

People and Place

'Believe that further shore is reachable from here.'

Seamus Heaney

'There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind.'

C.S. Lewis

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Editorial

We believe that we live together in a time of world-historic cultural change, marked by fundamental disagreements over the nature of human identity, the meaning of the common good, and the possibilities of civic life.

New City Commons

What kind of people are we becoming?

What kind of place are we creating?

What kind of people and place could we be?

How can we create a cultural ecology which holds people and place together?

These are the big questions which shape this text.
And in one sense that's all it is, words.

These words are not *prescriptive*, they do not give answers to every pressing question.
They are *descriptive* of the kind of people and place we aspire to be.

These words are not a lecture. They are not an imposition of beliefs.
They are an invitation to everyone to join a conversation.
Maybe you are a Christian disciple, a politician or a church leader?
Maybe you don't believe in God? We still hope you will find some common grace and good in these words.

Some of our most important 'laws' will never be found in the statute books or court judgements.
Commands like '*Love your neighbour as yourself*' cannot be contained by the law.
They live and breathe far beyond legal and political limits, transforming the hearts and minds of children, women and men.

In the Old Testament, God called Israel to be a light to the nations. In the New Testament, Jesus called His followers to be salt and light, and Paul called the early Church to shine like stars.
The Church is commissioned not only to preach the good news but to embody it.
To live and love the gospel message sacrificially for the salvation of those around us.

At times the Church has failed to shine, to model the beliefs it proclaims.
Alfred Alder said, 'It is always easier to fight for one's principles than live up to them'.

So we call ourselves and the Church to repentance where we have not practiced what we preached.
We speak here to the Church as much as to the culture around it. For every principle and policy we propose in the public square, we call the Church to practical ways to live out the same values.
This is crucial if the Church is to fulfill its great commission. We believe it can. And this is good news.

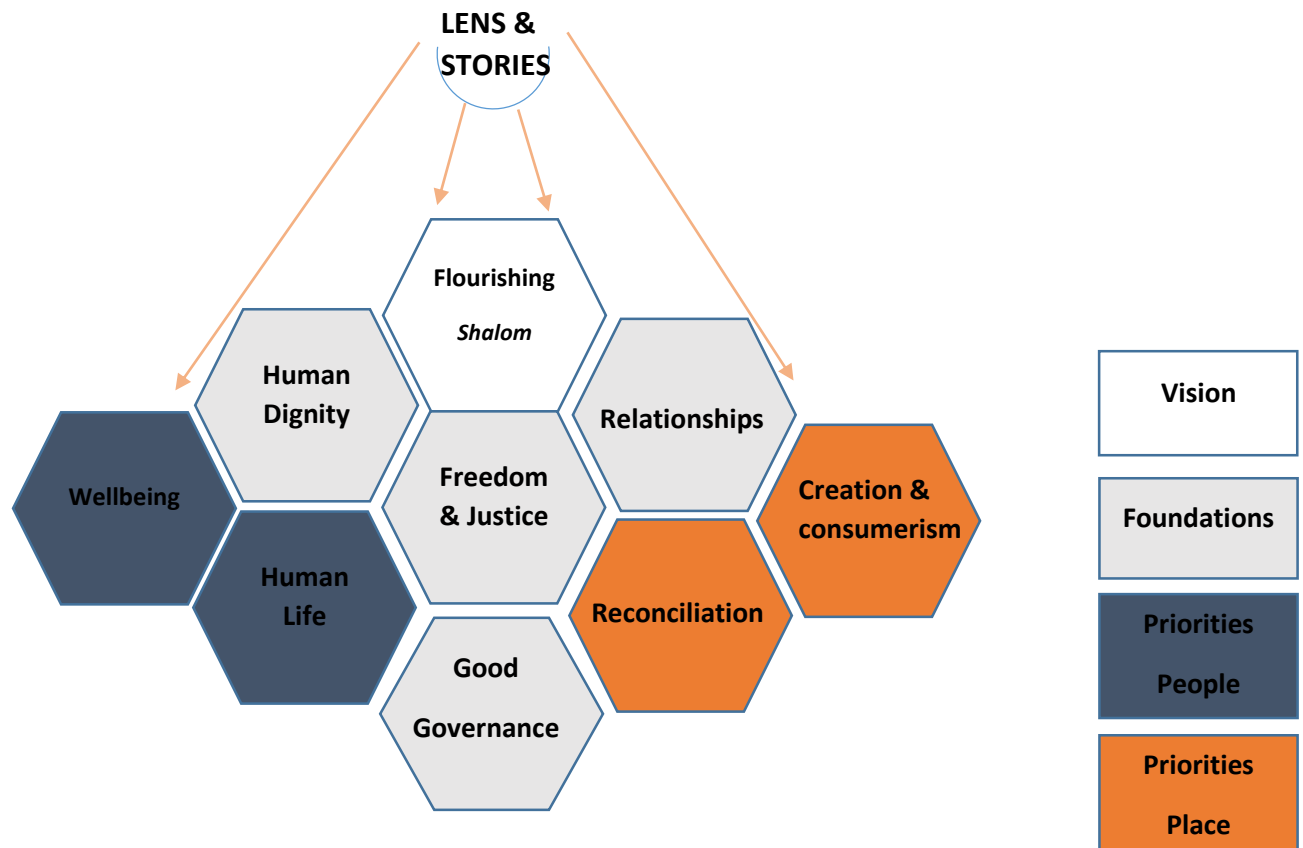
We respectfully offer these hopeful and provocative words to our culture and to the Church.

Framing

'Rationalism tries to find a place for God in its picture of the world.
But God...cannot be fitted into a diagram.
He is rather, the canvas on which the picture is painted, or the frame in which it is set.'

William Inge

Executive Summary



We advocate:

Flourishing - A flourishing peaceful vision of people and place.

Human Dignity - The protection and promotion of human dignity as a priority in all policies.

Freedom & Justice - Protection of individual freedom held in tension by social justice, personal responsibility and community relationships.

Relationships - Healthy family and community relationships at the heart of policy and culture.

Good governance - A shift in focus from power-sharing to purpose-sharing.

Wellbeing – becomes the central measure of this place and people and even more of a priority in the provision of housing, health, education, the economy and welfare.

Human life - That every human life is acknowledged, protected and valued from beginning to end.

Reconciliation - Political, civil, charitable and Church commitment to new and restored community relationships, healing and hope.

Creation care and consumerism - Wise stewardship of our natural habitat and agricultural land and considered consumption by everyone.

Lenses and stories

We all see life through a lens

These lenses affect our vision. Physically. Politically. Experientially. Metaphorically. Spiritually.

As well as processing events through our individual lenses, we seek meaning in shared stories and narratives. We collectively join sequences of events, relationships and emotions together, looking for reason, cause and effect, purpose and meaning. But our culture doesn't tell just one story. We know this well in Northern Ireland where the Unionist and Nationalist narratives see the past and future very differently. In the West today, there are many stories fundamentally at odds with each other. The tension between two stories in particular shape much of our thinking. Modernity, following on from the Enlightenment, brought with it the idea that truth could be discovered by reason – that if something could be touched, felt, weighed and measured then it is true. Post-modernity has rejected the certainty of modernity, and with it any notion of absolute or objective truth. The hallmark of postmodern thought is the death of truth. Values, gender and morality are personal and context specific, not true or right in any universal sense. Personal experience and 'tolerance' are the key values.

