

Coming together – for a change

Developing a social cohesion policy – with particular reference to the Consultation document on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration published by the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister in August 2010

A personal contribution by
Rt Rev Dr Norman Hamilton OBE

Minister of Ballysillan Presbyterian Church, Belfast
and
Moderator of the General Assembly of the
Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2010 / 2011

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INTRODUCTION

The publication in Aug 2010 by OFMDFM of their long awaited consultation paper on Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) provided a welcome stimulus to what had become a very muted debate on the issues involved, which are of huge importance to the future well being of the province.

This paper is offered as a personal contribution to the consultation process and to the much needed wider debate. Its genesis lies in a period of sabbatical study on the relationship between the church and social cohesion policy which was provided for me by the Presbyterian Church in 2009

This is unambiguously a 'challenge' document. Equally unambiguously it is written to stimulate careful and rigorous thought about the issues of social cohesion and community relationships, rather than be seen in any way as complaining or attacking any group, organisation or individual.

Whilst it is written from a clear evangelical standpoint within the church sector, it is my firm conviction that there is a huge role for the wider Christian church at large to play in shaping future relationships in our land after a generation of such intense conflict.

It is also written from a 'ground level' perspective. It is not an 'academic' paper as such, though hopefully, it stands up to serious scrutiny. It is earthed not only in my own experiences having lived for over 20 years on an interface in North Belfast, but in the myriad of discussions over the years with others right across the whole of society who have also sought to grapple with the issues discussed. It brings 'ground level' perspectives as well as analysis; makes suggestions as well as criticisms; offers policy suggestions as well as theological reflection.

We are not in a good place in terms of our community relationships. Last year (2009) the streets of Northern Ireland saw murder, sectarianism and rioting, plus naked racism leading to 100 Roma fleeing back to Romania (though some returned to Northern Ireland in August 2009).

One commentator put it like this: *'The cancer of sectarianism, which fuelled decades of violence, is now, as foreigners arrive in greater numbers, embracing racism'*.(The Times; p39; 27 June 2009;)

The picture in 2010 remains very troubling indeed. Recent figures from the PSNI show that in 10 of the 25 District Council area outside Belfast, there had been a rise of over 25% in sectarian motivated incidents between 2008/09 and 2009/10. In only 2 of those councils had there been a reduction of more than 25%.

There is a problem with sectarianism right across much of Northern Ireland, and it appears to be acute in what might be seen as some very surprising places.

The marching season has again brought community tensions to the forefront of world news, with the security operation to deal with the rioting in the Ardoyne area of North Belfast alone following the parades on 12 July 2010 estimated to have cost £2 million.

It is important to say at the outset that the analysis and views expressed in this paper are entirely my own, and should in no way be seen as representing the position of the Presbyterian Church. Yet they have also been shaped by much reading and reflection alongside many informal conversations over recent months and years, as well as by 22 structured conversations in the Spring / Summer of 2009 with people from the worlds of politics (right across the spectrum), journalism, community, church and public service.

To all who responded with such great honesty and generosity I am most grateful.

This paper concentrates on some of the main policy issues raised in the OFMDFM consultation document, and sets aside, for the present, discussion on the resourcing and delivery mechanisms. These should flow from the policy discussions and decisions, which still seem to have a long way to go.

It is my earnest hope that there is enough in these pages to bring encouragement and help to a wide range of sectors and people, even if there are some daunting and very painful issues that need to be addressed. It is offered from my heart as well as my head, and with a deep sense of humility in the face of the huge challenges and pain still so obvious in our community.

It is not offered as some sort of blueprint, but in the hope that it will contribute to the much needed discussion on the CSI consultation paper. That discussion must be rigorous, clear, informed – and above all gracious - so that we can come closer to the longed for ‘peace’ that goes far beyond the mere absence of violence.

**Norman Hamilton
October 2010**

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CHAPTER 1

STRUCTURED CONVERSATIONS - RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

1. Central to producing a paper such as this is the necessity to have inputs from as wide a range of people as possible, and who can be trusted to give honest reflections and perspectives, away from any 'party' line. To help achieve this, 22 'structured' conversations were set up with a wide variety of people from the worlds of politics (including all the major parties), community, church, the public service and journalism. They were conducted in Londonderry, Ballymena and across Belfast during the Spring and Summer of 2009. Most conversations lasted about an hour, though some considerably longer, and were based on the following five questions. Their purpose of the questions was to bring some shape to what are wide ranging and often complex matters, yet allow feelings, perceptions, and personal comment on a wide range of issues to surface and be taken on board.

2. The questions were as follows:

Q1. *Describe Community Relations in your area. Have they changed in recent times – and if so, why has that happened, and who has led the change?*

Q2. *Do you see any differences between Community Relations (CR) and Community Cohesion (CC). If so, what are they?*

Q3. *What are the key ingredients in the building of community cohesion?*

Q4. *What do you expect from government (especially local government; public agencies; Community Relations Council and OFMDFM) in relation to CR and / or CC?*

Q5. *What role, if any, do you see for the churches in building CR and / or CC?*

MAIN ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE STRUCTURED CONVERSATIONS

(Detailed responses are included as an addendum to this chapter)

3.1 Without doubt there was universal appreciation of the difference that the peace process had made to community relationships 'on the street'.

3.2 Yet all is far from well. Division still flourishes, and the diminishing hope for a better future were summed up in the phrase - *Things are better but bitter*. This appears to leave us in a situation where relatively few are even interested in the building of community cohesion.

- 3.3 A major challenge for the new policy is that few understand what CSI is really about. As a result, there is no consensus at all on what it is designed to achieve.**
- 3.4 The building of trust in the working of institutions both at local level and with central government is a critical factor if the new policy on CSI is to have any effect.**
- 4. Five main strands emerged from the responses to the questions..**
- (a) The scale and depth of ongoing division in our society, and the widespread acceptance of ‘parallel / separate development’ by both government and society at large.**
- (b) The very low level of interest in wider society in the development of a new CSI strategy.**
- (c) The very low level of expectation of government in taking a new CSI strategy forward. Political leadership needs to be supplemented by a proactive civic engagement in this topic.**
- (d) The trenchant criticism of the churches for not working cohesively, alongside a hope – even expectation – that the church in general could be a great help in the rebuilding of our community. In particular, there was a clear expectation that the church should stand up and say things are wrong when they are.**
- (e) All of these leading to a sense of disillusionment, weariness and steady erosion of the hopes for a ‘shared and better future’ raised in the Programme for Government following the return of a locally elected devolved administration. (It has to be said that the widespread negative or ambivalent immediate responses to the CSI consultation document suggest that it has done little to alleviate the angst.)**
- 5. This brief survey of the themes emerging in the structured conversations spells out some very big challenges for both the churches and the government. Much of the remainder of this paper attempts to bring together the politics, the theology and the practical steps needed to chart a way forward in what is clearly a situation where hope and expectation remain in short supply.**
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Addendum on the 5 questions and responses to them.

Italics are direct quotations from those engaged in the conversations.

A1.1 Describe Community Relations in your area. Have they changed in recent times – and if so, why has that happened, and who has led the change?

A1.2 Without doubt there was universal appreciation of the difference that the peace process had made to community relationships 'on the street'. *It has been good to talk!* and *people feel safer as a result of the peace process.* Credit for this was willingly given to political leaders, at both local and Stormont level.

A1.3. Yet there was a constant refrain that we still live in a *very divided society. The big picture may be sorted, but the micro picture is hugely fragmented.* There were some examples of good inter-community relationships, but the general picture was one of there being little reconciliation, with the middle classes *keeping their heads down.* Few would have argued with one comment '*Things are better but bitter*'.

