



IRISH CATHOLIC
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Council for Research & Development

32nd ANNUAL REPORT 2006 & 2007

Covering the period June 2006 to
December 2007

The Council for Research and Development

In 1970, the Irish Episcopal Conference set up a specific unit within the Catholic Communications Office, with the purpose of conducting religious research and monitoring social change in Ireland. It was proposed that the reports produced by the Unit would assist the Episcopal Conference with pastoral planning and programming in the future. In 1973, The Council for Research and Development was established as a separate unit from the Catholic Communications Office. The main function of the Council was to carry out large scale quantitative research projects on behalf of the Episcopal Conference.

This form of research activity continued until 1991, when it was decided that Research and Development should no longer carry out national surveys. The Council was re-established as a Resource Centre, with the main functions of up-dating the Bishops on new developments in religious research and carrying out the *Annual Vocations and Personnel Survey*. In 2003, the office for Research and Development was re-located to the Columba Centre in Maynooth, providing new opportunities to work with other Commissions and agencies of the Bishops' Conference.

The Council for Research & Development is part of the Department of Planning & Communications of the Irish Episcopal Conference, currently chaired by Most Rev Dermot Clifford. The Social Researcher is an individual member of the Sociological Association of Ireland. The Council for Research & Development is an organisational member of the European Anti Poverty Network, based in Dublin.

Priorities of the Council

Undertake specific research projects at the direct behest of members of the Episcopal Conference

Act as an Information and Resource centre for the Episcopal Conference, clergy and religious, as well as media personnel and the general public.

Generate specific statistical information regarding vocations and other data on numbers of clergy and religious in Ireland

Provide summaries of recent research in the sociological study of religion to members of the Episcopal Conference.

Update the Episcopal Conference on recent studies in the areas of divorce, marital breakdown and abortion.

Continue to monitor reports on the incidents of child sexual abuse amongst clergy and religious in Ireland

Liaise with other agencies and commissions of the Episcopal Conference, and provide them with research support whenever possible.

Council Meetings

Council meetings generally take place four times a year and coincide with the meetings of the Bishops' Conferences. In the period June 2006 to December 2007, seven meetings of the Council were called and these took place in June, October and December of 2006 and in March, June, October and December 2007, during the period of the Conferences.

Council Members

Chairman: Most Rev. Dermot Clifford,
Archbishop of Cashel and Emly

Members: Most Rev. Patrick Walsh,
Bishop of Down and Connor
(ceased membership December 2006)

Most Rev. William Walsh,
Bishop of Killaloe
(member since March 2007)

Dr. Darach Turley,
Dublin Business School, Dublin City University

Mr. P.J Moran,
Co. Meath

Dr. Mark Morgan,
Department of Education,
St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra

Ms. Anne Hanley,
Co. Meath

Ms. Louise McCann,
Support Officer, Disability Federation of Ireland

Ms. Orla Mc Partlin
International Co-Ordination Unit, An Garda Síochána
(ceased membership March 2007)

Dr. Brian Conway
Department of Sociology
NUI Maynooth
(member since October 2007)

Mr Eoin O'Mahony, M.Soc.Sc.
Social Researcher, Council for Research & Development

The Council extends its gratitude to Most Rev Patrick Walsh and Ms Orla McPartlin for the service to and support for the work of the Council over the years.

Part 1. Review of Research

The period June 2006 to December 2007 was a very busy time for the Social Researcher of the Council. During this time, more efforts were made to expand the scope of the research carried out by the Council as well as a consolidation of the traditional roles carried out by the researcher. The researcher continued to provide timely and relevant data to the members of the Episcopal Conference while also providing support and information to a small number of Conference-related issues across the period. At this time, the source and nature of the research carried out by the researcher has also changed somewhat, to take in a changing policy context in Ireland more generally.

This section of the report outlines the main research activities of the social researcher during the period June 2006 to December 2007.

1.1 Age Profile of Diocesan priests in Ireland

In early 2007, at the request of the chair of the Council, Most Rev Dermot Clifford, and following a query from Most Rev William Lee, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, a project to profile the ages of the men currently serving in active ordained ministry was initiated. The purpose of this project was to determine the age profile of the men currently serving as Diocesan priests in the Cashel Province. Concern was expressed that the age profile of men currently serving in parishes in the province was older than the male populations of similar areas. A short questionnaire was devised to determine the ages of the currently serving Diocesan priests of the Province. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire, indicating in particular age band into which they fell. The results were compiled and presented in a report.