Many of the emerging and prevailing Western narratives have in common a rejection of the Christian God. He cannot be proved to exist in any modern scientific sense, and His truth claims are considered arrogant and intolerant by post-modernists. The prevailing secular view is that life and humanity came into being by random cosmic accident. Chance. Human life has no objective meaning, value or purpose. Any *dignity* accorded to humanity is a construct of our own making. Our notion of *morality* has no objective meaning, simply a bio-evolutionary quirk which has evolved to help us survive. Those are the beginnings of life. The end isn't any more hopeful. Death is the end - no afterlife, just decay. These beliefs about beginnings and endings are deeply formative and profoundly shape the way individuals and cultures approach human worth, relationships and purpose.

Cutting across the prevailing narratives is God's story – Christians claim it to be universal truth. It starts with a Creator - in whose image humanity is made. Human beings are endowed with inherent dignity and value. They are made as relational beings for relationship with God, other human beings and the earth around them. They are made for a purpose. We believe that sin exists, that some things are wrong. We believe that Jesus' life, death and resurrection inaugurated a new Kingdom which will be fulfilled one day when He returns to bring judgement, justice and a new creation. God will again make His dwelling place with humanity. These orthodox Christian beliefs, found in any creed or catechism - that God exists and is sovereign, that humanity has objective value, dignity and purpose, that some things are right and others wrong, and that one day there will be justice for all and redemption for those who trust Jesus - these are increasingly radical beliefs today.

God gives everyone the freedom to decide whether to follow His ways or not, and so we do not seek to 'force' our beliefs on anyone. However, we believe there are principles and values of truth and life in

His Word which are worth advocating and proposing for the common good all of humanity, even those who choose to reject Him completely.

It's easy to be so steeped in these formational stories that we no longer see them. We fail to appreciate that others are living with such different understandings of the world, relationships and purpose. In a noisy and crowded public square with so many different agendas, it's almost as though we talk past each other speaking different languages, at times.

Incarnation at the Intersection

But at the intersection or *cross* of these narratives is Jesus. Incarnation. His followers live at this intersection - in this daily tension between a worldview that rejects God and one which prays, "Thy kingdom come". We inhabit - live in, dwell in, make our home in - a different story. We live incarnationally at this intersection, *in the world but not of it*. This is the living-in-two-worlds task of Christians in the public square.

Those who identify as Christian make up 81% of the population in Northern Ireland.¹ Over 700,000 people in Northern Ireland attend church at least once a year.² Now, of course many of these people will be nominal and use the term 'Christian' as cultural identity or to mean 'not-from-another-religion'. However, this is still a very significant number considering 661,734 people voted at the last Northern Ireland Assembly Election in May 2011.³ It seems too that Christians are more likely to show up on Election Day and engage with politics. According to a survey of evangelical Christians in the UK, 80% of respondents were certain to vote in the next election.⁴ In comparison, the most recent Audit of Political Engagement suggests that just 49% of population in Great Britain were likely to vote in an election.⁵ The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey in 2010 reveals a similar result: when asked whether they would vote in the next assembly elections, only 48% of respondents said they would 'definitely' vote.⁶ So with Christians more likely to vote than the average member of the population and feeling called to live out their faith values, it's likely that they will significantly influence this election - and our culture far beyond, into the everyday showing-up of public life.

¹ Tearfund, Churchgoing in the UK (2007) 28, Fig 1 accessed at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf on 13/04/2016

² According to the most recent survey on church attendance, 736,000 people attend church at least once a year. See Tearfund, Churchgoing in the UK (2007) 31, Fig 5 accessed at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/03_04_07_tearfundchurch.pdf on 13/04/2016

³ Northern Ireland Assembly, Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2011, Research and Information Service Research Paper (2011) 10 accessed <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2011/General/5511.pdf>

⁴ Evangelical Alliance, 21st Century Evangelicals: Faith in politics? (2015) 6 accessed at <http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/upload/21st-Century-Evangelicals-Faith-in-Politics.pdf> on 13/04/2016

⁵ Hansard Society, Audit of Political Engagement 12 (2015) accessed at <http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-12-2015.pdf> on 13/04/2016

⁶ Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (2010) accessed at http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Political_Attitudes/NEXTNIA.html on 13/04/2016

Where are going?

'Where there is no vision, the people perish....'

Proverbs 29:18

'The heart of an Irishman is nothing but his imagination...'

George Bernard Shaw

It has been said at times that the Church here has failed to show leadership and to offer vision. We humbly offer the following. Again it is descriptive not definitive. A broad painting of the values and character in the flourishing society we hope to co-create.

We begin with a love of this place and people.

Flourishing

It is both our vision and the common thread running through our foundational values.

Compelled by the God of Genesis and the new creation, we seek flourishing or shalom, as Eugene Peterson defines it, *'the dynamic vibrating health of a society that pulses with divinely directed purpose and surges with life transforming love'*. A complete and holistic wellbeing, humanity at peace with God, one another and the land.

Christians look both back, to the created earth pre-fall, and forward to the re-created earth post-Christ's return. In the now, we seek to live out the Lord's prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.' We pursue the shalom of the Kingdom of God in this place and for this people. This is the basis for our vision of 'the common good'.

A Message from God-of-the-Angel-Armies: "Old men and old women will come back to Jerusalem, sit on benches on the streets and spin tales, move around safely with their canes—a good city to grow old in. And boys and girls will fill the public parks, laughing and playing—a good city to grow up in."
(Zechariah 8:4-5, The Message)

We want this land to be a place of safety for young and old alike, a place of laughing and fun and flourishing. Like Jeremiah, we seek both the peace and prosperity of this land. We pray that it will be a place of hope-filled storytellers and risk-takers. We pray that we will continue to be known the world over for our hospitality - welcoming the stranger in. We pray that we will be known as a place of incredible generosity - giving out of our abundance. We pursue a stable peaceful community governed by the mutual values of civil liberty, religious freedom and fairness for all.

We imagine a community where every person is valued, relationships flourish and injustices are put right. This is the vision under which all of the other values and policy areas find their place and purpose. Many will strongly disagree with our beliefs and conclusions but we propose this vision and values are good for everyone in our society.

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In this vision every human being is acknowledged and valued. Made in the image of God and endowed with inherent worth, we see a community which protects the **human life**, identity and **human dignity** of every member, from the pre-born to the elderly, sick and dying. This is the foundation of true equality, human rights and social justice.

Hungry for **justice and freedom**, love and truth, we see a place where laws are just and equitable and every person is treated with humanity and fairness. Individual freedom is held in tension with a pursuit of justice. We see a society where rights are protected and equality and diversity championed, but all re-framed through a lens of relational responsibility.

People have the freedom to believe in God or not, to follow His ways or not. We see God moving regardless, transforming and re-creating people's identities and relationships through Jesus.

Being called to seek the good of those around us and the welfare of the place in which we live, we see **good governance** guided by the mutual benefit of all.

We see a home for everyone. Physically, social houses become homes, they are high-quality, beautifully designed, beyond functionality. Homelessness is no more. Everyone has access to whole-person health care. Education is built on mutual values, it inspires creativity and forms character.

Created for **relationship** by a relational God, we see strong relationships everywhere from families to communities to business and government. Relationships become our primary currency and the measure of our success. Marriage is de-politicised and no longer seen as a threat or injustice to anyone. Other relationships are recognised in law. Everyone is treated fairly and valued with the dignity of diversity.

