



# Poverty and Deprivation

## 1. Introduction

1.1 In his first major public appearance, Jesus read from the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners... to release the oppressed ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour" (Luke 4: 16ff). Tellingly Jesus continued "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". John Wesley in his sermons often took up this theme. For example "A poor wretch cries to me for an alm: I look, and see him covered with dirt and rags. But through these I see one that has an immortal spirit made to know, and love, and dwell with God to eternity. I honour him for his Creator's sake." (From John Wesley's sermon "On Pleasing All Men.").

1.2 It is the duty of the Council, as laid down in the Manual of Laws, to "undertake informed study and analysis of social, economic, political and international issues". Health and well-being and social justice and equality are included in the areas of special interest for the Council's attention. The purpose of such study is to inform and resource the Church to be an effective Christian voice in society. In considering any aspect of our witness, Methodists need to understand the nature of the society in which we live. Effective witness can only occur when it is prompted by God and relevant to the context of the immediate community.

1.3 In 1991 the Council brought a paper to the Conference "*Poverty and Deprivation – The nature of Northern Ireland Society*". 20 years have passed since that paper was adopted by Conference and N Ireland society has changed dramatically through peace agreements and the creation of a devolved administration.

The population of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland are currently experiencing the effects of a significant economic down turn in both countries so it is timely to re-visit the area of poverty and deprivation in Ireland.

Sadly it seems that poverty and deprivation have become even more entrenched in our society since the 1991 report. In presenting this paper to Conference the Council does so with the firm conviction that the Bible points towards a radically different picture of society. If we are to be true followers of Jesus we must strive to create that different society.

The purpose of this paper is to:-

- to raise awareness about the extent of poverty and deprivation in our midst;
- to challenge our attitudes of complacency and indifference; and,
- to offer some constructive recommendations for action.

## 2. Poverty Defined

One of the most important things to do as we begin to bring together a paper on poverty is to clarify what 'poverty' means and how it can be defined.

When asked to think about poverty many people will recall TV images from the developing world: of famine, of shanty towns, or of children dying from preventable diseases. These are examples of absolute poverty. Absolute or extreme poverty is when people **lack the basic**



**necessities for survival.** The United Nations tends to focus its efforts on eliminating absolute or extreme poverty. The first goal of The United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Eradicating extreme poverty is translated into an objective to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day.<sup>1</sup> Absolute Poverty is definitely not what we observe in modern day Ireland, north or south other than in exceptional cases of homelessness, extreme child neglect or instances of elderly isolation and poverty after a lifetime of poverty.

Peter Townsend, the sociologist who did so much to advance our understanding of poverty and its relationship to wider society, certainly thought it important. In 1979 Townsend defined poverty as follows:

Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies in which they belong.<sup>2</sup>

This type of poverty often results in social exclusion, hence the two terms are frequently used together.

As the above definition makes clear, in wealthy societies such as the UK and Ireland poverty can only properly be understood in relation to the typical living standards of wider society. This is known as relative poverty and its true meaning will vary from country to country throughout the world, depending on the standard of living enjoyed by the majority. While not as extreme as absolute poverty, relative poverty is still very serious and harmful. Townsend's definition also highlights that poverty is about a lack of resources. People in poverty lack capital (both income and wealth). But they can also experience poverty in other ways: they may lack human capital (such as education or good health), or social capital (such as positive and trustful communities). This is a point which is emphasized in the 2004 European Commission Joint Report on Social Exclusion:

People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live.

Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, a generic understanding of poverty as something which only affects the developing world, is an insufficient understanding.

So is there any poverty here on the island of Ireland? Relative poverty does exist on the island of Ireland and has been highlighted by both governments. For example, the Central Anti-

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<sup>1</sup> European Anti Poverty Network, *What is Poverty*, <http://www.eapn.eu/en/what-is-poverty/poverty-what-is-it> accessed on 2nd January 2013

<sup>2</sup> P Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, Allen Lane, 1979

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *Joint Report on Social Inclusion 2004*, [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint\\_rep\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint_rep_en.htm) accessed on 2nd January 2013



Poverty Unit of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland states:

People are considered to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to prevent them from enjoying a standard of living, which would be regarded as acceptable by society generally.