26% of the Province's priests in ministry are between 55 and 64 with a further 22% aged between 45 and 54 years. While 26% of the Province's priests are between 55 and 64 years, just over half that proportion of the men resident in the State is of that age group – 14.8%. Following the compilation of the report, a similar exercise was conducted for the remaining Dioceses on the island of Ireland. Data on 2,464 priests was compiled in August and September of 2007. This

second, larger report found that the age profile of the Diocesan priests of Ireland is disproportionately older than the male population as a whole, and that the age group 45 to 54 is the only age group where the proportion of males in the Republic matches that of the Diocesan priesthood. This points to an older than average profile for Diocesan priests in Ireland and a population of priests ageing faster than the rest of the population of the Republic as a whole. The report ended with a forecast for the balance of the numbers of Diocesan priests until 2020.

1.2 Active Citizenship in Ireland's religious communities

In 2006, the Council for Research & Development was granted funds by the Department of An Taoiseach to compile a report on active citizenship amongst Ireland's religious communities. This was in support of the work being conducted by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, an initiative of the Department. The research was conducted to provide some data on the nature and extent of volunteering activity. As the Taskforce already had employed another research organisation to carry out a quantitative exercise, the Council for Research & Development was asked to conduct a project using a qualitative methodology. Following a small number of meetings with the Taskforce's administration, the Council was asked to investigate the types and number of Church-related volunteering activities currently extant in Ireland through a survey of selected contexts.

The funding granted to the Council allowed it to employ another researcher, Ms. Martina Prunty, for a period of six weeks. This second researcher was engaged in all aspects of this project including: focus group convening, pre-planning of question schedule, running of the focus groups, data compilation and analysis and report writing. In all ten focus groups were convened, taking into account the religious, geographical and age-related data available to the project. A majority of the groups were convened amongst Catholic parishes. The data gathered in these ten groups was recorded and analysed according to the emergent themes from the group sessions. The data was organised around a series of brief questions, e.g. how do people get involved? What do you understand by active citizenship? How has volunteering here changed over time?

Among the findings were that regulatory frameworks, like insurance, are having an impact on the informality of volunteering and that personal contact in encouraging new people to get involved is very important to the establishment of the broader social networks necessary for unpaid activity in the community. Commuting and changing work patterns within households are also changing the amount of time people can engage with community-based voluntary activity. The report was included in the final pack of the Taskforce and the report generated considerable interest following publication.

1.3 A report on the Principal Demographic Results and Preliminary Results from Census 2006

A Census of population was conducted in the Republic of Ireland in April of 2006, enumerating all of the people present in the State on April 23rd of that year. The Principal Demographic Results (PDR) report of this Census enumeration was published by the Central Statistics Office in March 2007. This enumeration relates to the population recorded for each area present within the State's boundaries on the night of Sunday, 23 April 2006.

These two reports (published by the CRD in summer 2006 and April 2007) outline the main results from PDR and tracks a number of emerging trends. For the first time the Census enumerated the numbers of those from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as a small number of other innovations. The report was centred on population changes, demographic shifts such as the increase in the number of ethnic minorities in Ireland since 2002, increasing suburbanisation but a considerable

portion was also dedicated to the religion data available at that time. A third report based on the detailed data from Census 2006 is currently under preparation and will be ready in the first quarter of 2008. As the Census data was made available on a timetable right up until November 2007, this third report will contain the most detail.



1.4 Project on the retirement of Diocesan priests from active ordained ministry in the Diocese of Ardagh & Clonmacnoise

In late 2006, the Social Researcher was approached by the Sick and Retired Priests Fund of the Diocese of Ardagh & Clonmacnoise to conduct an exploratory research project. In recent years, the Fund's Committee has been coming to some understanding of retirement, in its non-financial aspects. While provision for accommodation has been made by the Diocese, the non-material aspects of the priests' retirement has been re-examined in the light of a changing age profile and the pastoral needs of the Diocese. Following a series of short meetings, the Fund's Committee and the Social Researcher agreed a programme of work for the project through which these non-material aspects of retirement for priests would be investigated.

The Fund's Committee thought that it was important that the views of all the Diocesan priests were sought. The Diocese has just over sixty priests and so six focus groups of approximately ten priests each were

organised. These were conducted in September 2007 in Longford town. The group discussions lasted approximately one hour each. These discussions were then supported by a short postal questionnaire, returned anonymously by each of the respondents. The Social Researcher attended the Diocesan annual retreat in Knock Co Mayo to disseminate the preliminary results of the fieldwork conducted. The draft report was submitted to the Diocese in December 2007. Amongst the main findings of the research are the lack of private preparation for retirement by individual priests currently in ordained ministry, a high level of work-related stress amongst the working priest of the Diocese and a lack of clarity over precisely the Diocese can achieve for the priests about to retire from active ordained ministry. The development of this project is ongoing into 2008.

It is hoped to enhance this project during 2008 following expressions of interest from a small number of other Dioceses in relation to the subject of preparation for retirement.