Co-missioned by and with Jesus in the **reconciliation** of humanity to God and in all things, we dare to see a restored community. We see a place and people emerging from the past and thriving. We choose to see light where others see darkness. Hurt is common ground on which we empathise with the other. Peace is not held lightly and risks are taken together into forgiveness. Harmful acts, attitudes and words are continually being de-commissioned. We see new relationships and the creation of new culture which draws on our shared past and builds our mutual future. The interests of neighbours are put before our own. Communities compete to outdo the other in actions of grace and generosity.

Cultivators of the garden, we care deeply for the land. We see a place where the beauty of the landscape is celebrated and protected. Where farming flourishes by sustainably providing enough local food for everyone to eat. Where we change our eating habits to benefit ourselves, each other and the earth around us. Our **creation environment** is handled with care not exploited for profit. Waste is not a part of God's character and we see a place where nothing is wasted - people, talents, resources or creativities.

Inspired by the God who created beauty, we seek it in all we do. **Beauty** is a central value, not an after-thought, even in policy. From design, to relationships, the arts to business and politics, beauty is pursued and created and celebrated.

Believing we exist for a **purpose**, we see a place for every person. We see gifts and skills flourishing in work. Those who cannot work are protected and cared for because we see infinite value in them and those who care for others. In the relationship economy, everyone has something to contribute to and everyone has a purpose. Everyone matters.

Ultimately, we see a place where character is more important than constitution, where values deeply shape our actions and where every person counts. We see hope and dignity, purpose, freedom and justice.

We seek the life and wellbeing of this place and people.

Foundations

how do we get there?

We live in a society which has been rocked by scandals in recent years often involving money, sex and power - or all three. Across Britain, ninety three per cent of the population believe their politicians cannot be relied upon to tell the truth⁷.

Our culture is complex and beyond the ability of any one group of people to control. With so many people within the democratic system holding different values and pursuing different ends, tensions are guaranteed. In this absence of trust and moral authority, we believe the starting point must be the rebuilding of healthy relationships and mutual values. Foundations.

The future of this place and people is often discussed through a framework of legal and politico-constitutional agreements. This can become academic and abstract, seemingly irrelevant to many people. A values-based conversation holds the potential to move people at a deeper level, to connect their hopes and aspirations to the public discourse. A society will plan years in advance to provide for transport infrastructure and energy requirements. This is wise. We propose that when it comes to setting broad policy direction, it would be wise to look to mutual values, to foundations which benefit everyone even in uncertain times.

⁷ The British Social Attitudes Survey 2013 asked whether politicians could be trusted to tell the truth when in a tight corner. Ninety-three per cent said 'almost never' or only 'some of the time' <http://www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk/read-the-report/politics/can-people-make-a-difference.aspx>

Foundations. Freedom & Justice

We advocate protection of individual freedom held in tension by social justice, personal responsibility and community relationships.

Personal freedom is central to our understanding of a fair and plural society. This freedom is not absolute, however, as in the sense of anarchism. When personal freedom is abused to deliberately diminish or destroy the human dignity or life of another human being this leads to injustice. Christians may differ to some degree in their theology on the extent of personal freedom, but would agree that freedom is a gift from God to be stewarded wisely. Even beyond the Christian faith, humanity has generally agreed that boundaries like harm and consent should temper our freedom for the common good. This relationship between freedom and justice provides the basis behind much of our custom and law.

Our faith calls us to action on a whole range of justice issues – often involved with protecting the poor, the vulnerable, the oppressed, the widow, the fatherless, the misunderstood and the marginalised. The biblical notion of justice is about much more than punishing people, but about putting right situations and relationships that have gone wrong. It encompasses a much deeper sense of relational wholeness. It addresses both the individual and the institutional systematic causes of injustice.

Vision

So individual freedom must be held in tension by social justice, personal responsibility and community relationships. Finding the lines between these things is very difficult, but using these principles as a model can be helpful in shaping our thinking. Here are a few examples:

- Paying tax – We generally have the freedom to earn money and hold private capital and do what we like with it. However, we also have a responsibility to pay for common public services and to benefit those who need help – responsibility, relationships and justice. Opinion will obviously vary as to where exactly these fiscal lines should be drawn, but Christians will be concerned about equity, fairness and how we care for the marginalized and vulnerable.
- Abortion – Generally the state must only restrict bodily autonomy or personal freedom in very exceptional circumstances. So the law only really intervenes to prevent acts of violence against others, harm against ourselves and to protect duties owed to society. We believe that placing restrictions around access to abortion so as to protect women, unborn children, the wider community and communal value of life is such an exceptional reason.

Civil and Religious liberty is foundational to the constitutions or constitutional law of most Western democracies. This is the territory of relationship between individual freedom of conscience and community cohesion and justice and highlights the need for some sort of reasonable accommodation of different beliefs so we can live together well.

- The ongoing Ashers Bakery case, for instance, is testing whether the law can accommodate people, including business owners and their personal freedom to exercise their conscience

while ensuring that others, customers in this instance, are protected from injustice or discrimination.

- The case of Pastor James McConnell and his sermon on Islam tested the legal boundaries around the freedom of speech and challenged the Church to use these freedoms wisely and winsomely when preaching the gospel.

We must be constantly vigilant that this tension between freedom (religious, civil, personal) and justice (personal or social) is held robustly and graciously for the good of everyone in our society.

Key facts

- **Members of the Orange Order (see the founding principles) and Irish Republicans (see the 1916 Proclamation) both claim to be committed to the cause of civil and religious liberty for all.** This is a very helpful starting point for discussions between people living in this place with very different constitutional agendas.
- **We have a huge body of local, national and international law which exists to protect freedoms and achieve a more just society.** The issue is not necessarily more law or rights but often how to interpret, mediate and balance these rights well.

Policy

- **Reasonable accommodation** - A fair balance must be struck where rights come into conflict to avoid a hierarchy of rights. The concept of reasonable accommodation in the law allows this balance to be struck. A private member's bill in the last mandate explored this area but limited it to the issues of religion and sexual orientation. We would advocate that the idea of reasonable accommodation be explored again in a much wider context as part of a civic conversation.
- **Relational approach to equality and human rights disputes** - When a relevant public body is engaged in a potential case where protected equality characteristics or human rights come into conflict, we advocate, at the first stage, that a mechanism of alternative dispute resolution or open dialogue should be initiated before legal proceedings are issued. Resorting to legal proceedings at first instance is costly to the tax-payer, often deepens division, and damages community relationships.

Church

- **Protect freedom and justice for all.** Too often, Christians are known for what we are against rather than what we are for. The Evangelical Alliance is for religious liberty for all not just for Christians. We have been since we began in 1846 and just last year set up the Religious Liberty Commission. Our members are constantly campaigning for justice for the poor, marginalized and oppressed. The Church must continue to be champions of justice and freedom, not only for Christians, but for everyone in our communities.

Foundations. Human Dignity

We advocate the protection and promotion of human dignity as a priority in all policies.

Everyone matters. Human life possess inherent worth and dignity. For Christians, this stems from the belief that human beings are 'made in the image of God'. This belief about human worth has shaped countless civilisations throughout history and shaped the formation of modern equality and human rights law.⁸ We seek the care of and compassion for all human beings. Those who have been displaced, abused, raped, those who are in pregnancy crisis, orphaned, in care, disabled, those who have been trafficked, the sick and the elderly, the poor and homeless in our society. We desire restoration for all who have been dispossessed of their human dignity and worth.