A1.4 The impact of funding, and the lack of / withdrawal of funding surfaced regularly. The point was made several times that community tension generates funding to community groups in an area, with the clear implication being drawn that '*it is useful to have tensions for funding purposes*'.

A1.5 However, by far the most worrying feature was the widespread comment that relatively few were interested in the building of community cohesion, except those to whom it already matters. '*Our people have absolutely no interest whatsoever in what happens to your people.*' It seems that parallel living is very easy on the public conscience.

A2.1 Do you see any differences between Community Relations (CR) and Community Cohesion (CC). If so, what are they?

A2.2 Although the term 'Community Cohesion' (CC) is something of a 'buzz word', it is quite clear that it brings no settled or substantive meaning with it.

A2.3 Responses to this question ranged from CC being almost a state of being *'CC is when you have a community where community relations don't matter – we are all just people'* (politician) to *'CC is about the common good and CR about relationships'*. (academic); to an almost completely different understanding... *CC is about the common good* (of one community), *whilst CR is city-wide work.* (Community activist). Yet another view was articulated by seeing CC as a *'process that delivers diversity'*.

A2.4 This varying understanding of what community cohesion is and what it implies, brings a substantial challenge to Government as a new policy is rolled out. It is significant that the consultation document makes no attempt to provide a coherent definition of what is meant by the three terms – Cohesion / Sharing / Integration. This makes it extremely difficult to have an informed debate about what policy implications.

A3.1 What are the key ingredients in the building of community cohesion?

A3.2 Given the difficulty that the previous question presented, it was no surprise that the responses to this question were many and varied. Yet some themes constantly surfaced.

A3.3 One was 'Trust'. This is needed at personal level, but also at structural levels too. Several picked up on the need to have trust in the working of institutions at local level, not just with central government. *'CC should be locally based, because that is where it matters, but should not only be determined by a bigger neat narrative. The role of government is to give the tools and enable communities to get on with that task'*.

A3.4 A second main theme was that CC is incompatible with 'parallel development'. If community life is dominated by *zero sum* politics, or the influx of people to whom or from whom there is no *neighbour responsibility* nor respect is *encouraged across the community*, CC simply won't happen, because it cannot happen. One person summed up this view in these words... *'If the culture is wrong, then you are left with just a shell of institutions'*.

A4.1 What do you expect from government (especially local government; public agencies; Community Relations Council and OFMDFM) in relation to CR and / or CC?

A4.2 The responses to this question were overwhelmingly distressing, because of their negativity. Few, if any, appeared to have any expectation at all of good policy or practice coming out of central government.

A4.3 *A Community Cohesion policy might destabilise electoral bases*

There is no vision of a common good

Government needs to knock the heads of government departments together

OFMDFM are suited to division

If there is no modelling in the Executive, why should others bother?

A4.4 Addressing the challenges of community cohesion, sectarianism and racism is a civic task of central importance. It is vital that it is seen to transcend narrow party differences and short-term immediate interests. While political leadership is essential it must be supplemented by clear mechanisms for civic society to articulate our best hopes and not only our worst fears. These are also not problems that can be solved by a simple bureaucracy. For this reason, a body like the Community Relations Council, - openly recruited, connected to the system and licensed to champion and challenge for the cause of a shared and better future for all -needs to be maintained and developed.

A4.5 Examples were even given suggesting that current government policy was destroying years of good work 'on the ground'. Given that this paper is written to help the process of building community cohesion, it seems inappropriate to develop this section further.

A5.1 What role, if any, do you see for the churches in building CR and / or CC?

A5.2 If there was trenchant criticism of government, there was also trenchant criticism of the church sector, alongside some hope – even expectation – that it could make a much better contribution to CC than it currently does.

A5.3 By far the most common criticism was the apparent inability of the churches to act cohesively themselves.

Churches are part of the problem for they have sustained division.

*There is something theological about the politics of Northern Ireland...
'Come out from among them' permeates the religion and the politics.*

The church is a place where sinners are no longer welcome

The church should have been speaking for us as a people

The most profound spiritual challenge is how things are lived out at congregational level, not just the statements from the central church.

How can you be encouraging respect across the community, when the Presbyterian Church cannot even invite a Roman Catholic to its Assembly?

A5.4 Yet there was also a widespread view that the church could be a great help in the rebuilding of our community. Some (including those not actively involved in any church) even suggested that the church was the 'only' hope, since politics was failing to bring CC. In particular, there was a clear expectation that churches should stand up and say things are wrong when they are.

Churches have '*wonderful people resources,*' and their contribution to dealing with racism appears to be widely appreciated.

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CHAPTER 2

REPORT OF COMMISSION ON INTEGRATION AND COHESION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

1. The OFMDFM consultation paper begins with these words:

'We have now entered a new and hopeful period in our history. Our vision for this new era is that, working together, we will build a shared and future for all. We want to build a society where everyone shares in and enjoys the benefits of a more peaceful society.'

2. The paper makes no claims to have a substantive research base for the new policy. This is a serious deficiency, and it is clearly disquieting that OFMDFM did not consider it necessary to underpin their new policy by drawing on the substantial amount of existing research or commissioning further serious research.

3. There is a huge body of research and work in progress on these matters in England and Wales. The most substantive work in recent years is contained in the final report of The Commission on Integration and Cohesion published on 14 June 2007, following its appointment a year earlier by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly. (Ironically, its published title was 'Our Shared Future').

4. The Commission, a fixed term advisory body, was set up to consider how local areas can make the most of the benefits delivered by increasing diversity - and also to consider how they can respond to the tensions it can sometimes cause. It was tasked with developing practical approaches to building communities' own capacity to prevent and manage tensions.

5. It is of course, almost self evident that the work and the report of the Commission cannot be simply imported into our situation in Northern Ireland. However, coming as it did out of real tensions in England and Wales, the Commission's Report has much to say to our own divided society, should we care to listen. Given this fact and the scarcity of recent or ongoing local research on CSI anywhere in Ireland, it seems axiomatic that its perspectives and conclusions should be carefully explored, so that we can make faster progress to building a healthy society than would otherwise be the case.

6. In 2001 Ted Cattle was the Chief Executive of Nottingham City Council, and during that year was appointed by the then Home Secretary to chair the Community Cohesion Review Team, and to lead the review of the causes of the summer disturbances in a number of towns and cities in Northern England. His report birthed the concept of community cohesion, and coming as it did out of a situation of civil unrest, clearly has many resonances with our situation here.

7. The report is readily available via the internet, as well as in hard copy. The remainder of this chapter in Section A sets out some of the key thinking and recommendations contained in the report, with Section B offering some commentary and application to the Northern Ireland situation.

SECTION A – Key thinking and recommendations in the report

8. The report set out four key principles underlying its recommendations..

- ◆ Firstly, the sense of **shared futures** which we believe is at the heart of our model and our recommendations – an emphasis on articulating what binds communities together rather than what differences divide them, and prioritising a shared future over divided legacies
- ◆ Secondly, an emphasis on a **new model of rights and responsibilities** that we believe will be fit for purpose in the 21st century – one that makes clear both a sense of citizenship at national and local level, and the obligations that go along with membership of a community, both for individuals or groups
- ◆ Thirdly, an ethics of hospitality – a **new emphasis on mutual respect and civility** that recognises that alongside the need to strengthen the social bonds within groups, the pace of change across the country reconfigures local communities rapidly, meaning that mutual respect is fundamental to issues of integration and cohesion
- ◆ A commitment to equality that sits alongside the need to deliver **visible social justice**, to prioritise transparency and fairness, and build trust in the institutions that arbitrate between groups.