Around 341,000 people live in relative income poverty in Northern Ireland. Over 100,000 of these are children.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the Irish Department of Social Protection (Office of Social Inclusion) reports that in 2010 just over 32% (1,435,000 people) of the population of Ireland were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>5</sup>

“Official” definitions and faceless statistics, however, often do little to capture the reality of the day-to-day struggle of living in poverty. To understand this better, is it vital to ask people who are themselves experiencing poverty what this means. The following are just a few direct quotations from people living in relative poverty regarding what it is like to live their lives day by day:

*“I can afford only cheap food; fruit and vegetables to feed children is too expensive; fish is not affordable; “healthy food” is too expensive for me”*

*“The way people look at you is humiliating. You are not considered a human being”*

*“My children will inherit my poverty.”<sup>6</sup>*

So poverty does exist in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and, as we have seen above, poverty can be and is experienced in a multitude of ways. Overall, the reality of poverty is that it affects many aspects of people’s lives and limits people’s access to their fundamental rights. People affected often experience a range of different disadvantages, which combine to reinforce each other and trap them in poverty. Poverty limits the opportunity for people to reach their full potential. For instance, children growing up in poverty are more likely to suffer poor health, do less well at school and become the next generation of adults at risk of unemployment and long-term poverty.

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<sup>4</sup> Central Anti Poverty Unit (OFMDFM) <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/central-anti-poverty-unit> accessed on 2nd January 2013

<sup>5</sup> Office of Social Inclusion, *Poverty in Ireland*, <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/StatisticalInformationonPoverty.html> accessed on 2nd January 2013

<sup>6</sup> These are **voices of people participating in the 6th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty organised under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the EU in 2006. These are quoted on the website of the European Anti Poverty Network:** <http://www.eapn.eu/en/what-is-poverty/poverty-what-is-it> accessed on 2nd January 2013



In light of all this, and as members of the Body of Christ, it is of utmost importance that we continually ask what our response to poverty must be.

### **3.Considering the causes of Poverty**

This report has already outlined some key data regarding the extent of poverty at present, along with some specific examples to illustrate some of the real world ramifications arising from that.

However, before we can realistically look at what actions the church can take, it is necessary to also consider some of the causes of poverty. Why does it exist? Can anything be done about it? These are questions to which there are no simple answers, but we can however point to some of the major elements of the causes of poverty.

It is our contention that there are several reasons, arising from aspects of social and political policy (both explicit and implicit) which contribute significantly to poverty or which exacerbate already difficult situations thereby pushing people into poverty.

Firstly, of course, at its simplest poverty is the consequence of having inadequate income to survive with any sense of decency. This can arise from unforeseen events, such as the loss of employment due to redundancy or illness. However this report is more specifically focussed on systemic poverty in our society.

In any society, the cost of living will tend (in accordance with basic principles of supply and demand economics) to be based around average incomes/ability to pay. Thus if an individual or family have significantly less than that, they will be experiencing at least relative poverty, and possibly absolute poverty – with all the undesirable consequences of that. Thus, in simple terms, the way to reduce or eliminate poverty is to bridge that income gap. This in turn points to the necessity of creating a more equal society, and reducing the gap between the top and bottom of the socio-economic scale.

As the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland has recently pointed out, *“Countries with a high ‘at risk of poverty’ rate, are also the countries with high levels of inequality. Not only are poverty and inequality interconnected, but anyone who wishes to eliminate poverty should bring their attention towards reducing inequality. Measures focusing on poverty reduction sometimes tend to be discussed within a discourse of growth whereby the rising tide lifts all boats. This discourse overshadows the problem of inequality and the idea that, while the rising tide will lift some boats, others will run aground or stay on the bottom as the water rises around them. There needs to be a shift in thinking, away from a focus on growth and towards an emphasis on wealth redistribution which brings the attention towards the society as a whole.”*

Taking an example which was not obviously planned: during the boom years the state old-age pension in the Republic was increased year on year at a level greater than inflation, but has been held steady during the more recent recession. Thus these people have become relatively less financially unequal in society and the incidence of extreme poverty by old people dependent on state benefits at present is somewhat less.

Looking at this issue more widely, one suggestion for directly seeking to address income inequality would be to implement a high level of income tax on income over what was deemed to be an acceptable level. Thus, for example, a tax of say 70% (or more?) on income in excess of 10 times the minimum wage would have a major equalising effect. When issues such as this are being considered, it is clear that the church must go beyond our current valuable focus on ethical investment to also address wider issues of economic and governmental financial policy.



Another major factor hindering equality, and thus exacerbating poverty levels, is low levels of education and training in certain sections of society, which in turn leads to high levels of unemployment or only low wage opportunities for such people. Is it time for us as a church to reflect on whether our current approach to education, while important for an earlier era, is no longer the correct primary focus for us at this time. Should we be re-directing our energy in relation to education to supporting literacy, numeracy, and general life skills training so that we work towards more equal outcomes for those who start off from a position of disadvantage?