Vision

Simple. Everyone has intrinsic worth and value. From the baby in the womb to the most elderly, from the refugee to the casualty of a homophobic hate crime. The vulnerable and marginalised, the poor and the rich. The conservative and the liberal, the republican and the loyalist, the victim and the perpetrator. Everyone has intrinsic worth and value.

We see perfect equality of human dignity. This equality is already inherent. It is our starting point, a truth realised, not an idolised end in itself. An equality which values and respects the unique individual characteristic's and differences of others and does not categorize people under labels or group people into competitive causes. The consistent framing of our law, policies and culture by this truth is basic to building a flourishing society. From this objective starting point of inherent equality, we tackle injustice and pursue equity together.

Key facts

- **The total number of domestic abuse incidents** have increased from 27,628 in 2013/14 to 28,287⁹ in 2015.
- **Belfast City had the highest incidence rate of hospital treated self-harm** for those aged over 15 years in the UK and Ireland at 632 per 100,000¹⁰
- **Almost 2,000 children in Northern Ireland were identified as needing protection from abuse** last year.¹¹

⁸Education for Justice, the official website for education for justice. <https://educationforjustice.org/free-files/HumanDignity09.pdf> (accessed 18th June 2015).

⁹ The police service of Northern Ireland, 'Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland: Quarterly Update to 31 March 2015 (final figures for 2014/15)' The office website of the police service for Northern Ireland.

http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_domestic_abuse_statistics-2.htm (accessed 2nd June 2015).

¹⁰ The public health agency, 'Northern Ireland self-harm statistics published by PHA' The official website for the Public Health Agency UK. <http://www.publichealthagency.org/news/northern-ireland-self-harm-statistics-published-pha> (accessed 2nd June 2015)

¹¹ The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 'Child protection system, Northern Ireland statistic's', the official website of the NSPCC. <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/northern-ireland/statistics/> (accessed 2nd June 2015).

- **Research shows that approximately 1 in 4 women have experienced, or currently experience, domestic violence.**¹²
- **Racist hate crimes were recorded at 921 incidents** in 2014/15, alongside a marginal increase in sectarian hate crimes at 1072 incidents in 2014/15.¹³

Policies

- **A charter of human dignity** - This would move beyond the limits of a rights-based approach and would consider how to protect and promote human dignity through rights, responsibilities and relationships.
- **Changing the nature of care** - Jobs which directly protect and promote the human dignity of others should at least attract the living wage as well as additional benefits. Examples include, nurses, care workers, social workers, home helps and counsellors. A 'supply' of young people seeking employment should be encouraged through policy and apprenticeships and training, to meet the 'demand' for care from an aging population with care needs.
- **Additional tariffs on crimes which deliberately degrade human dignity** - This is held in tension by judicial discretion and a justice system with an emphasis on redemption over retribution.
- **Human dignity taking central place in the equality debate** - Equality silos should be challenged by the concept of mutual equity. At the moment, vulnerable groups at risk of discrimination or injustice are pitted against each other through the labels of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, marital status, and so on. This creates a competitive approach to rights, funding, and ironically, the very notion of equality. Some become more equal than others. The concept of human dignity would be a healthier way to re-frame this debate in the long term. Equality would cease to be viewed as an aspiration to be attained, instead it is a reality bestowed upon everyone. From there, we move forward together, seeking justice through mutual equity. This is more than pedantic linguistics, it's an important re-orientation of mutuality and justice within the current understanding of equality.

Church

- **Constant and consistent theological teaching and practical modelling** of the inherent human dignity of all.
- **We encourage the continuation of all aspects of care and compassion in the Church.** Work with refugees, asylum seekers, minority communities, human trafficking victims, the unborn, the elderly, orphaned and widowed, the hungry, suicidal, destitute, addicted and lonely. We seek to help the Church celebrate and share her stories of care and compassion, upholding human dignity and worth.

¹² Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, 'Domestic violence statistics', The official website for the women's aid federation. <http://www.womensaidni.org/domestic-violence/domestic-violence-statistics/> (accessed 2nd June 2015).

¹³The Police Service of Northern Ireland, 'Incidents and Crimes with a Hate Motivation Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland: Quarterly Update to 31 March 2015 (final figures for 2014/15', The official website for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. http://www.psnipolice.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics/updates_hate_motivation_statistics.htm (accessed 2nd June 2015).

Foundations. Relationships

We advocate healthy relationships and families at the heart of a flourishing society.

The Bible tells the story of human beings made in the image of a relational God – for the purpose of relationship with Him and with others. Regardless of beliefs, flourishing or shalom cannot be achieved without deep relationships; marriages, families, friendships and communities. A healthy society upholding civil and religious freedom, in which the rights of one group do not negate another's. We seek healthy family relationships, wide intergenerational families, strong marriages and diverse communities. Healthy business relationships, healthy relationships with the earth around us. Solidarity with the weak and accountability from the powerful. We believe that healthy relationships have the ability to transform every area of life – our homes, workplaces, churches, communities and governments.

We all begin life by being born, adopted or fostered into families. Families are diverse and inclusive by nature, growing and grafting 'others' into ever-interconnected family trees. We believe that nurturing relationships within the family are the fundamental building block of society. As we grow through life we create, and find ourselves part of, wider family relationships. Everyone - married, single and regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, disability etc- is part of a family.

Vision – Focus on marriage

There is great legal and cultural value in retaining marriage defined as a lifelong union between one man and one woman which binds them to any children which may be created through that relationship. The relationship of marriage in itself is not an injustice or an inequality and bears no ill or discrimination to anyone or any other relationship. In fact, it is rich and deeply good for families, children and communities and strengthens the very fabric of our society. We believe the state, through policy and the Church, practically and pastorally, should support marriages where possible to avoid divorce, separation and their many detrimental effects. We believe that any genuine legal 'inequalities' between marriage and civil partnerships can be addressed by amendments to the civil partnerships legislation rather than the State assuming the control and redefining of marriage.

Facts

- **There is a higher percentage of married households in Northern Ireland** - In the 2011 Census, in terms of household composition, 47.03% are married in Northern Ireland compared to 33% in England and Wales. ¹⁴
- **Cohabitation is a less secure arrangement in which to raise children.** Only 48% of cohabitating couples are still together by their child's fifth birthday, compared to 92% of married couples. ¹⁵Cohabitation is significantly lower in Northern Ireland at 6.2%, compared to 10% in England and Wales. ¹⁶

¹⁴ http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/key_re_port_2011.pdf

¹⁵ Rebecca O'Neill, 'Does Marriage Matter?', Civitas.

¹⁶ http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/key_re_port_2011.pdf

- **Marriage has real benefits for those involved.** Married people live longer, healthier, happier lives. They are far less likely to suffer psychological illness.¹⁷
- **Marriage is good for children.** Studies consistently indicate that children raised by two happily and continuously married parents have the best life chances. Children whose parents marry and stay married are more likely to have stable marriages themselves and to wait until marriage to become parents.¹⁸
- **Stable families benefit society financially**– According to *The Institute for Family Business* in 2010, Northern Irish economy is heavily reliant on family businesses, with 78% of firms family-owned.¹⁹
- **Marriages last longer in Northern Ireland** - The average length of a marriage in Northern Ireland ending in divorce in 2010 was 18.1 years, significantly longer than the UK average of 11 years.²⁰

Policies

- **Relationship proofing policy** – Every new policy is proofed in terms of how it would actually impact and affect marriages, families and communities. Retrospective review of employment law and its impact on family work/life balance.
- **Political Relationships Commitment** – An agreement drawn up by and between MLAs on how they will treat each other above the formal codes of conduct which come with the office. This is leadership through relationship, beyond the level which political and legal codes can impact.
- **Improved signposting for family services** - More provision for counselling and talking therapies, encouraging a culture where people talk through disputes (marital, communal, legal) before reaching the stage of relationship breakdown.