9. The following extract gives some insight into the thinking behind the recommendations.

- ◆ How cohesive an area is will depend upon a series of interacting factors about that area and the people who live there, so that the story of cohesion in each local area will be different. In some cases the differences will be subtle – in others they will be large.
- ◆ Improving cohesion is about addressing multiple issues at the same time – taking action on a single issue will only make a small difference, so there needs to be both mainstreaming work and targeted policy interventions.
- ◆ If cohesion is going to improve, local actions need to be taken to improve individuals' personal circumstances, to change individuals' perceptions and to address area wide-issues.

- ◆ Taken together, this means no simple statements can be made about integration and cohesion.
- ◆ Deprivation remains a key influencer of cohesion, but the fact that some areas have high deprivation and high cohesion shows that local action can build resilience to its effects. (Report. page 15)

10. The Commission's work led to a recommendation that the government bring forward a new definition of community cohesion, and this was given in their response to the report issued in February 2008.

A new definition of Community Cohesion

Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration - which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on three foundations:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly

And three key ways of living together:

- A shared future vision and sense of belonging
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity
- Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

11. The report was quite clear that mainstream activities should factor in these aspirations, and that there must be an emphasis on:

- what binds rather than divides
- a new model of rights and responsibilities
- a new emphasis on civility and mutual respect
- mutual communal hospitality
- visible social justice
- trusted institutions – including those that operate at local level. The role of the police was singled out as of special importance.

12. Specific chapters were given over to more detailed exploration of key themes, with some salient points emerging as follows..

13 Developing Shared Futures

13.1.1 Civic participation was seen as a key way of building integration and cohesion.

13.1.2 Local community plans should be framed around cohesion.

13.1.3 There is very much more to social cohesion work than simply preventing disorder.

13.1.4 Shared community facilities are a key resilience factor.

13.1.5 Local history (incl riots) is key to perceptions of cohesion.

14. Strengthening rights and responsibilities

14.1 As citizens we are co-owners of the same society and jointly responsible for its future.

14.2 In the main, local stake holders and practitioners in particular, placed more emphasis on developing a sense of community through focus on tangible aspects rather than abstract values or a conceptual vision for a community or area.

14.3 Putting values such as compassion and justice into action is vital for a cohesive and integrated society.

15. Building mutual respect and civility

15.1 How people behave towards their neighbours or respond to strangers is central to the web of relationships that then develop locally.

15.2 Advances in technology often mean fewer shared experiences.

15.3 A need for a renewed emphasis on hospitality and civility within communities.

15.4 Some of the Christian groups ... might describe it as 'social generosity' or working for the common good 'treating each other as you would wish to be treated'

15.5 *'It is also about recognising and respecting the different habits of different groups within the same communities – and the potential clashes when the preferences and behaviours of each group collide. As local diversity becomes more complex, we think mutual respect and civility should underpin the way we as communities navigate a shared course through different understandings of what is acceptable or normal. And begin to understand that attitudes and behaviours from both settled and new communities have the capacity to cause offence.'* (Report page 78)

16. An increased focus on young people

16.1 At times we (*The Commission members*) were also shocked by the pessimism of some of the young people we met.

16.2 To say that Youth Service provision falls short of expectations is not a new observation – reports from the 1960s have picked this up. But given that our conversations have exposed a pattern in which tensions between young people in local communities are often the early indicators of wider community unease, the need to address this head in is becoming more urgent.

16.3 Consultation with young people should set out three priorities

- something to do
- somewhere to go
- someone to talk to

17 Working with faith communities

17.1 The responses we received to our consultation have made clear the contribution which churches and other faith groups make to the life of local communities. They help to build integration and cohesion through their community buildings and leaders on the ground, their support for projects and networks, and the promotion of shared values such as neighbourliness and civility among others.

17.2 'Faithful capital' The locally based grassroots activities that people of faith undertake to seek to make a difference. The report also points to a *'lack of understanding about faith groups, but also to a squeamishness about the possibility of their proselytising'*

17.3 Various suggestions including 'a need for a more constructive conversation between those who are religious and those who are not'.

17.4 Recommendation 'to develop a programme to help increase 'religious literacy' on the part of public agencies, and the ability of these agencies to establish effective patterns of engagement with religion and belief groups as part of wider public engagement; to strengthen their engagement with the process of policy development and implementation, and enable local areas to make targeted use of their resources.

18 Building stronger communities

18.1 There is a wide range of factors that can enable integration and cohesion through community empowerment including personal motivation / confidence / self worth.

19 Tackling Anti Social Behaviour

19.1 Experiencing ASB and / or having a 'fear of crime' is *'a vicious circle that risks keeping people inside their homes rather than engaging with others'*

20 Neighbourhood policing

20.1 The importance of (visible) Neighbourhood Policing to integration and cohesion C/f Flanagan review of Policing.

21 Resolving conflicts

21.1 The continued expression of conflict among and between groups can be corrosive.

21.2 The report places great importance on:
- all communities being able to air their grievances and concerns, but for those discussions to have clear ground rules.

- engaging with people on their territory initially – particularly young people.

- Using and building upon existing local capacity.

22. Making Social Justice Visible

22.1 Integration and cohesion are linked to a commitment to Social Justice and tackling inequalities in the long term. This means a sense of equality and fairness for settled communities.

22.2 One of the key themes is concern about preferential treatment of particular groups

22.3 *It is clear .. that the idea of a shared future locally can only work if it means something to all communities and will not work whilst those (negative) narratives are still prevalent.*

22.4 The Report identified 3 key ways for local public agencies to take action..

- by addressing the substantive issues being experienced

- by rebalancing communications to include all residents, not just particular target groups.

- by ensuring that local media understand the importance of their role in building integration and cohesion, and their responsibilities when reporting from within a context of diversity.

SECTION B

INTERPRETING THE REPORT FOR CSI POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

23. Many in Northern Ireland will readily identify with many of the comments and insights in the Report. This does not of course mean that all its recommendations can, or should, be lifted and transported to our situation. Yet given the difficulty that we have had in producing a CSI strategy here, and the lack of capacity devoted so far to its production from the whole island of Ireland, there seems no reason to seek a new starting point substantially different from the underlying themes and definition agreed (in Feb 2008) within the UK context. The key sections of the report relating to this have been reproduced in Chapter paragraphs 8 to 10 above.

24. From the definition given in paragraph 10 (or one close to it), a significant number of major challenges and decisions emerge for all sectors of society – government, civic society, churches, groups, communities, families and individuals.

25. A CHANGE OF CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

25.1 The report specifically speaks of ‘a new emphasis on mutual respect and civility’. This does not conflict with the nature of adversarial politics as we have it, but it does significantly change what should, and should not be acceptable, in public discourse. Language matters – a lot. Specific effort is needed to ensure that in the engagement with one constituency or in public utterances, no other constituency, group or person is either ignored or demeaned. To do so is indeed to be sectarian, racist or whatever. Good practice is clearly expressed in the principle outlined above with its *‘emphasis on articulating what binds communities together, rather than what differences divide them, and prioritising a shared future over divided legacies’*.

26. MAKING SOCIAL JUSTICE VISIBLE

26.1 One of the weaknesses of current policy and the OFMDFM paper is that there is little or no recognition that good social relationships are intimately connected with social justice and the tackling of inequalities. Of course, this is not the same as saying that tackling inequality brings good community relationships, for as we know, there can be an increasing degree of equality, with equal, but increasingly separate development.