#### **4. Theological Perspectives on Poverty**

4.1 In developing a Christian response to poverty, we must begin with the doctrine of creation. In the Judeo-Christian tradition human beings are created in the image of God and have therefore, in consequence, a unique dignity, which is expressed in a variety of ways not least in terms of human rights and reciprocal responsibilities. From the analysis presented in Appendices 1 and 2 it is clear that in Ireland people are not perceived to have equal dignity. If we are to build a truly equitable society it is essential to re-discover and afford in word and action an equal dignity to all in our society. How appropriate the words are that “we should call no one worthless for whom Christ died”.

4.2 Jimmy Reid, former shipyard union leader and later Rector of Glasgow University, famously provided an assessment of British society in his inaugural speech, which 40 years on continues to resonate; he wrote “profit is the sole criterion used by the establishment to evaluate economic activity...from rat race to lame ducks...the vocabulary is more reminiscent of a human menagerie than human society”

By way of advice to students Reid said “... reject the insidious pressures in society that...would caution silence in the face of injustice”

In light of Reid’s analysis one of the many challenges facing the church is charting an effective response to the issue of poverty, which will challenge both Church and society.

4.3 A recent churches’ report (published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, through their Joint Public Issues Team), shows how evidence and statistics have been misused, misrepresented and manipulated to create untruths that stigmatise poor people, welfare recipients and those in receipt of benefits. The report is titled, “*The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*”

The author of the report, Paul Morrison writes “As a coalition of major British Churches, we want to create a new story; one grounded in truth, compassion and hope. Part of our calling as Christians is to seek after truth, and that means facing up to our own blindness as well as calling others to account. Collectively we have come to believe things about poverty in the UK which are not grounded in fact. We need to develop an understanding of the depth and breadth of UK poverty that is compatible with the evidence available. Just as importantly we need to match the language of public debate with the reality of people’s lives. It is a task we must approach with humility; one which puts the lived experience of poverty at its heart, and one which is committed to truthfulness – no matter how uncomfortable we find those truths to be.

4.4 It is a matter of profound regret that in modern society family breakdown and dysfunction are so prevalent. We take the view that the foundation of true family life, and, when blessed



with the gift of children, is God's chosen way for the continuance of mankind". It follows necessarily then that the political state exists for the well-being of individuals and families and not vice-versa. It also follows that the state should always seek to empower people at local level as opposed to developing an over-arching and all-enveloping bureaucracy.

There is of course a certain tension that arises here in consequence of the interrelationship between the individual and society at large eloquently expressed by President John F Kennedy in his 1961 Presidential inaugural address when memorably he stated: "Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country". Perhaps another way of putting this in the present context is to re-affirm the inter-relationship between rights and responsibilities.

4.4 Recognizing that we live in a globalized world we are increasingly and necessarily inter-dependent. This is so because there is an essential bond between all people since all people are afforded equal dignity by virtue of their creation by the one God. Because of this bond, we hold that those who are more influential or stronger, because they have a greater share, should feel responsibility for those who are weaker and be prepared to share with them all that they possess. This insight is profoundly biblical in that the clear response to the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a resounding "Yes!"

#### **4.5 Creation and Community**

Given the above context, the Bible is clear that care and concern for those who are poor is not an "optional extra" for those who would wish to take the Gospel seriously. From the biblical account of Creation, it is clear that in creative love and purpose God has provided enough for all members of his human family. Within the Deuteronomic laws we are reminded of the responsibility of the community for those who, for whatever reason, are less able to provide for themselves. Clear instruction is given to the landowner and to the gleaner as to what must be left aside for the poor (Deut 24: 19-22). A portion of the Temple tithe was for the care of those who needed to be supported by the community.

#### **4.6 The Prophets**

Within the prophetic tradition there is a clear connection between the failure of society to care for "the poor" and the judgement of God. While he was by no means alone in his condemnation, no prophet was more outspoken than Amos who declared God's great displeasure. (Amos 5: 21-24).

In the Old Testament, "the poor" are seen as those who not only are dispossessed in terms of money but also in terms of power. They are the oppressed; they are the "marginalised". Having neither money nor power they put their trust in God who is seen as the champion of the poor.

#### **4.7 Jesus and "the poor"**

If a reading of the Old Testament demonstrates our obligations towards the dispossessed in our society; a reading of the New Testament confirms that for the Christian community such obligations are unavoidable.





Central to our understanding of **incarnation** is the very powerful sense of **identification**. When the Son of God came to proclaim His Kingdom, he came as the "Word made flesh." He came as a poor Jewish baby, to share the simple lifestyle of a poor family in a forgotten village. But there is much more to incarnation than identification.

There is also **engagement**. As he went about "doing good", Jesus was engaged with the poor, the lost, the lonely and the outcast. He was with them in the dirt, squalor, rejection and pain of their existence. His engagement did not begin or end with his physical presence and his healing touch. Jesus also was constantly challenging the institutions of church and state with regard to their lack of care and concern for those in need.