Church

- **How is the Church modelling a different way of relationships** internally, with other Churches and in the local community?
- **How is the Church improving the quality of relationships** in the wider community? Marriage or parenting courses? Mentoring? Pastoral visits? Other less structured but tangible ways?
- **While the legal and political debate about marriage continues, and regardless of the eventual outcome, how will the Church faithfully model marriage in a culture where it has come to mean something else entirely?**

¹⁷ C.M. Wilson and A.J. Oswald, 'How does marriage affect physiological and psychological health? Evidence for longitudinal studies', 2005.

¹⁸ Waite L.J. et al. (eds), *The Ties that Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation*, 2000.

¹⁹ http://www.ifb.org.uk/media/44219/theukfamilybusinesssectorreportnov2011_final.pdf

²⁰ www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/publications/marriages_divorces/MDCP2010.pdf

Foundation. Good Governance

We advocate a shift in focus from power-sharing to purpose-sharing.

We celebrate the many civil and religious freedoms accorded to citizens here and the fact that those with diametrically-opposed political and constitutional aims can now peacefully share governance. National identities and the constitutions of these island nations are under the spotlight. Devolution, the Scottish referendum, debates about British values, the EU referendum and the Northern Ireland constitutional issue raise many timely questions. The resulting values, priorities and pursuits of those in government will affect the rest of society. We see an opportunity for our local leaders to unite around mutual values to shape the future of this people and place - whatever the ultimate constitution. At this deeper fundamental level we can agree that good governance is central to a healthy, flourishing society.

Vision

The system of governance is secondary to the quality of relationships in governance.

We welcome moves in the Stormont House Agreement and Fresh Start Agreement to more actively encourage political innovation and accountability. We long to see a political system which rewards new risks in relationships for reconciliation. We are just as concerned with the *quality and tone of relationship* between those in governance as with the structures and processes.

A shift of focus from power-sharing to purpose-sharing.

We have a power-sharing Executive. This is good but in one sense it is easy to share power and money by dividing it. What would it look like if the emphasis moved from power-sharing to purpose-sharing? This cannot be divided but requires a commitment to shared responsibility and relationship. We challenge our politicians when pride comes before principle, when opponents are denigrated, and when vulnerable groups of people are used for political point-scoring. We encourage our politicians when we see maturing relationships, principled leadership and sacrificial service. We dare to believe that our civic leaders can become peace-provocateurs.

Key Facts

- **Division comes at a huge cost** – relationally but also financially, up to approximately £834 million per year.²¹
- **New identities and new relationships are possible.** Although Northern Ireland has a long history of divided national identities (with 70% of protestants identifying themselves as British and 55% of Catholics identifying themselves as Irish), 22% and 26% of Protestant and Catholics now identify themselves commonly as ‘Northern Irish’²².

Policies

- **Mutual relationships covenant** – A joint statement of intent drawn up between the parties themselves to serve the electorate through best working relationships. The covenant would be

²¹ <https://www.dfpni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/Cost%20of%20Division%20-%20Overview%20Report.pdf>

²²The Northern Ireland Life and times, the official website for the ‘Northern Ireland Life and Times’. http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2013/Community_Relations/NINATID.html (accessed 17th June 2015).

voluntary, going above and beyond existing formal codes of conduct. The premise is that healthy, robust, respectful discourse between parties with an electoral mandate leads to better governance and a healthier culture of inter-party relationships. Elected representatives model the relationships they want to see on the streets.

- **Mutual Values** - A framework of mutual values or *foundations* could help to shape long term government policy. The Nolan principles of public office (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership) are an important start. However, they do not offer policy makers guidance in terms of policy direction, values or definition of the common good. Values will differ from individuals to groups, but seeking consensus on some mutual values (such as those proposed here) could be helpful in steering policies in the pursuit of a flourishing society. A semi-structured public conversation on mutual values and common good would be helpful.
- **Mutual Cause** – The concept of *mutual cause* could provide shared political language and impetus for better governance. Both Sinn Fein (in their 2007 document ‘A new beginning – A new Ireland’)²³ and the Orange Order (under the aims of their origins ‘The Glorious Revolution Guarantee’) strongly affirm the necessity of ‘civil and religious liberty for all’²⁴. Taking a step back from the competing constitutional objectives, there is a lot of mutual cause: civil liberty, religious freedom and democracy. A commitment to a *mutual cause* when progressing controversial matters may help steer a more effective course when natural differences of opinion rise in policy detail and direction.

Church

- **The Church also has lessons to learn about good governance** and stewarding resources well. We see a Church which models biblical governance, centred around healthy and unifying relationships (John 17). This will take different forms across theologies and denominations. But from presbytery to parish to independents, the same values should be evident under Christ’s headship.
- **We challenge the Church to find mutual cause and to *agree to disagree well*** when internal differences of opinion arise. We are keen to help the wider Church develop guidelines on good governance and dealing with conflict within and between individual congregations. The world is watching, we pray they will know we are Christians by our ‘John 17’ love for one another.

The Church also has a key role to play in its support of those in civil governance by:

- **Prayer** – For all their Church or community members who are in governance.
- **Pastoral support** – Tailored pastoral care to provide guidance, support and a confidential talking and listening space for political civic leaders.

²³ Find

²⁴ The Orange Order, The official website for the Orange Order. http://www.grandorangelodge.co.uk/what-does-orangeism-stand-for-today#.VYE_vfIVhHw (accessed 17th June 2015).

Priorities

What is important?

We are always becoming something. A kind of people. A kind of place.

Amidst the demands of modern business and politics, sight of what we are becoming can be lost.

The pursuit of money, power and personal gain can blind us all to the wider picture. Without intention, direction, thought and planning, we may become a society we would rather not be. What are our priorities? What should they be?

Again we invite you to conversation, and again we ask:

What kind of people are we becoming?

What kind of place are we creating?

Priorities. Wellbeing

We advocate that wellbeing becomes a central measure of the provision of housing, health, education, work and welfare.

*'More than 15 years after the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, some of the most enduring post-conflict challenges are at their heart questions of wellbeing. These include the equalities challenges, mental and physical health, community safety, resilience and good relations, pockets of intergenerational educational under-attainment, fuel poverty, weaknesses in environmental governance and building social capital to name a few.'*²⁵

Individual and community wellbeing is so obvious that there is a risk we lose sight of it in the pursuit of other good things. Why do we primarily measure the 'success' of our country in economic terms, by GDP, not by the wellbeing of our citizens? When we measure the achievements of our health service by targets met and waiting lists reduced, as important as these are, are we missing the individual wellbeing of staff and patients?

Work, welfare and wellbeing are intimately linked and all important to a flourishing society. Meaningful work is an important human need in which we find a great degree of purpose. We see a work-culture which is less driven by consumerism and capitalisation and more concerned with purpose – meaningful jobs and good working environments. Caring for the welfare of the vulnerable in our community is not a new concept, as the Old Testament laws around gleaning and caring for the poor and foreigner testify. We advocate policies which focus on the human dignity of each person, their ability and not their disability. Welfare provision must address not just economic needs but poverty of opportunity, relationships and wellbeing.