26.2 One example will suffice. Neighbourhood Renewal was launched by the Department of Social Development right across Northern Ireland in 2003 and has since been rolled out with little emphasis on community relations and/or cohesion. Its four strategic objectives are Community, Economic, Social and Physical renewal. It can certainly be argued that improving community relationships is implied in much of the plan, but the implementation has not shown that to be the outcome. Few Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships are designed and actioned on the basis of inter-community welfare, and this has reinforced the perception that public policy readily accepts, in practice, an ethos of separate development. Regeneration and tackling deprivation are commonly in different silos from that of building a healthy civic society – though the work in the Health Action Zone in Belfast shows that this need not necessarily be so.

26.3 The long term commitment to social justice appears to be crucial to community cohesion, and that is a key pointer to the need for long term commitment by the whole of central government to any emerging CSI policy.

27. A NEW MODEL OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

27.1 It is ironic that the debate on human rights in the Northern Ireland context has been and remains so divisive, for the desirability of upholding such rights is widely accepted. Part of the problem is that the emphasis on a rights based society has ensured that public dialogue has rarely focussed on a '*sense of citizenship*' at national and local level, or on the '*obligations that go along with membership of a community*' (both quotations from the Report on Cohesion and Integration). This is scarcely surprising, given the highly polarised views on territory and identity that underlie our community tensions.

27.2 Yet if these are important to the building of community cohesion, they must be faced and worked through in an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility. How do republicans and nationalists describe 'citizenship' and 'obligations' within Northern Ireland whose constitutional integrity is guaranteed until and unless a majority of those 'citizens' decide otherwise? How do Unionists describe 'citizenship' and 'obligations' within Northern Ireland which is geographically part of the small island of Ireland, yet whose allegiances are to a British constitution (and Protestant throne) who seem less and less interested or committed to that constitutional link, and alongside a community where many are overtly opposed to that link? Does the absence of a shared view of 'citizenship' and 'obligations' inevitably mean that only very limited progress can be made in building cohesion?

28. AN ETHIC OF HOSPITALITY

28.1 This concept is now almost unknown in our society, except in the tourism industry which is highly commercialised. Outside the family, there are very few places and communities where hospitality is adopted as a way of life – especially towards those who are ‘different’.

28.2 There are several highly attractive features of this concept, and it is further explored in Chapter 4.

- (a) the starting place is ‘offer’ rather than either demand or needs – relational rather than legal.**
- (b) the principle and the practice can be embraced in a host of diverse ways by individuals, groups, communities, as well as across all social, ethnic, religious and cultural groups, and throughout all sectors of society.**
- (c) it expresses value to people, irrespective of who they are, and builds strong bridges between people, allowing the difficult issues to surface on the solid ground of already proven relationship.**
- (d) it encourages initiative, has very low cost to the public purse, and has great potential to bring energy back into what appears to an increasingly disillusioned and separated society.**

29. This report offers some fresh new thinking to the building of relationships in a divided society. It has much to commend it to politicians and civic leaders, as well as to the churches, since it also resonates with mainstream Christian teaching. We have neglected this wider research and these insights to our detriment in the OFMDFM document, for it implies that we feel the need to ‘reinvent the wheel’ – and that will take a long time.

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CHAPTER 3

A NEW OFMDFM POLICY ON COHESION, SHARING AND INTEGRATION

1. This chapter is an attempt to offer some suggestions into the consultation process and to policy makers generally on a possible way forward in the development of a new approach. Many of the themes and recommendations are explored in much greater detail elsewhere in this paper, and should be read in close conjunction with this chapter.

2. As stated in the introduction, it is no part of this paper to be a vehicle for unhelpful criticism. Yet, given that we now have the OFMDFM paper in the public arena for public consultation, some comment seems appropriate.

- A. The lack of a serious or comprehensive definition of ‘Cohesion, Sharing and Integration’ is a serious deficiency. This means that there is no agreed and clear benchmark in place either to develop the policy or measure its effectiveness.
- B. The consultation paper does not offer a policy backed by a substantial research background. This devalues it, since it reads as a series of opinions and aspirations.
- C. Crucially, the paper does not connect CSI in a thoroughgoing way to policy development on a wide range of connected issues – social justice / education / regeneration / health / policing and justice. There is a very clear assumption that much of CSI can, in fact, be delivered in a silo unconnected with other major policy areas and budgets. The research elsewhere shows that this is simply not possible, by demonstrating that CSI strategy profoundly affects those who are not ‘middle class’. Indeed, those who are most marginalised are the ones who often bear the brunt of there being no coherent policy.

3.1 The current approach within government is clearly facing huge difficulties, and the situation seems very unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. In addition, there appears to be little interest in wider society on the development of a new CSI policy, especially among the middle classes, many of whom are well away from the immediate consequences of community conflict, interfaces, riots and tensions. Whether they are well away from the costs and consequences of sectarianism and tribal loyalties, never mind underlying sectarian attitudes, is another matter.

4. Language

4.1 It is clear that there is no agreed understanding of much of the language and many of the terms currently in use. For example, whilst the consultation paper gives some examples on page 11 of what 'Sharing' might look like, the scope and range of the policy implications of the concept itself is not clearly articulated anywhere in the document.

4.2 As indicated earlier, the word 'Cohesion' has no generally understood meaning, and both 'Sharing' and 'Integration' suffer from the same problem. The myriad of other words used in discussing these issues seems indicative of the fog in which we are all trying to find a way forward..

**Shared and better future – as in the Programme for Government
'Shared Future' as a document, and as term in funding applications
Shared future as a concept
Shared and reconciled future as used in the Eames / Bradley report
Shared space
Good relations strategies by local councils
Community relations as a general term, but also formally as in the name of
the Community Relations Council
Race Relations / Cultural diversity
Reconciliation / Peace building**

Language matters. Over time words accrue baggage or change meaning. The language for future use needs to be much simplified, be clear and be given well defined and widely understood meaning.

4.3 The point has been made a number of times that little or no intellectual capacity has been invested in the development of this policy either by academics, politicians, business leaders, trades unions, community groups, the media or churches.

4.4 OFMDFM must clear away the fog, and suggest clear lines of meaning and understanding, so that there can be intelligent and substantive input from civic society to the formulation of the new CSI policy.

4.5 I wish to argue that, in the absence of any other well founded research, OFMDFM broadly adopt the definition and framework of Community Integration and Cohesion agreed by the UK government in Feb 2008. This to be reviewed after 5 years and amended as necessary.

5. Section 75 and Equality issues

5.1 Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 has become almost synonymous in the public mind with Section 75. Section 75 (2) is almost unknown to the general public.

5.2 Sections 75(1) and 75(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 read as follows:

Statutory duty on public authorities

(1) A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity—

(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;

(b) between men and women generally;

(c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and

(d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

(2) Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

5.3 The opening words of Chapter 1 of the OFMDFM consultation are ***‘Our programme for Government makes clear: equality, fairness, inclusion and the promotion of good relations will be watchwords for all of our policies and programmes across Government.***

5.3 However, by paragraph 1.4 of the same chapter there appears to be an explicit rollback from the importance of promoting good relations. That paragraph states that ***‘Obligations under Section 75(2) cannot prejudice the obligations under section 75 (1). It is recognised that good relations cannot be built on inequality. It is recognised that the promotion of equality of opportunity is an essential element of building good relations’.*** De facto, this means that there are first division watchwords, with good relations being relegated to the second division.