There is no evidence to suggest that Jesus rebuked anyone for their possession of wealth. He was, however, deeply concerned about what people did with power and privilege to relieve the plight of the poor and dispossessed. This would have been quite a shock to the religious systems of the day. Clear examples of this are to be found in the parables of the "Good Samaritan", "Death of the beggar Lazarus" Luke ch 16 and in the "Final Judgement" in Matthew chapter 25. Jesus gives a new definition to the term "neighbour". The concept becomes the basis for the new community which is to be based on love rather than law. Clearly, "neighbour" is the person in need - irrespective of any other consideration.

### 3.5 The Early Church and Community

For the first generation and first century Christians, the sharing of possessions with those of their number who were in need became one of the characteristics by which Christians were known. In the second chapter of Acts we read: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need." (Acts 2: 44-45). Initially, this approach was effective: "there was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands and houses sold them ... and distribution was made to each as they had need." (Acts 4: 34-35) Of the early church writers, James was not alone in his insistence upon the relationship between personal piety and responsibility for others: "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed', but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is that?" (James 2: 15-16) However we might wish to rationalise these and other passages, it is quite clear that all of this was part of a genuine attempt by the early Christians to make practical their understanding of the mind of Christ in relation to their responsibilities for one another.

### 3.6 The Methodist Tradition

As Methodists, we have inherited a good reputation for practical social concern. Whether it is always deserved is for others to judge. We would do well, however, to remember the enormous impact our founder and the early Methodists made upon 18th Century society. Wesley saw poverty on every side; he yearned over the poor and spent a great deal of time and money on relieving their physical needs. But at the heart of his caring was his conviction that a new experience of God would result in a new found peace, dignity and self-worth. Society would then be changed and, as such, would begin to reflect God's Kingdom on earth. Concern for the poor and social injustice often prompted the early Methodists to social action; sometimes the consequence of such action was personal sacrifice.

Unfortunately Methodism, like her sister churches, has, in the main, moved away from its roots and become largely middle-class and privileged and much less identified with the poorest and



most vulnerable members of our society. From our understanding of the Gospel, however, this must change. The biblical message is abundantly clear: privilege cannot be divorced from responsibility. More is required of us in our day if we are to respond realistically to the plight of the poor in our own community as well as in the wider world. We must move aggressively to address the difficult political issues which trap an unacceptably high proportion of our neighbours in poverty.

### **3.7 Popular fallacies**

To free us to work for real change we must resist two popular fallacies. The first is to do with the so-called "*Protestant work-ethic*" which infers that those who do not take responsibility for themselves, are unproductive and therefore undeserving of our sympathy. This simplistic value-judgement has much more to do with Stoicism than Christian faith and practice. It takes no account of the fact that for a very significant percentage of the population of Ireland there is little or no choice with regard to gainful employment.

The second fallacy to be resisted has to do with contemporary "*Prosperity Theology*". This suggests that affluence is confirmation of God's approval, a reward for personal piety and obedience. For devout folk who are poor and for whom there will be no opportunity to "prosper", this is as degrading as it is heretical.

## **5. Church Initiatives to tackle poverty and deprivation**

This paper seeks to promote a discussion in congregations on how the local church recognises and responds to the growing issue of poverty within the church family and within local communities as the economy continues in decline.

However, it is important to acknowledge the initiatives already established in many churches to respond to those who find themselves in difficult financial circumstances and in need of help.

Church members will be involved in volunteering in their local communities, giving to charities not associated with the church and supporting needy families known to them. The examples of church initiatives that follow cannot take account of individual responses to need.

Some Methodist congregations support the poor by partnering with other charitable organisations. An example of this is Storehouse Belfast, a Christian charity which aims to eliminate food poverty in the city. Six of our churches are affiliated to the charity and members of the congregations collect tinned and dried foods and leave them at drop off points for collection and distribution.

Since 2008, Storehouse has helped over 5000 families in need. (CAP) to become a CAP Debt Centre and new opportunities are developing for churches to facilitate CAP Job Clubs.

People can be homeless for a variety of reasons; all are exposed to the elements, lack warm food and often have inadequate clothing. Dublin City mission does a soup run four nights per





week for the homeless, on these runs the volunteers will try to provide hats and gloves for those who have none.

Many of the mission churches are involved in food and clothing distribution all year round but need is often felt most acutely at Christmas time. The mission churches are involved in providing food hampers and toys at Christmas time. Many local congregations on the district support the mission churches in their efforts to provide for the most needy.