Education is about much more than exam results and we encourage measures which develop resilience, character formation and student wellbeing across all abilities. Similarly in terms of housing, good design, aesthetic beauty and green spaces are all connected to wellbeing.

Vision

Our proposal here is simple, that the wellbeing of people and place be a central consideration in the formation of government policy and measurement of outcomes. Wellbeing is the thread that runs through many of the classic functions of government, from the administration of law and justice to some degree of market regulation and the protection of natural and civil liberties. Entire libraries could be filled with books on each of these issues alone, so let's be clear: we are not even scratching the surface in terms of policy detail. However, this should not stop us asking the question of what should be at the very heart of our policies on things like the economy and the provision of welfare, education, health and housing?

Key facts

- **The top strain on relationships is concerns about money (62%)**²⁶. We need to address this practically, but also by challenge prevailing attitudes to money and value.
- **Being able to experience meaningful work** is linked to greater reported levels of well-being and to higher levels of job satisfaction.²⁷ Research carried out by Investor's in People in 2014

²⁵ Measuring Wellbeing in Northern Ireland, Doran, Wallance and Woods, 2013

²⁶ The Office of National Statistics, 'Measuring our national well-being: Our relationships 2015'. The official website for the Office of National Statistics. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_394187.pdf , (accessed 11th May 2015)

showed that 63% of British workers say that the main incentive for moving jobs is job satisfaction.

- **Rates of statutory homelessness acceptances are higher in Northern Ireland** than anywhere else in the UK²⁸ (13.4 per 1,000 households, as compared with 2.3 in England). The main cause (29%) for homelessness in the UK is family break-down²⁹.
- **Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of people suffering with mental health issues in the UK**, almost 30% of the NI population suffer mental health problems, nearly half of which are directly related to the Troubles.³⁰
- **In terms of socio-economic and health inequalities**, a publication by the Northern Ireland Assembly found that a man living West Belfast will live 6.4 years less than a man living in Lagan Valley.³¹ There are clearly structural inequalities around deprivation which must be addressed.

Policies

- **Recognising the difficulties around defining and measuring wellbeing**, we encourage careful consideration of how it could be used to better assess the achievements of this place and its people. There are problems with GDP as a measurement of national prosperity,³² while some research has already been done into establishing a wellbeing framework in NI.³³
- **Increased use of local and social clauses** in public procurement.
- **Make more ‘mental health first aid’ training** available in Northern Ireland.³⁴

Church

- **The Church is bursting with good news stories of physical, social, and spiritual transformation**, from addictions and suicide, prayers for healing, debt-advice centres, pastoral care and chaplaincy work, care homes, food banks and social enterprises. Let’s tell them.
- **We encourage the Church and its members to create and support ventures which cultivate human dignity**, welfare, and wellbeing in their work places and local communities.
- **We celebrate when Churches work together** for example in rotating use of their halls and accommodation to care for the homeless and destitute e.g. The Boaz Trust.
- **Counteract the narrative which confines education to schools**, ‘Educational strategies which traffic only in ideas often fail to actually educate; that is they fail to form people’³⁵.

²⁸ Crisis UK, The official website for Crisis UK.

http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/HomelessnessMonitor_NorthernIreland_web.pdf (accessed 22nd June 2015).

²⁹ Council for homeless in Northern Ireland, The official website for the council for the homeless in Northern Ireland. <http://www.chni.org.uk/homelessstats.html> (accessed 22nd June 2015).

³⁰ The commission of victims and survivors Northern Ireland, the official website for the commission of victims and survivors NI. http://www.cvsni.org/images/policy-research/pubs/march_2015/Towards_a_Better_Future_for_Web.pdf (accessed 22nd June 2015).

³¹ The Northern Ireland Assembly, the official website for the Northern Ireland assembly. http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/Constituency-Profiles/2012/lagan_valley.pdf (accessed 22nd June 2015).

³² The National Office of statistics, ‘Measuring national well-being: Economic well-being.’ The official website for the Office of National Statistics. http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_358832.pdf (accessed 15th of May).

³³ <http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=8cf2eac1-b9a2-433c-9fc3-e7c3fa556523>

³⁴ Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland, the official website for the public health agency NI. <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/mental-health-first-aid-training-programme> (accessed 22nd June 2015).

³⁵ Desiring the Kingdom – Worship, Worldview, and cultural formation, James K.A Smith pg40 2009

Priorities. Human Life

We advocate that every human life is acknowledged, protected and valued from beginning to end.

The value of human life in some Western cultures is being privatised, shifting from a sacred gift to a consumer product. This is the ultimate and logical end of strict personal autonomy. For example, the cultural conversation around abortion has moved away from a very limited life-saving medical intervention, towards an ideology of reproductive rights and a multi-billion dollar global industry. At the other end of the life spectrum is a drift towards assisted suicide in the name of compassion and personal freedom.

We acknowledge every life. The most vulnerable, terminal or 'malformed' are still one of us and worthy of our solidarity. Where humanity is in question, wisdom guides us to protection rather than destruction. We oppose the trend towards death as a choice and a measure of progress. Difficult individual circumstances must be held in tension with community wellbeing, met sensitively with compassion and without recourse to premature death as the solution. We oppose medical action and legal facilitation to directly and prematurely end human life, whether through abortion, assisted suicide, medical experimentation or reproductive treatments.

Vision

We celebrate that law and policy in Northern Ireland remains protective of human life. We contend that the robust public protection of human life is key to the flourishing of any society. We see a community where human life is protected from beginning to end. We see a community which stewards the gift and value of life for the generations to come.

We see a policy of protecting human life which spurs and guides medical research and healthcare. Assisted suicide is not permitted under the law here and we celebrate the compassionate work of palliative care. We resist any 'right' to assisted suicide and see a clear distinction between the alleviating of suffering through medicine on the one hand, and medicine being used for the sole deliberate purpose of ending a human life, on the other.

We see more and more people challenging a false and dangerous dichotomy between the rights of women and their unborn children. Instead, we seek the life, health and wellbeing of woman and unborn child, family and wider community. We see pregnancy as a relationship, sometimes an unexpected and difficult one. We champion solidarity, care and support. We challenge those who seek to twist human rights to end human life. We challenge moves to decriminalise abortion, which would allow abortion in any circumstance. This is the privatisation of the value of human life.

We see the infinite value of human life being secured above the marketplace, so we oppose the market provision of human sperm and eggs. This unethically turns children into consumer products subject to consumer choice. It may be unpopular, but we don't support the 'creation' of children outside of male/female relationship. The 'commissioning' of children by single people or same-sex couples is very different to a heterosexual couple already in a relationship where there is the biological potential for

children, receiving limited medical help with their own fertility. However, we challenge the creation and destruction of 'surplus' embryos and support an approach which gives dignity and protection to each life.