5.4 The proper commitment to equality and human rights is to be unambiguously welcomed, and it a truism to say that good relations cannot be built on inequality. However, the paper pointedly avoids stating the other side of this argument – that equality can, and currently is, being delivered ***without*** the building of good relations.

5.5 The equality agenda, as currently structured and understood, facilitates the perpetuation of division in our society. For example, each 'side' is treated equally, and is 'given' its own leisure facilities, its own schools, its own housing, its own programmes and its own gatekeepers. This may be electorally important, but is catastrophic for embedding cohesion, sharing and integration in our thinking and policy making.

5.6 I wish to argue for an unambiguous 'upgrading' of the community relations agenda so that it has the same legal status and is a watchword of equal importance to those in Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Order. Nothing less, will, in my opinion, focus the minds of policy makers and wider society on how to face the sectarian demon in our midst.

5.7 This agenda is not always politically palatable. With this in mind, a successful focus on these critical issues will require a pro-active role for civic society. The delivery mechanisms in the document do not seem to achieve this, reducing the role of the Community Relations Council to an advisor to government and funder rather than a licensed champion for a shared and better future for all. Given the challenges we face, the role of the CRC should be upgraded rather than reduced, and attention paid to how it the CRC can be improved rather than abolished.

6. Across Government Departments

6.1 Much has been made in recent years of the need for joined up government. This is of special importance in Northern Ireland where politicians of very differing persuasions are in government together. This raises a central issue which has not been satisfactorily addressed in the outworking of power sharing or in the CSI paper. Politicians are elected to government on the basis of their electoral mandate, but as soon as they achieve office, their primary task is to govern on behalf of all the people, not just those who voted for them. Given the difficulties that are well documented, much more work needs to be done within government to embed the concept of the 'common good' in policy making. Nowhere is this more important (or potentially more difficult) than in developing a new CSI policy.

6.2 There are some encouraging signs in the CSI paper. The contribution of various government departments to various strands of the CSI strategy is mentioned, but it is very patchy and often quite limited in scope.

6.3 For example, it appears that government policy and action is often dictated by the pressing needs of a plethora of small geographical areas and/or small constituencies. This is exemplified in the large number of very small areas that have the status of being Neighbourhood Renewal areas, even though some are contiguous. Housing need too is often assessed on a very localised geographical

basis, yet much of education and health care is provided on a wide geographical basis. There is little evidence of policy and action being determined by the 'common good' (an idea which has strong resonance with the Biblical concept of 'seeking the welfare of the city' as a whole). Behind this concept is that the interests of a much greater community both in terms of numbers, space and diversity must take precedence over the needs of smaller local groups. The smaller the group being served, the less the benefits of diversity are felt, to say nothing of the greater economic costs involved in maintaining the current approach.

6.4 In a recent academic book by Ray Kinsella, Professor of Banking and Financial Services at the Smurfit School of Business and Law in University College, Dublin, he gives an extensive treatment of 'common good' within the financial sector which has come so close to meltdown in the past two years. The core issue he discusses surely applies as much to social cohesion policy as to financial policy. *'The principle of 'The Common Good', stemming from the dignity, unity and equality of all people, attempts to both articulate and achieve the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily;. Then argument is, quite simply, that the Human Person cannot find fulfilment purely in themselves; that is, separate from the fact that they exist 'with' others and 'for' others.* (Kinsella, p14)

6.5 I wish to argue that the concept of the 'common good' be embedded much more clearly in the new CSI policy, and that its implications be made clear for all public bodies.

7. Social Justice

7.1 As the 2007 Report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion makes clear, the building of a cohesive society must be linked to a long-term commitment to social justice and the tackling of inequalities. It is far from clear that either current public policy or the Programme for Government recognises the importance of these links. Across government generally, the improvement of community relationships seems much more aspirational than embedded in practical decision making, especially where significant spending priorities are involved.

7.2 I wish to suggest strongly that the new CSI policy explicitly recognises the link between social needs and community cohesion, and includes a long term resource commitment to the people and areas most affected.

8 Churches

8.1 A number of comments and recommendations in relation to the churches are made in chapter 6 of this paper. A key question however, for the whole of the church constituency, is whether its members can find enough common ground and enough will to contribute in a cohesive way to the building of a cohesive community.

8.2 This is not primarily a theological question, since as is noted elsewhere, there are examples of such working together already in place. (See chapter 5 Para 11) There are, of course, theological issues involved, but the main challenge in this area of CSI is not theological. There is in fact a great deal of common ground between the churches on this issue, as has been evidenced over the years in statements and policies that have emerged.

8.3 A key problem for the denominations is that they have very different structures of governance and accountability, and therefore a key task would be to find a way of working together that is consensual and effective, and that can move at a reasonable pace.

8.4 Gladys Ganiel, in a sensitive and perceptive book which flowed out of her doctoral studies, makes the point that ‘religious structures’ affect the potential to effect change, and play a ‘prophetic’ role in society. *More flexible structures have greater potential to play prophetic roles.... Ecumenical agencies and denominations have the least flexibility, congregations and organisations are more flexible, and networks have the greatest flexibility of all. Strong, flexible religious networks have the greatest potential to play a prophetic role. (Ganiel p25)*

8.5 This observation brings a substantial challenge to the main denominations, and yet also offers deliverance from any pressure to ‘over-formalise’ their corporate contribution to CSI. On the basis that there is the will to work together, the way forward might be to first agree a number of working principles in relation to cohesion and integration. Then each denomination would commit to ensure that in shaping its own deliberations, actions and statements, those principles would be at the core. Finally, there should be a regular meeting of those charged with seeing the principles worked through, to ensure coherence in whatever the next steps might be.

8.6 These suggestions are essentially a call to the churches, given their diversity, yet claiming a common purpose, to model cohesion, mutual trust and vision for the community in and between themselves. This must not only be done privately, but also publicly, on an ongoing basis, so as to build credibility in their contribution to the shaping of wider public policy.

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CHAPTER 4

COHESION, HOSPITALITY, WELCOME AND FEAR

1. Northern Ireland is a place where division and separation remain deeply embedded, and where institutions are struggling to find enough common ground to build a cohesive society. In this context it is quite difficult to find the contribution that 'ordinary' citizens can make to help break the logjam, a task made no easier by our living in such a heavily politicised community. Yet it is crucially important to do so, otherwise the responsibility can be conveniently off loaded onto the state or some organisation. This, in effect, pushes the relational element of community relations policy to the margins, and is therefore hugely self defeating.

2. One way that is referred to in the Report on Integration and Cohesion, though not much developed, is the suggestion that a renewed understanding and promotion of hospitality and welcome at local level can be of great benefit in the building of cohesion. (See earlier in this paper - Chapter 2 para 15.3). On the face of it, this is a nugget well worth mining, because it breathes life into community cohesion at both street and personal level.

3. It is hard to deny that we live in a society that is plagued by fear and fears, (real or imaginary), which are rarely articulated, and which play little or no substantive part in public or political discourse. The failure to identify and name them means that their corrosive influences remain, and no amount of confidence building measures will deal with the 'bogeymen' while we fail to face those fears. Some examples show the cost of not addressing the fears alongside the benefits that flow when they are addressed.

4. Politicians fear that their opponents will out-manoeuvre them, and leave them weakened, with the consequent loss of power and credibility. (Thus the levels of disappointment in and indifference towards the NI Assembly and Executive). Communities fear the loss of territory or the opportunity to expand their territory (seen very clearly in housing debates). Expressions of culture and identity bring fear in their wake (as in the issues over contested parades). Community groups fear that they will not be given the funding they need to continue their work (so competition increases between groups for access to the increasingly limited funds) Victims and survivors battle over the appropriate levels of recognition given to them, fearing equal treatment of others or marginalisation.