The missions provided help to between 500 and 2500 families in their Christmas outreach in 2012.

Factors that contribute to inability to find work or hold down a job are addressed through a number of church mission based programmes. Approximately 150 people who do not speak English confidently, currently attend conversation groups in Dublin Central Mission each week. They can also get help to complete job application forms.

Vulnerable young people at risk of homelessness are supported through programmes run by Belfast Central Mission and Dublin Central Mission, others are helped through supported housing projects for young people.

## **6. Practical Action**

**6.1** Whilst acknowledging the work described in paragraph five, it is important that our churches review their activity in light of the facts about our society and a consideration of all the implications of what the Gospel has to say in terms of community, identification and engagement. Such a review will inevitably challenge any personal complacency and under God's leading, stimulate individual and collective action.

The recommendations are primarily addressed to the Church but it is also incumbent to make suggestions and recommendations for action to other groups with whom the church interacts.

### **6.2 The Church**

#### **6.2.1 A programme of education.**

There is a clear need for a programme of education to raise awareness about the nature of our society and its implications amongst our members. A number of recommended resources are recommended for use in the following paragraph

#### **6.2.2 Advocacy.**

There is a requirement to speak and act for and with the poor of our community, This includes critiquing and challenging the status quo in relation to matters of social justice. The Church should be a voice for the voiceless.

#### **6.2.1**

Connexional support and co-ordination.

Practical action should be encouraged and supported in every circuit. The work of the City Missions must be applauded but the scale of poverty and deprivation is so widespread that all of our Societies and Circuits ought to be involved, as indeed some already are. Despite the move towards membership of the middle class of many/most Methodists in Ireland, there are many inside our churches actually living in poverty. It is not only a case of us and them, but also "us" and "us". It may be worthwhile to consider how to co-ordinate the social outreach of



the Church, enable a sharing of expertise and assist with advice and training to those wishing to start a project/underpin work already happening. It would also be worthwhile to share with sister churches about these issues – there is much to learn as well as much to give!

#### 6.2.3 Funding.

The Connexion should consider the use of its resources to support social outreach projects. Local churches should be at least, in a state of readiness to take up opportunities and funding already available to engage in such work. This is particularly relevant in inner-city areas.

#### 6.2.4 Church Twinning.

Churches from radically different geographic and socio-economic backgrounds and locations should consider twinning so as to share in Christian worship and witness as well as in providing each other with insights and, where possible, a pooling of expertise and talents.

### 6.3 Government

While acknowledging all that is being done by Government, the church would further encourage both Governments to;

- (a) address the level of deprivation and poverty as a priority, and seek to eliminate poverty.
- (b) "poverty proof" all relevant Government policy prior to approval
- (c) work with industry to target job stimulation measures to areas with current low employment possibilities

### 6.4 Voluntary Sector

(a) To recognise the potential assistance of churches in supporting and enabling the work already undertaken by the Voluntary sector – not least with the contribution of premises and personnel.

(b) To co-ordinate efforts in order to avoid duplication and unnecessary wastage of resources.

## 7.Resources

Below are listed a number of organisations and resources which might be of use to any church group or individual who is seeking to learn more about the causes and impact of poverty and injustice or become more involved in the battle against them.

[The Jesus Agenda](http://www.thejesusagenda.org) is a 9 week study good material which raises issues of poverty throughout the world and the importance of Christian advocacy in combating the causes and impact of extreme poverty in communities around the world. It gives accurate, up to date information on organisations that are working hard in the fight against poverty and it points the participant in the direction of how they might be involved with such groups by providing links to websites and pointers to social networking pages for each group. More information can be found at [www.thejesusagenda.org](http://www.thejesusagenda.org).



[Tearfund](http://www.tearfund.org) has a long and well established reputation as an organisation which is working hard to bring relief to the places it is most needed and to raise awareness of the causes of poverty and injustice in the world. They have a collections of 101 studies which look at many issues of relief and development, some of which could be directly linked with more specific issues of poverty in the context of a church bible study or small group meeting. [www.tearfund.org](http://www.tearfund.org)

[Christian Aid](http://www.christianaid.org.uk) is another well established organisation. They have developed a series of papers which outline the theological thinking behind the work of Christian Aid. These might not suit group study so well but they certainly could act as a resource in preparing material for working within such study/fellowship groups in churches. [www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)

[World Vision](http://www.worldvision.org.uk) has also prepared a number of Bible Studies on themes around poverty and the Christian response to it. [www.worldvision.org.uk](http://www.worldvision.org.uk)

Action Aid is an organisation which seeks to mobilize groups and individuals into advocacy for those who suffer as a result of poverty and injustice. Their website offers suggestions on how groups and individuals can become involved in speaking out and acting on issues of poverty and injustice. [www.actionaid.org.uk](http://www.actionaid.org.uk)

"Economic Justice" Bible studies for Lent 2012 by the Bible Association for the Church of Ireland [*copy is attached as I think it might also be a possible model for the format for an eventual output from our work*]

In terms of questions for further reflection these need to be raised when we know what our final draft looks like. Liz has raised some questions but we both agree that their relevance needs to be measured against the final document and then included.