Key facts

- **There have been 8 million abortions in the UK** since the introduction of the 1967 Act – the populations of Scotland and Northern Ireland combined. By the age of 45, one in three women in England and Wales will have had an abortion.³⁶
- **In the Netherlands, from 2006-2013, there was an increase of euthanised death** by 151% in just 7 years.³⁷
- **It is already legally possible in the UK** for a single man to commission a child himself using his sperm, a donor egg and a surrogate. The consumerisation of children is a reality.³⁸

Policy proposals

- **A long-term commitment to world-leading hospice care.**
- **No change to the law on abortion to continue the delicate balance of protection of life, health and dignity of the women, unborn child and wider community.**
- **A personal pathway of care in every pregnancy crisis.** Co-ordinating existing services so as to signpost clearly and provide the best possible care and support to every woman in every pregnancy: including interdisciplinary medical care, financial advice, social services, Rowan SARC in the cases of sexual crime, chaplaincy services and charity NGOs. Wrap-around-care for women, their families and unborn children, to help them navigate through what may be or become a pregnancy crisis. A perinatal hospice pathway should also be offered as standard when a severe life-limiting illness or disability is identified. This would compassionately underpin the existing law by offering the woman and her family medical, practical, emotional and spiritual support to continue the pregnancy until the natural end of the life of the baby, whether in the womb or post-birth.
- **Local legislation and guidelines for IVF and embryo research** - In the face of the rest of the UK allowing the creation of animal-human hybrid embryos and 'three-person embryos', we propose that Northern Ireland follows a different path where human life is not rendered disposable, even in the pursuit of the good ends like parenthood or scientific gain.

Church

- **Preach, teach and model** a practical and consistent theology of the sanctity of human life, dignity, suffering and compassion.
- **Support** (money, volunteers) palliative care, pregnancy crisis and perinatal hospice care.
- **Encourage a culture** of adoption and fostering in the Church through initiatives like Home for Good.
- **Providing regular safe listening spaces** in local communities by trained volunteer counsellors for those who may be feeling suicidal and need to talk. Continue pastoral visits.

³⁶ The Guttmacher Institute, 'facts on induced abortion worldwide', the official website for the Guttmacher Institute. http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html (accessed 2nd of June 2015)

³⁷ <http://www.carenokilling.org.uk/articles/dutch-euthanasia-deaths-up-15/>

³⁸ The daily mail, the official website for the 'Daily Mail'. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2985590/I-don-t-care-people-think-baby-s-loved-m-happy-matters-extraordinary-story-divided-Britain-single-gay-man-mother-gave-birth-surrogate-baby.html> (accessed 2nd June).

Priorities. Reconciliation

We advocate political, civil, charitable and Church commitment to new and restored community relationships, healing and hope.

We have written extensively about reconciliation in our response to the Haass process⁵⁰ and the TBUC strategy⁵¹ so we will keep these comments brief. Reconciliation is one of the greatest moral and social justice issues facing Northern Ireland today. Our people and place is often known for the things that divide us rather than the things that unite us, but we see great hope and potential amidst the challenges.

Past - Our past is a prologue, still shaping the unfolding story of our lives today. It dictates our posture towards present events and gives form to our attitudes and mindsets. The events of the past are getting further away every day. This presents real difficulties around evidence for criminal process and prosecutions. An investigation of a forty year-old murder, nothing to do with the Troubles, will face the same evidential difficulties due to the natural passage of time. This is not to say that justice should not be pursued, but that realistic expectations must be fostered. That said we must challenge false dichotomies which spring up between pursuits like truth and justice. Though demanding of different resources and mechanisms, these pursuits are not mutually exclusive. Nor is forgiveness or reconciliation. The law and political agreements can only take us so far, there must be a work in hearts and minds as well and courts and inquiries. We commend the work of the Commission for Victims and Survivors, the forum and services. As one generation of the conflict ages and requires more services and new generations continue to be traumatized, we support the calls for urgent further talks to address the outstanding issues, like a pension for the severely injured.

Division and shared space - Division costs money and relationships. **Division comes at a huge cost** – relationally but also financially, up to approximately £834 million per year.⁵² This is evidenced⁵³ in separate education systems, duplication of public services because some communities do not feel safe traveling a few streets away, the effect of unrest on investment, tourism and the cost of sectarian related disturbances etc. It is clear that our society needs to learn to share public history and the public square figuratively and literally in a more generous way. Language used to describe this public space needs to be fitting. Although subtle, it is not appropriate to describe residential areas as 'Nationalist' or 'Loyalist'. This perpetuates territorialism. There needs to be a distinction between people and places (eg, 'In an area where the population is largely nationalist.')

The move needs to be to shared roadways and sports pitches, yes, but more so to shared hearts and minds. Moreover, it is important that government policy encourages this transformational space

⁵⁰ <http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/upload/Past-future-now.pdf>

⁵¹ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/ofmdfm/inquiries/building-a-united-community/written-submissions/evangelical-alliance-northern-ireland.pdf>

⁵² <https://www.dfpni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/Cost%20of%20Division%20-%20Overview%20Report.pdf>

⁵³ <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/segreat/docs/deloitte0407.pdf>

approach when dealing with all aspects of education, housing, planning, interfaces and cultural expression etc.

Flags - We point out that there is no biblical imperative towards a single moral solution and for various reasons⁵⁴ we currently support the designated days policy. We would reason that people should be free to display whatever flag they wish on their own private property, as long as it is not illegal or criminally offensive. However, publicly-owned streets and their architecture (such as lamp-posts, kerbstones) should be kept free of flags and symbols erected by private individuals or organisations. It must be very clear which body the public should contact when they have a complaint over an illegally erected flag, symbol, mural etc. The Executive parties should agree as a matter of urgency a consistent protocol on flying flags from public buildings and estate.

Parades - Again with parading, we would point out that there is no biblical call to parade nor prohibition against it. So we look not at the act itself but the purpose, intention, consequences and contribution it makes to society. We look at the role and reason for the Orders and those who wish to parade. People have the protected ECHR right of freedom of assembly, but this is not absolute right. People also have a right to protest, but again, not an absolute right. We look at the narratives that have been constructed and the fact that only 5% of all parades are considered contentious. In 2012, policing of parades reached £7.4m. Loyalist parading costing £5.5m, with a large amount being spent around the 12th July holiday. Republican parading cost around £376k.⁵⁵ We support models of engagement where resolution is respectfully reached at a local community level examples like Derry/Londonderry and Crumlin recently. So we return to our first principles of relationship, identity, freedom and justice and good governance. We advocate a relational solution which protects cultural identities, strikes the balance between freedom and justice, and is lead by government and grass roots in equal measure.

Education - We respect the diversity of education in Northern Ireland and the freedom of parents to choose the best option for their children in line with their faith and values. However, we also advocate measures which help children create real relationships with others from across religious, political and socio-economic backgrounds. There is a disparity when roughly 6% of pupils attend integrated schools, despite 62% of people indicating that they would prefer their children to have a shared education.⁵⁶ We are not advocating one model of education, but rather the mixing of children in schools and other formative settings.

Housing – Similarly, 90% of social housing is single identity while 80% of people would like to live in mixed housing. Again this disparity between people and place should be resolved with creative and radical policies, and urgently. We would propose community contracts made between residents on

⁵⁴ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/corporate/eqias/eqia-final-decision-report.pdf>

⁵⁵ <http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/article/?id=13245>

⁵⁶ http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:2YJ6ITgk1iIJ:eprints.ulster.ac.uk/15407/1/SEP_pol_icy_briefing_1.doc+&cd=8&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk

issues like sharing spaces before they move into a new area and without knowing who they might be living beside.