5. The fear of crime is rampant. Parents fear what might happen if they allow their children to walk to school. Public policy has birthed a whole new set of fears about the education of our children even while they are in their most formative years in primary school.

6. Immigrants have had their worst fears realised with attacks on the Roma community in June 2009 leading to 100 of them returning to Romania. Sectarian incidents received widespread publicity during much of the Summer 2009, with individuals and local communities living in fear of attack, and we have already noted the costs of rioting during the marching season of 2010. It is tragic that this was foreseen in the Report in November 2009 of the International Monitoring Commission which articulated fears of more violence returning to our streets.

7. Churches too have fears – that their influence will decline, and the numbers attending continue to contract. Recently publicised scandals have greatly undermined public confidence, and brought great uncertainty about the future role of the church in the public square.

8. As a result, much effort and many resources are directed towards the management of the fears and the risks. Yet the wide range of initiatives designed to improve the quality of life for people reinforces the perception that we live in a dangerous and threatening society. This is at the heart of the reasoning behind the Summer Intervention Youth programme, designed to ‘manage’ the activities of young people in interface and difficult areas. And even the very title of and need for Community Safety Partnerships suggests danger and risk. Gated communities are increasingly common in middle class areas, paralleled by the ‘alleygating’ programmes of local councils. ID checks and security cameras have proliferated. The list seems endless.

9. None of this is to decry or in any way undervalue the need for, or the importance of the work being done and the help being given. What it does show however, is that fears and perceived danger are deeply embedded in our thinking and in the patterns of everyday personal and social life.

10. Frank Furedi has written extensively about the impact of fear on our social and political lives. Fear, he says, has *‘transform(ed) safety into one of the main virtues of society’*, making it an object of worship. He warns us *‘The disposition to panic, the remarkable dread of strangers and the feebleness of relations of trust have all had important implications for everyday life.... The outcome of these developments is a world view which equates the good life with self limitation and risk aversion’* (Bader-Saye p29)

11. **Commenting on this Scott Bader-Saye adds** *‘Our common fearfulness, then, takes on the appearance of a gift in that it creates a common goal – safety – among a populace otherwise fragmented by culture wars’.* (Bader-Saye p29)

12. **The greatest progress in facing fear and risks has been made in those areas which impact directly on the everyday life of the individual. Public policy and resources can and do bring a great deal of help at ground level, as for example in the commitment to policing in the community, and the Community Safety Partnerships. This needs to be matched by an equal commitment to face and address fears in civic society, conflicted community life and the world of politics. So what else might be done?**

13. **It is surely significant that one of the key qualities required of leaders in the early Christian church was that they ‘practised hospitality’.** Nowadays, when people meet in a home, or leaders meet for a world summit, or children celebrate a birthday, one of most common practices is that of food and drink being offered and received as a sign of welcome and friendship. Hospitality is of course, much more than simply food and drink, but these are common and crucial elements of it.

14. **One of the most widespread downsides of community life / church life / and political life is that often we feel the need to emphasise our differences and our distinctives if we are to maintain our positions.** Expectations and pressures from people who are ‘not like us’ may bind us together ever more tightly. And so the boundaries of exclusion and separation become ever clearer. Even those within our ‘family’ who push our boundaries can be rejected or required to conform.

15. **Alongside this is what seems to be an increasing need to keep ourselves ‘safe’.** We take extraordinary measures to ensure that known (and unknown) ‘others’ do not disturb us. Even last year (Summer 2009), 30 ft high brand new ‘peace walls’ were being built in urban areas, a real match for those suburban areas which build gated communities specifically to keep others out. We proliferate new groups that duplicate or replicate what is already being done. We live in houses alongside ‘our own’. We educate our children separate from ‘them’. We reject new neighbours. We protest - a lot. We speak of the need for diversity and plurality without apparently valuing the people who bring it.

16. **A culture of welcome and hospitality starts with a pre-disposition to say ‘YES’ to others, when many others will want to say ‘No’.** And they may wish to say ‘No’ for some very good reasons. But a prevailing culture of ‘No’ is the antithesis of a cohesive community . A ‘Yes’ to others is not without risk, and brings the probability of some big disappointments when the welcome and the hospitality is either rebuffed, misunderstood, or abused.

17. This suggestion is consistent with the desire of Robert Putnam and others to revitalise civic life with the building of 'social capital'. This is what happens when people have shared values and work together for the common good in a co-operative way. This emerging commitment to each other knits the social fabric of a community.

18. Putnam's thesis is not without its critics, but few would argue that finding ways to build relationships, trust and confidence is undesirable. Indeed, there have been many programmes in recent years designed to 'build trust'. Whilst many have seen a good deal of success, one of the weaknesses is that the building of trust in the public square has not been highly valued, because doing so blurs the boundaries of distinctiveness, and erodes exclusivism. Doing it quietly poses much less threat to the acceptance of any participant in another setting. But we have to face the harsh reality that the 'essentialising' of difference is highly corrosive of the call to build a shared and better future.

19. The reality is that developing a culture of hospitality and welcome poses little real threat to any group or person. What would be lost if a local congregation regularly offered hospitality to a group of migrant families? What would fall apart if two residents' groups on either side of a peace line invited each other to share a meal on their side of the fence? What would be at stake if the leadership of a church offered hospitality to the leadership of other churches? What ruin would come if a political party hosted a reception for all MLAs in its party HQ?

The possibilities and permutations are endless – though clearly we must humbly and wisely accept that there are some welcomes that cannot yet be given.

20. Promoting a culture of welcome and hospitality does not require any lessening of belief or principle. But it does require a conscious decision by everyone in this community to value other people, and neither ignore them or demonise them from afar. It requires specific action to express that valuing. It does not require or imply either acquiescence or agreement with what they believe. What it does do is to recognise that other people matter, irrespective of their religious beliefs, ethnic origin, social background, educational achievement or political aspirations. There is a common humanity, based on creation. Even on this basis alone, we should do unto others as we would wish to be treated ourselves.

21. Crucially, we need to have a wide range of leaders, civic, church and political, setting the example and therefore creating the space for others to follow suit. There is a huge opportunity for the churches and their leaderships - central and local - to set the pace by taking seriously the injunction of Paul 'Practice hospitality'. If this were to happen, the walls that divide us (either on the ground

or in our thinking) might start to come down rather more quickly than seems possible at present.

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CHAPTER 5 - CHURCHES

1. Churches occupy a strange position in our community. They are by far the largest 'voluntary' association of people in the country. The Presbyterian Church alone has 100,000 families in membership in Northern Ireland. Amongst other things, churches are also the largest providers of youth work in the community, have the largest network of caring in the community, and are major providers of specialist services such as residential care for the elderly, and rehabilitation of offenders. And crucially, for CSI strategy, they are present and active in every city, town, village, electoral ward and townland.

2. However, as 'institutions' their position is fragile. Government is often wary of working with faith bodies; funders shy away from supporting them; and the community and voluntary sector is often unwilling to accept that they are even part of that constituency (although individual church groups may be included).

3. Yet many individuals in the churches are highly regarded – and some clergy have had very high public profiles. For example, clergy were witnesses to the decommissioning of IRA arms; during the 'Troubles' clergy were often used as 'go-betweens' or even mediators in highly sensitive, even dangerous situations. There have been, and still are, many very committed Christian men and women at every level throughout the whole of society, including the public service, and some of them have very high public profiles too.