## **Appendix 1**

### **The Nature of N Ireland Society**

#### **Introduction**

This section attempts to summarise the main features of N Ireland society. The material is intended to be illustrative rather than definitive or comprehensive but it will broadly indicate the needs of the community.

#### **2.1 Demography**

It is estimated that in 2009 there were approximately 1.789 million people living in N Ireland with 21.4% being children (i.e. under the age of 16 years) and 16.9% being of state pension age.

The population in 2009 represents an increase in population of approx 11.3% since 1991 (population 1.6 million), compared to an increase of 2.1% in the population of Scotland over the same period. One can see that there has been and continues to be a disproportionate population increase in N Ireland.

#### **2.2 Health and Social Services**



With a significant percentage of the N Ireland population under the age of 16 one might reasonably expect a fairly healthy population. The following statistics however illustrate some disturbing trends:

- At September 2003 NI had the highest number of people in the United Kingdom (UK) waiting for admission to hospital per 1000 population – 32/1000 in NI compared to 22/1000 in England.
- The death rate for those under 75 years of age in NI was 4% above the UK average.
- While 66.4 live births per 1000 women were recorded in NI (as opposed to 56.6/1000 in Scotland) the infant death rate was 5.1/1000 in NI and 4.1/1000 in Scotland.
- NI has a higher mortality rate for circulatory diseases than the UK (9% higher); for respiratory diseases (28% higher) and from injuries/poisonings (23% higher).
- Approximately 3500 people claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in NI cited alcohol abuse as their main disabling condition.
- Benzodiazepines (prescription anti-depressants) are the second most common substance of referral for people with addictions in NI.
- 72% of males and 57% of females aged 18-29 years of age are estimated to binge drink at least once per week.

## **2.3 Family Breakdown**

Family breakdown is evident in increasing divorce rates, but is also predicated by higher rates of births outside marriage and higher rates of teenage pregnancies given the much higher frequency with which unmarried and particularly very young parents separate. Family breakdown is a frequent route into lone parenthood with all its disadvantages.

### 2.3.1 Lone Parent Families

- Today around one in five households with children in Northern Ireland is a single parent family
- Lone parent families are significantly more likely to live in poverty than two parent families in Northern Ireland
- Children growing up in lone parent families in Northern Ireland are more than three times as likely to live in households with nobody in paid work

### 2.3.2 Family dysfunction

- Very disordered households are often associated with higher levels of domestic abuse, behavioural problems and engagement in offending and substance misuse. Family breakdown is nearly always a precursor to family dysfunction, and children growing up in lone parent or broken families have been estimated to be three to six times more likely to suffer serious abuse than children growing up with both biological parents.



### 2.3.3 Children in Care

- In the worst and most tragic cases of dysfunction, children are often taken into statutory care: Nearly 2,500 children in Northern Ireland were taken into care in 2008, an increase of 3 per cent from 2007. Most children in care leave at 18 years of age; many in an intensely vulnerable emotional, psychological and financial state:
- Many children repeat their parents' patterns of economic dependency and family breakdown – the teenage pregnancy rates for females who have been in care is seven times the average for Northern Ireland

### **2.4 Education**

In 2009/10 there were 329,000 children in schools across Northern Ireland. In total, 148,000 children attended 219 post-primary schools and 164,000 children attended 866 primary schools. A further 5,000 children attended special or hospital schools and 13,000 children attended nursery or pre-school. In 2008/09, 71% of pupils in year 12 achieved 5 or more GCSEs (Grades A\*-C) and 98% of pupils in year 14 achieved 2 or more A levels (Grades A-E).

These figures compare very favourably with the remainder of the UK. However 2.9% of pupils in year 12 left school with no GCSEs (albeit down from 5.5% in 2004/05) and while 73% of pupils entered further or higher education 3.1% of pupils remained unemployed.

The issue of poverty of aspiration especially among protestant boys is very worrying and seems to resist any intervention procedures.

### **2.6 Employment and unemployment**

The number of persons in employment in the period September - November 2010 was estimated at 768,000. This estimate decreased by 12,000 over the same period. The employment rate for those aged 16-64 was estimated at 65.3%. NI's employment rate remained well below the UK average (70.4%) and was the lowest of the twelve UK regions.