1.5 Parents of Primary School Children survey

By far, the single biggest project undertaken by the Council for Research & Development during this period was the Parents of Primary School Children survey, undertaken on behalf of the IEC's Commission for Education, chaired by Most Rev Leo O'Reilly, Bishop of Kilmore. The project seeks to gather data on the factors and reasons that influenced the parents of those children attending primary schools under the patronage of the Catholic parish. It is primarily a data gathering exercise in advance of further work to be developed by the Commission in the coming years.

Following wide consultation during the summer and autumn of 2006, a pilot questionnaire was compiled and tested. A representative sample of the parents of primary school children was drawn (in as much as this is possible) and the questionnaire was administered in the period September to November 2007. What is interesting about this project is the way in which Diocesan education / CPSMA personnel participated in

the distribution of the questionnaire. It was important that each school (who distributed the questionnaire to individual parents) receive the questionnaire from a local contact, rather than from an address for an organisation that they may / may not have heard of.

A large number of responses were returned to the Council for Research & Development office from both north and south of the border. The results from this island-wide survey are currently being checked and analysed. The data will be made available publicly in the first half of 2008 in report form.



1.6 Annual Vocations and Personnel Report 2006 & 2007

The Annual Vocations and Personnel Report and the survey on which it is based are changing. In the past the Report was produced for internal use only and any queries made publicly of the data were taken on a case by case basis. The data from the 2006 survey were compiled in mid 2007 and produced in fact sheet format. Five colour double sided fact sheets were produced. These are available individually and as a pack from the Council for Research & Development.

The 2007 survey was electronically administered for the first time. The questionnaire was e-mailed to those who submitted an e-mail address to the Social Researcher in 2006. The response rate by December 2007 was just short of 50% for the electronic version. Because of administering this volume of questionnaires electronically, the report based on the 2007 survey should be ready before summer 2008. In 2008, the survey will expand to include a survey of recognised theological courses in third level colleges.

1.7 Language Use related to Marriage and the Family among 25 to 35 year olds

This short project, carried out on behalf of the Family Ministry of the IEC, the Commission for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development and ACCORD, was a data gathering exercise in pursuit of larger developmental goals for 2008 amongst these parts of the IEC. The survey consisted of an online questionnaire asking respondents to suggest words and phrases linked with presented words. A small number of other demographic variables were also collated.

The questionnaire generated considerable online interest in both Europe and the United States. A report based on this small project will be presented to the various agencies in early 2008.

Part 2. Information and Resource Centre

The Council for Research & Development also acts as an information and resource centre for the members of the Irish Episcopal Conference, the other Commissions and Agencies of the Conference, priests and religious throughout Ireland and members of the public at home and abroad. More often than not, these requests for information are enquiries for data on the personnel within the Church in Ireland or the most up to date data on Church attendance. These enquiries are generally dealt with in a matter of hours by e-mail or return telephone call. It is the ambition of the Social Researcher that a tracking mechanism for these routine requests is put in place, particularly in advance of the forthcoming Conference website.

There have been a number of other, more substantial, enquiries to the Council. These often take the form of consultation on expertise or related information in support of another project. These other enquiries are listed below:

- Planning for the Year of Vocation 2008/09 initiative being coordinated by Fr. Patrick Rushe, National Co-Ordinator of Diocesan Vocations
- Data analysis for the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin's Faith Development Services
- An analysis of Diocesan telephone and internet costs on behalf of the Finance and General Purposes Committee
- Planning for the new IEC website, being coordinated by the Catholic Communications Office
- Assistance with demographic data for Veritas review of the primary religious education curriculum
- Support in preparation for and attendance at the inaugural Church - State Structured Dialogue meeting
- Support for the fieldwork phase of a project being coordinated by Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development
- A small number of articles and reviews for Intercom magazine

Two seminars were delivered to the staff of the Columba Centre during the course of this report. These were *Secularisation? What Secularisation?* in July 2006 and a review of the Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships report in early 2007.

The Social Researcher is hosting a new initiative currently entitled *Emergent Social Values* being coordinated by a small number of staff at the Columba Centre. This initiative is developmental in nature and brings a small number of people together to assess what is valued within Ireland following the onset of affluence. In seeking to examine the present, we hope to find a space for reflection and the determination of positive social values. The group met twice in 2007.

The Social Researcher also attended a small number of conferences and seminars in the course of the period under review including the Iona Institute seminar on *Family and Demographic Changes in Ireland*, Carnegie symposia on *Voluntary Action and Change*, London and Dublin and COMECE's *Values and Perspectives for Europe's Future*, Rome.

The Council for Research & Development
Columba Centre
Maynooth
Co. Kildare

Phone: 01 505 3024
Email: research@iecon.ie