4. The current dilemma for the churches in the public arena was summed up recently like this by a senior church official. *'During the Troubles we knew what we were for. We condemned the violence; buried the dead and cared for the families. Now that the situation has changed, what are we for?'*

5. No denomination appears to have clearly answered that question, never mind it being answered with a degree of confidence across the denominations. Back in 2001 Glenn Jordan commented *'Whether individual evangelicals want to engage with their culture or to disengage radically from it, they are agreed that the society is changing, and that the Church is losing its once favoured position. Evangelicals of all types are pessimistic about the way Northern Ireland is changing both inside and outside the church'*. (Jordan page 87). There is no reason to think that his analysis is less accurate in 2010 than it was in 2001.

6. But answer that question we must. Biblical theology requires us to do so. How do we translate Jeremiah's call to 'seek the welfare of the whole city' into our own cities, towns and villages? How do we follow through Paul's expectation that even though people may disagree with us, they will still see God at work. How can we find new and attractive expressions of being salt and light as Jesus

commanded? Are there new contributions we can make to the building of a healthy and cohesive society?

7. Churches have sought to articulate their vision of the future in varying ways – sometimes in a way that is painful to themselves, as in the Hard Gospel project of the Church of Ireland. The Presbyterian Church embraced a ‘Peace Vocation’ as far back as June 1994, and has built up a large network of ‘peace agents’ in many congregations throughout the country. In today’s climate the conferences run by the church that are devoted to exploring peace issues continue to grow steadily, indicating a willingness and even enthusiasm to help embed peacemaking in regular congregational life. And there are extensive peace making resources available to the whole Christian community. The Corrymeela Community, for example, has been, and continues to be, at the forefront of building relationships in a host of different ways with a very wide variety of groups and individuals.

8. What the churches have not yet been able to do however, is to connect their own peacemaking work in a substantive way with parallel work in wider society. This needs to happen. Since peacemaking, by definition, involves engagement with those who are ‘not one of us’, and is a task for the whole of society, no group can both progress that work yet stay broadly within the limits of its own constituency.

9. During the initial research for this paper, there was a wide criticism of the churches in relation to community cohesion because of the fractured nature of the churches’ own contribution. The point was made many times, that churches cannot call for better community relations while they are ‘at war’ with one another (to quote one contributor, though he clearly overstated the issue!). Clergy too regularly commented, in an adverse way, that other churches in the area simply ‘did their own thing’, with little regard for what was already happening around them. Effective and focussed inter church consultation and working is still quite rare.

10. The failure to work together is not primarily driven by theological differences, even though they are clearly there. As separation and division have become normative in our society, the life of the churches has followed those prevailing patterns, since church members are also members of our divided society, and have imported that thinking into their church life. The Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf puts it well *‘In situations of conflict Christians often find themselves accomplices in war, rather than agents of peace. We find it difficult to distance ourselves from our selves and our own culture, and so we echo its reigning opinions and mimic its practices’* (Volf, page 54). Societal norms have

all too readily become church norms – even though the New Testament is absolutely clear that this should not be so.

11. The model of partnership with others and working together for the common good is not currently embedded in the life of our churches. A good model, based on principled pragmatism, that does not threaten cherished beliefs, was articulated as far back as 1970 by Francis Schaeffer, founder of the L'Abri Fellowship. He contended that we do not need to enter into '*alliances*' with others, but we may well be able to work alongside those who seek the same outcomes as we do. There have been some striking examples of this in Northern Ireland – as in the debate on possible changes to the abortion legislation – but much more is needed in the area of social policy. In more recent times, Daniel Strange has explored Schaeffer's ideas in a Cambridge Paper (2005), and Volf has articulated a much more theologically and philosophically sophisticated rationale in his book '*Exclusion and Embrace*' (1996). There is much scope for substantial work on applying such principles and insights into our society in an extended theological paper on these issues.

12. Some specific suggestions:

(b) That the churches work urgently together to create a short statement of common purpose on what contribution they wish to make collectively to the building of a cohesive and integrated society. This should include a clear statement of confident hope for our community.

(c) That the churches actively seek the necessary resources to embed this work both at central and local level.

(d) That the churches actively promote partnership working and hospitable welcome both in their central structures and at congregational / parish level. To do so would have important mentoring implications for other parts of civic society, and would not imply or lead to any weakening of central theological tenets.

13. The 2007 Report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion spoke of the need to '*increase religious literacy on the part of public agencies, and the ability of those agencies to establish effective patterns of engagement with religion and belief groups as part of wider public engagement; to strengthen their engagement with the process of policy development and implementation, and enable local areas to make targeted use of their resources.*' (Section 6.24)

14. Given the much higher levels of church connection in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales, this recommendation seems one that is especially appropriate to be picked up in our context. The irony is that it is much less

developed here than in other parts of the UK, though this is understandable given our political, religious and cultural history. The barriers on all sides to such *'effective patterns of engagement'* need to be dismantled to promote the common good ('the welfare of the city'), and this paragraph is a further specific recommendation that government, civic society and the churches themselves do so. In particular there ought to be an explicit responsibility that following the elections in May 2011, each local council should be required to carry out an audit so as to develop a clear plan for the building of high quality working relationships with all the faith based groups in its area.

15. These suggestions to the churches represent something of a new way of working in the public arena, and pose huge challenges. Some may not wish to rise to those challenges, and that needs to be accepted. However, not to do so will be its own commentary on what we are 'for' in today's world.

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CHAPTER 6 - THEOLOGY

1. A chapter on theology may not be of primary interest to every reader of this paper, but it is crucially important that the church deals with these issues from a properly worked through theological perspective. Not to do so means that any contribution is largely reactive to what others are putting on the table, and at worst can lead to merely offering a second rate political or social commentary.

2. A huge amount of work has been done in the past 50 years to explore the theological relationship between social involvement and the witness of the church. Many of the debates within evangelicalism have been worked through, and the best articulation of that settled theological position is in the work of the Lausanne movement. This is set out in detail in Lausanne Occasional Paper 21 '*Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*' written in 1982. It still repays careful study, and it provides the basic theological undergirding for this research paper.

3. However, some extra work is needed to apply Biblical teaching to the particular needs of our divided society, and this paper attempts to make a further contribution to that. But, as indicated elsewhere, there remains much scope for further substantial reflection on the theological issues involved.

4. In Northern Ireland, the dynamics of church involvement with wider society have changed over the years with the widespread adoption of community development principles. They were central to British Government strategic policy response to the conflict (Equality Commission p25). In community development the emphasis shifted significantly to the empowering of people to take control of their lives as far as possible, and to do things with local communities in partnership working.

5. In practice this means that wherever the church is involved (either at congregational or central level), it is rarely if ever, in the driving seat of that partnership. Indeed, it may well find itself as a minority stakeholder in the partnership - working alongside statutory agencies, or within neighbourhood renewal partnerships, or in wider community forums. No longer is the pattern that we do things 'to' people, or 'for' them, but may (or may not!) be invited to do things 'with' them. The church's relationship with the community has changed irrevocably.

6. The Biblical basis for the church's involvement at local community level has been set out in many papers, and important work has been done to shape that relationship and develop good practice by groups such as Oasis in England and CCWA (Churches Community Work Alliance) both in GB and Northern Ireland.

