

Board for Social Responsibility (NI) Report 2005
Proposer: Dr Joan Turner

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

The appearance of your name amongst a list of committee members in these reports is little enough thanks for the time and energy that so many people put into committees. To have one's name omitted altogether is most ungracious.

So I apologise to the following:-..

Mr David Brown - Church of Ireland Youth Officer; and

The Rev Malcolm Ferry of Derry Diocese;

whose names have been inadvertently left off the list of members

This also gives me a chance to mention the name of the Reverend Shane Foster of Armagh Diocese who recently joined the Committee

This has been another busy year for BSR (NI), in his Presidential Address the Archbishop of Armagh has clearly outlined a number of the pressing social concerns that face us all in Ireland today.

In our work much time has been spent in studying Norman Goodwin's report (as mentioned on page 348) at two of its quarterly meetings in Cookstown and Armagh.

As a consequence of those meetings there were only two chances to hear major presentations from other agencies about social issues:

One was a talk from *EMBRACE* – Christians working together with Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Northern Ireland –

and the other was from *Community Restorative Justice* – examining the ways of addressing justice with community involvement.

In the past the expression “dealing with social issues” meant caring for **our people** in **our own small area**. Today we are called to care for **all** the people of the “**global village**” which we suddenly find ourselves inhabiting! It is daunting having to deal with the ever-changing needs which continually arrive on our doorstep in Ireland today.

Even the way the Church deals with its social concerns has changed.

May I mention five of them?

1. FAMILIES IN NEED

- In dealing with families in need, BSR gets help from the *BBC Children in Need* appeal – money given by the whole community - but we still depend on those donations from Northern parishes to help us provide for the many hundreds of families who need assistance - such as in the provision of toys at Christmas. A sincere “Thank You” to all those parishes which give generously.

2 DISABILITY

- The Ministry to the Deaf, where Canon Wilf Murphy does vital work, now encompasses all disabilities. Dr Judith McGaffin and Canon Murphy have done vital work in explaining how the new statutory laws on disability will affect parishes – if you want to know more about this, contact Canon Murphy.

3 CHILD CONTACT CENTRES

- Ian Slaine continues his active involvement with the Central Belfast Child Contact Centre and is also helping to set up further centres outside Belfast. These are places where children of divorced or separated parents can meet “the other parent”,- the excluded parent - the missing parent - in a safe and controlled environment. This is a new concept in caring for Church and society.

4 INTER-AGENCY WORK

- The Board continues to build links with various inter-church groups including participating in working groups on **homelessness, alcohol** and **drug abuse**, and in co-operation with the Mothers' Union, on *Parenting Today*.

5 RESOURCES

- Changes in society and the new problems that they bring are making demands on our existing resources. For example, in its early days the Adoption Society was run by one woman who had considerable experience but no statutory qualification – and who worked mostly without any secretarial help and originally without even a 'phone!. Today five fully qualified social workers operate in a small set of offices which makes life difficult for everybody – particularly Marie Walker the Administrator who acts as receptionist, tries to answer the 'phones and deal with e-mails while at the same time typing confidential reports for each member of the team– an impossible task! –She has also to be ever ready to send out information about Board of Social Responsibility meetings. I have, however, been told that she will be getting help very soon!- but lack of accommodation in Church House Belfast is giving concern to all its occupants.

So I conclude by saying that in all we do, we must be ready to adapt to the needs of society in an appropriate and responsible way - and follow our Christian calling to be good neighbours.