#### 2.6.1 Unemployment

The unemployment rate for the period September - November 2010 was estimated at 7.8%, up 0.9 percentage points over this quarter and up 1.1 percentage points over the previous 12 months. The number of unemployed persons was estimated at 65,000 (and it worth highlighting that the corresponding figure at the start of 2008 was 25000), up 7,000 over the quarter and 10,000 over the year. The latest male unemployment rate (9.9% - November 2010) was almost double the female rate (5.3%). Unadjusted figures show that 49.8% of the unemployed have been unemployed for 1 year or more – up 12.5 percentage points over the year. They also estimate the unemployment rate for 18-24 year olds at 21.0% – up 5.0 percentage points over the year.

#### 2.6.2 Economically inactive

The N Ireland inactivity rate for those aged 16-64 stands at 29%. This is significantly higher than the UK average rate (23.4%) and is the highest in the twelve UK regions.

Unadjusted figures estimate that 27% of the total economically inactive in NI, aged 16-64, are sick/disabled, 26% are students, 25% are looking after the family/home, 13% are retired and 9% are 'other' reason.

Unadjusted figures also show that while 91% of the inactive do not want work, the remaining 9% (52,000) want employment but do not satisfy the full ILO job search criteria (by actively seeking work and being available to start a job).



### 2.6.3 Changes in the Structure of Manufacturing Jobs (NI)

Over the period 2000-2010, Manufacturing jobs in NI decreased by 26,720, with 19 of the 23 manufacturing divisions recording a decrease. The largest decrease occurred in the Manufacture of wearing apparel, which recorded 7,930 fewer jobs.

In the construction sector for the period Jan 2008 to March 2010 the number of people involved in this sector fell from 46140 to 34030 – a reduction of 27%

The total cost of Social Security administration in N Ireland in 2009/10 was £228M.

*Behind the raw statistics of unemployment there is the clear and very disturbing link between worklessness and entrenched poverty, ill health and family breakdown.*

Among young people youth unemployment has increased from 11.6% in 2008 to 17.4% in 2010 and while this presents a major frustration for some, for others the outcome is demoralisation – figures indicate that at least 12000 young people who are not at work or study do not want a job –demonstrating a low level of aspiration which in turn leads to an increasing likelihood of anti-social behaviour.

Again the link between worklessness and ill health is disturbing. There is a positive association between mortality and unemployment for all age groups, and a strong association between deprived areas , poor health, poverty and worklessness. This relationship is even stronger for unemployment and mental health. Depression can be understood as both a cause and consequence of long-term worklessness.

It is also important not to miss one of the long term consequences of unemployment and that is economic dependency among those of pensionable age. Some 57000 (20.7%) pensioners (out of a total of 275000 pensioners) in N Ireland live in relative poverty.

Finally in this section, for those who are in work the average gross salary in 2009 was £424.60 per week compared to a UK average of £499.00 per week.

## **2.7 Economic Downturn**

As a consequence of the very significant downturn in the global economy the economic landscape in N Ireland has changed dramatically in the past few years. As a result of the UK Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) of October 2009 N Ireland faces unprecedented pressure on public services with reduction in real terms of 8% in current expenditure and 40% in capital expenditure by the end of the CSR period. Given the N Ireland economy's reliance on the public sector these reductions will have a significant impact on economic activity and employment in both public and private sectors. The commitment by the UK Government to re-balance the local economy towards the private sector represents both opportunity and threat. Clearly a buoyant private sector is both necessary and desirable and will yield enormous social benefits as well as clear economic benefits. However, while changing the corporation tax rate to harmonise that in RoI is almost certainly an essential element in stimulating the private sector this will represent in real terms some £200M per annum and there seems to be clear evidence that EU regulations are such that the UK block grant to N Ireland cannot be consequentially increased – even if there was the political will at Westminster so to do. The consequence of removing an additional £200M from an already squeezed block grant is almost bound to have significant ramifications in areas highlighted above thus making a worrying situation even more worrying – especially given that the Minister of Finance in his Foreword to the Draft Budget 2011-15 stated “this Draft Budget continues to prioritise the economy”. The creation of a Social Investment Fund and a Social Protection Fund is to be welcomed but allocating some £20M per annum to each Fund is modest indeed by any standard.





## 2.8 A Divided Society

While the hallmarks of the conflict in N Ireland remain important factors in social breakdown many people face social problems such as increasing family breakdown, third generation educational under-achievement, worklessness, cycles of addiction and serious personal debts. These issues are often entrenched in some of N Ireland's poorest communities and trap some of its most vulnerable people. Social issues create a second – and much more worrying – division in N Ireland society. The Concept of multiple deprivation is helpful in quantifying these social divisions in society. The co-existence of family breakdown, education failure, addiction, indebtedness and worklessness and economic dependency occur in certain geographical areas..