Church

- **Development of a public theology of reconciliation** - which promotes faithful biblical understanding and imagination of what a reconciled and restored community could look like. The Church contributes vision, language, spaces and practical opportunities for hope and healing.
- **Church community initiatives** - Churches close to the 10 new mixed housing schemes (to be built under TBUC) could collaborate to create a safe space of welcome and conversation for those moving into the area to deal with the inevitable tensions that will arise between mixed groups who will be living together.
- **Churches are welcoming spaces for all members of the community** - An internal gospel-centered and missional Church conversation is required at denominational and local level about the place of flags, parades, symbols, church buildings and Church culture.
- **Training for Church leaders on mission and pastoral care in a post-conflict culture** - We would never send Church planters to Gaza without training them on the conflict there and its cultural impact, yet it seems we send Church leaders out into this place without comprehensive understanding of the conflict and culture around us. Almost every congregation will have victims/survivors, ex-paramilitaries or states forces – sometimes all three. How can the Church be a radical community of honour, hope and healing?
- **We have many more questions/recommendations for the Church here:-**
<http://www.eauk.org/northern-ireland/a-respectful-provocation-for-the-church-in-northern-ireland.cfm>

Priorities. Creation Care & Consumerism

Wise stewardship of our natural habitat and agricultural land and considered consumption by everyone.

Northern Ireland is a special place and part of these islands. From farming to fishing, golf to film locations, tourism to sites of special scientific interest and UNESCO world heritage sites, our land is closely linked to our livelihood. Land shapes people and people shape the land. In Northern Ireland, 35% of people live in a rural area,⁵⁸ and for many others our direct connection with the land is often no more than a generation ago. The flourishing or Jewish concept of *Shalom* that we have been writing about goes much deeper than our modern idea of peace; the absence of violence. It is a holistic sense of wellbeing, of humanity being at peace with God, with each other and with the land. It is this last part that Christians have often struggled with.

Vision

'It seems quite inexplicable to me that there are some Christians who claim to love and worship God, to be disciples of Jesus, and yet have no concern for the earth that bears his stamp of ownership. They do not care about the abuse of the earth and indeed, by their wasteful and over-consumptive lifestyles, they collude in it.'

(John Stott, The Radical Disciple)⁵⁹

We are particularly challenging the mainstream evangelical Church in Northern Ireland to again see creation care and attitudes to consumerism as issues of Christian discipleship and witness.

We are stewards of God's gifts to us, the earth, the values of human life and dignity, nature, food, our money and time. Waste is not part of His character and nothing goes to waste in His kingdom.

We also apply these principles of care, stewardship and sustainability more widely to the issue of consumerism. We've all heard people say locally that the economy is not yet 'back to normal', probably referring to the days before the 2007 global crash. We have to stop and ask ourselves though if that was ever in any way 'normal' and actually good? We do not naively miss or minimize the global and local economic realities, the need for jobs and wealth creation. However, we place them in a perspective which prioritises wellbeing, relationships and wise stewardship. An economy built on creating ever-increasing demand and consumption, far beyond need, is not sustainable or healthy. It evidently became a ponzi-economy where the value of property became inflated and completely unaffordable and the speculative financial system collapsed to reveal a nakedness like that of the Emperor's New Clothes. A culture of consumerism is driving us to use money we do not have to buy things we do not need made from resources we do not own. It is hollow and harmful.

We advocate solutions which promote wise stewardship of this place for generations to come – our seas and forests, farmland and food. In a worldwide economy where supply chains for one product can cross continents and cultures, we advocate fair trading and ethical consumption, recognising that our global neighbour may be paying for our cheap goods in very real ways.

⁵⁸ NISRA Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (Feb 2005)

⁵⁹ Stott quoting his colleague, Chris Wright.

Facts

- **We need to avoid complacency.** In 2008/09, 82% of households were either concerned or fairly concerned about the environment compared to 72% in 2012/13.⁶⁰
- **Car travel continues to dominate** the way we do most of our day-to-day travelling, with 73% of our journeys being made by car.⁶¹
- **A family of four produces more waste than the weight of the average car per year.** However, this is steadily decreasing each year and from 2006/2007 there has been an average annual decrease of 2.5%. In addition, the proportion of household waste landfilled has decreased from 81.8% in 2004/05 to 52.8% in 2012/13.⁶²

Policies

- **Awareness and education** about waste and sustainability applied to everyday life and everyday choices from travel, to food miles to buying slave labour-free clothes.
- **Policy and planning for public transport needs to be very long-term and strategic.** Increased promotion of cycling and more incentives like the Belfast Bike Scheme to encourage more people to make cycling part of our local culture.
- **Environmental proofing** of all policy relating to agriculture, transport, energy supply and residential sectors. **Support for community agri-based projects** like urban-farms and 'grow your own', initiatives which aim to reduce the distance between farm and fork.
- **Subsidise local food** - If the canteen at the NI Assembly can be subsidised by the NI taxpayer, so perhaps can the cost of locally produced farm produce for those who are most vulnerable. This benefits the farmer and those who struggle to afford fresh, local food.
- **A more collaborative approach between all those involved in targeting waste reduction and poverty alleviation** – Great examples include the Love Food Hate Waste campaign and the working relationships between some supermarkets and food banks.
- **Linking any reduction in corporation tax to local wage equity** and local community wealth creation. Capping the amount of money that companies which benefit from reduced corporation tax here can move to offshore holding companies, subsidiaries or 'tax-havens' outside the jurisdiction.

Church⁶³

- **We call the Church to not only teach and model the importance of stewardship** but to help its members and community practice stewardship by running financial management courses to offer practical tips and advice, eg. CAP.
- **We call the church to model a different economy.** To practice financial stewardship, sharing time and resources with one another and the wider neighbourhood. To live out a Christ-centered economy in our communities, a different narrative. What is distinctive about Christian consumers in how they purchase? Or about Christian farmers in how they manage their animals and land? Or Christian business-owners in how they choose suppliers or use profits? If every Christian family in Northern Ireland reviewed and changed their consumption to more closely reflect biblical stewardship priorities, this could result in a significant market shift.
- **Reduce energy use and environmental impact** of churches using resources from groups like Eco Church and A Rocha.

⁶⁰ [DOE.2014](#)

⁶¹ DOE.2014

⁶² [DOE, 2014](#)

⁶³ Look out for our specific resource on this area for churches coming in Spring 2016.

Now/. Conclusion

We've seen that the God-story cuts across the prevailing understandings of our world.

In a culture marred by lies, pride, darkness and death, God's story brings truth and humility, light and life. It challenges some emerging trends by telling a better story. God's story contests **the post-modern notion that truth is dead** by modelling how we can live in a plural society in an age of moral relativism for the gospel and for the abundant life of others. It challenges **the grip of consumerism** which has reduced our children, relationships, death and life itself into branded consumer products. God places value on His creation and humanity made in His image far above the market place. There are moves to privatise the relationship of marriage and the value of human life. The quest for **individual autonomy is an idol of our age** and yet it's nothing new – it is the original sin. The God-story calls us to live far beyond ourselves as servants of God and others.

Our vision and policies are orientated around hope and the redemption of human life, human dignity, relationships, governance, justice and freedom, creation care and consumerism, wellbeing and reconciliation. We see these as core foundations and priorities in cultivating a flourishing society for everyone.

We work towards this flourishing - shalom. The holistic wellbeing of everything in our civic ecology. Of right and reconciled relationships. Justice. Freedom. Human life and human dignity. A wholeness which binds us to one another and the land we inhabit. People and place.

This is our contribution to policy and public discourse as we come up to local elections, a new Programme for Government and as the public square continues to be a contentious space.

May God's and His kingdom come as we seek it and His righteousness.

And may the conversation continue.

Shalom.



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