers them an opportunity to be sympathetically supported throughout the adoption process by a social worker who is not involved in the placement of their child.

There are leaflets available on the BSR stand explaining how the Society deals with these matters.

The work of the **Fertility Counselling Service** developed by the Society had 223 referrals last year – an increase of 100%. Funding by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has meant that the Society was able to rent a room in Cookstown, making it easier to meet with clients from the west of the Province. A full account of this service is shown on page 314 of the book of Reports.

Another new project promoted by the Board, in conjunction with the Church of Ireland Youth Department, is a **parenting course** being developed through “Love for Life”, a locally based charitable trust which provides training for parents. It is hoped that a pilot course in Connor Diocese will be followed by courses in other dioceses.

The Board, through its chief executive Mr Ian Slaine, is involved with the **Central Belfast Child Contact Centre**. A child contact centre is a place where a child of divorced parents can meet “the other parent” in relaxed surroundings. The Centre in Saint Stephen’s Church is thriving. The Board hopes to promote child contact centres here in Armagh and in Derry. Enquiries from other areas in Northern Ireland would be welcome, and there is a possibility of some core funding.

**Forward looking.** Last year the Board conducted a survey on the growing issue of **Disability Access** to church buildings, which it sent to Diocesan Secretaries and to the Diocesan Social Services Committees. It is hoped to explore further the needs of parishioners with disability, especially in the light of new legislation in the autumn.

Your Grace, I second the proposal that the Synod should “ADOPT” this Report!