Whiterock is the most deprived Ward in N Ireland Knockbracken is the fifth least deprived Ward. The following statistics illustrate a yawning gap between the two Wards.

### Whiterock

- Worst employment rates in Northern Ireland: one in ten people are unemployed
- Lowest household incomes in Northern Ireland: over a quarter of households in Whiterock are in poverty according to official measures
- Low educational attainment: 80% of individuals have no or low qualifications
- Widespread family breakdown: lone parent families make up over 27% of households in Whiterock and over 80% of births are to unmarried mothers

### Knockbracken

- In the least deprived wards in Northern Ireland for employment (4% unemployed)
- 90% of births to married mothers
- Lone parent families make up only 4% of households in Knockbracken
- Only 4% of households in poverty – less than half the national average (8.1%)

Only five miles from each other, the areas of Whiterock and Knockbracken reveal huge levels of disparity, pointing towards the interrelatedness of pathways to poverty, and the entrenched and intergenerational cycles of family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness and ill-health.

## APPENDIX 2

### **The Nature of Society in the Republic of Ireland**

The nature of the 'Boom to bust' economy in the Republic has thrown a variety of people into different levels of poverty. The Celtic Tiger had passed by many and for others the practical



impact of its demise was devastating. Further budgetary cuts to deal with the country's debt highlight that poverty is likely to remain at high levels for years to come.

Unemployment tripled from 2008 to almost 15% (2012). A high number are regarded as long-term unemployed. Among young people, the rate is nearly double the average. While there has been a levelling off, there are no signs to suggest that unemployment will decrease significantly soon.

In 2012 Social Justice Ireland (SJI) issued a report called 'Shaping Ireland's future'. It is probably the most useful and up-to-date background document on poverty in the Irish Republic. According to the report 15% of the population are in poverty. Of that 700,000, children make up 200,000, and 120,000 have jobs. The report reflects on the impact of government policy upon society. In doing so, it highlights high levels of poverty and questions how current trends in addressing the economic situation in the country can benefit the Irish people.

From urban communities that suffer high unemployment and anti-social behaviour to rural areas where the results of migration are most felt, poverty takes various forms. For example, those under strain often have to make hard choices about what they can afford, including what they eat. The Department of Social Protection reported that in 2010, 10% of the population experienced food poverty. (The inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability or accessibility.) Of those in their survey who said that they found it difficult to make ends meet, this was 24%. (Dept. Of Social Inclusion - Survey on Income and Living Conditions, October 2012)

Almost 2% of the population left the country in 2011, with many being young and educated. While this is a symptom of the country's challenges, it impacts on families and future economic prospects. The SJI report says that a quarter of male students, aged 15+ do not have the level of literacy needed to fully participate in society and further training.

In the SJI report, its director, Fr Sean Healy states that Ireland has around 100,000 households on waiting lists for social housing with no prospect for change. Nearly a quarter of them have been waiting for more than four years.

However there are also those like 'Colm', a Garda sergeant, who along with his wife, bought a fairly average four bedroom semi-detached house in a good area not long before property prices slumped. Saddled with a mortgage of E1400 per month, Colm and his family have been struggling and are in trouble. While families like this often appear on the outside to be OK, the constraints on their finances are then exacerbated with other cuts, such as in this case, cuts in public service pay. Many like Colm have consulted with MABS (Money Advice and Budgeting Service). "We are the silent poverty class. We're not the kind to ring Joe Duffy or give our names but I'm sure there are thousands like us. There is absolutely no help and no one listening..." (Irish Times, 17/10/2012)

The SJI report refers to a 'two-tier society' in Ireland. In its conclusion it says, 'it is obvious that we are becoming an ever more unequal society. Scarce resources are being taken from poorer people to offset the debts of bankers and speculators. This shift of resources is made possible by the support of our national value system.' In calling for a 'fundamental change in values', it says, 'this dualism in our values allows us to continue with the status quo. It allows us to implicitly find acceptable the exclusion of almost one sixth of the population from the



mainstream of our society while substantial resources and opportunities are channelled towards other groups in society. This dualism operates at the levels of the individual, communities and sectors.'

Ireland has a strong tradition and ethic of charity. However, writing in the Irish Times (24/11/12), Kathleen Lynch TD, minister for equality, says that 'by relying on charity to guide public policy, Ireland has never developed a deep political and moral commitment to developing a truly welfare-led caring state, a state whose primary concern is the welfare of all the people.' In a country that has changed greatly in recent decades, this means that many in society fall foul of the resulting inequality.