Much of it is built around the call of Christ for his followers to be 'salt and light' as taught in Matthew's Gospel chapter 6. (Presbyterian Church, 2001)

7. Still more theological challenges have arisen as government has embraced embryonic policies of community cohesion and integration. This paper argues that such policies, properly shaped, are fully consistent with Biblical principles and should be energetically worked through by churches locally and centrally.

8. As explained elsewhere in this paper, community cohesion has been defined in these terms by the UK government in February 2008:

A new definition of Community Cohesion

Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration, which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.

Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on three foundations:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly

And three key ways of living together:

- A shared future vision and sense of belonging
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity
- Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

There are major strands of Biblical thought that, in principle, make such policy development attractive to the Christian church.

9. Cohesive Christian community is a centrally important expression of authentic Christian faith. As Acts 2 and Acts 4 show, normal everyday life was characterised by a costly, yet profoundly satisfying and rewarding communalism.

10. The New Testament is rich in its portrayal of a cohesive and inter-dependent Christian community. John's Gospel speaks of one shepherd and one flock (ch.10). In his letter to the Galatians (3.27-28) Paul declares that in Christ all are one with no distinction of race, status or sex. He also uses the analogy of the human body with its many different parts, all of which are needed to make the whole body function properly. (1 Corinthians 12). In Ephesians 2 he affirms '*You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household... and in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit*'. And the Bible ends with a glorious picture of exuberant diversity across the nations and the generations (Revelation ch 7).

11. Central to the Bible's teaching on the church is that it is cohesive and yet has great diversity.

12. These key strands of biblical teaching are of course explicitly grounded in a shared experience of Christ's salvation, and cannot simply be widened to bless government policy nor equate social inclusion with incorporation into Christ. Nonetheless, they highlight the importance of community, cohesion and diversity in contrast to the prevailing trends of exclusion, separation, individualism and isolation. To quote John Donne's famous line - *No man is an island entire of itself* – and that applies both in church life and in the life of the wider community.

13. One immediate and major challenge for churches is to articulate and demonstrate rather better than they currently do, what a cohesive and energetic Christian community looks like at parish level. How is such life expressed at congregational level when a large car park is needed for a suburban church, or an urban church membership is largely composed of those who drive in from afar to Sunday worship? How is Christian community expressed if church life is dominated by attendance at events or meetings when the interdependent life patterns of Acts 2 and Acts 4 are missing? Again to pick up on Paul's words - how do they express the fact that are they 'bound' together in Christ?

14. If local churches / congregations are unclear as to what their own understanding of community / fellowship should look like, on what basis can they call with integrity for the building of community relationships and a 'shared' future of any description? Do as we say, rather than as we do? This gap, even hypocrisy, will be fully exposed, if public policy is able to deliver even a modest 'secularised' version of community and cohesion.

15. There are important and largely neglected other strands of Biblical teaching.

16. The implications of Jeremiah 29 and the story of Daniel are very instructive. The background to both is that God's people were in exile, forcibly carried off to a land where they did not want to be - to Babylon, much of which is modern day Iraq. They pleaded with God to be allowed to return 'home' to their own beloved land. God's purposes were different. Through the prophet Jeremiah he told them to settle down for a long-term inter-generational commitment to the city / land where they were.

Jeremiah 29 verses 4-7

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper'.

17. The Scriptures do not tell us the detail of how they responded to that call. The elements of it are clear however.

(a) They were to actively seek the welfare of ALL the people of the city, not just themselves. This included the welfare of the very people who had oppressed them.

(b) They were to settle down properly amongst their neighbours.... building houses, planting gardens and raising families. They were to be committed long term to that place and its welfare.

(c) There was to be a serious commitment to the spiritual welfare of the city and its citizens, especially in the area of prayer.

(d) Crucially, the scriptures are explicit that the welfare of God's people was intimately and inextricably linked with the welfare of the wider city. .. *If it prospers, you too will prosper.* God's people could not and should not expect God's blessing in isolation from their - and His - commitment to the welfare of the wider community.

18. It is not a straightforward task to interpret the guidance given to a harassed and persecuted minority in a foreign land 2500 years ago with the situation of the church today in a modern democratic state. However, in a fascinating book on the ethical authority of the Old Testament for the modern day, Chris Wright brings some light to that task. (Wright. See esp pp 233-235 and 289-292)

19. He points out that two responses were those of prayer and service. Commenting on the paragraph from Jeremiah 29 quoted above, Wright comments:

The shalom of the people of God was bound up with the shalom of the pagan nation among whom they now resided. Jeremiah here anticipated the New Testament command to pray for those in secular authority out of obedience to God who rules over them. Prayer puts all things in perspective. It seeks the good of the state, while refusing to absolutise it, since the very act of prayer appeals to a higher authority than any human power. (pp 234-235)

20. The response of Daniel and his friends went further than prayer alone and brought them into service in the young imperial state of Nebuchadnezzar. Wright comments:

The book of Daniel is a fascinating analysis of the extreme dangers, as well as the unique opportunities of such a decision (to serve)... The stories of Daniel 1-6 are a powerful study of the challenging possibilities of living as a believer at the highest levels of pagan political authority, and remaining faithful and uncompromised in doing so. (p 235)

21. Given the difficulty of interpreting the Old Testament for our situation in Northern Ireland today, Wright's conclusion still seems compelling:

Here then are several models of response to political power... The need for practical political involvement with courage and integrity; the balance of profound prayer and pragmatic ability to seize the given moment and its opportunity for the cause of the Lord, his people and his justice. (pp 291-292)

22. Good order is self evidently necessary for a cohesive community. The New Testament is very explicit in upholding that principle. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus told the people to 'Render to Caesar what is rightfully his'. (ch 22.21). Paul is equally explicit in Romans 13 in the need to submit to the governing authorities. In 1 Peter ch 2 we find a similar instruction.

Alongside this we are reminded that 'righteousness exalts a nation' (Proverbs 14.34).

23. Of course, uncritical submission to the governing authorities is never sought or commended. Jesus completes his teaching from Matthew ch 22 with 'give to God what is God's'. The evils of uncritical submission were exposed in Germany during the second World War, and during the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in more recent times.

24. So the church has some real responsibility to help shape the role of the state, both by challenging what is wrong, and promoting what is right for the welfare of the whole society. To help shape the values that build a cohesive and resilient community - a community that is cohesive enough to accept shared values, and is resilient against forces and people who would destroy those values.

25. Some of those Biblical values have been rather neglected both by government and the church in recent times. As the opening chapters of Genesis make abundantly clear, each person on this planet is made in the image of God. That image was greatly marred by the sinful rebellion in the Garden of Eden, but we were not reduced to the level of the animals. We mattered so much that the plan of salvation was in place to bring redemption and hope back to a fallen world. Each and every person is still to be respected (1 Peter); the social outcast is to be sought out (for example in the stories of Matthew the tax collector and the woman at well), the widow and orphans are to be cared for, and compassion is to be at the heart of everyday life. Justice is to be done equitably, publicly and openly (Micah / Amos)

26. A cohesive society therefore is marked by all of these. No one is excluded because of what they have done or the standing they are given by others. Cohesion is evidenced by the welcome given to people who are not like us. This is most certainly not to say that everything that people do is acceptable or should even be tolerated. But it is to say that there is an equal place in that society for the sinner and the saint; for the powerful and the weak; for the politician and the immigrant; for the rich and the poor. No one is to be stripped of value, for each one is made in the image of God, and was important enough for Christ's death on Calvary.

27. The continuing decline in church affiliation, membership and attendance is prima facie evidence that we have not paid anywhere near enough attention to including people who are 'not like us'. The church is no longer the one place in the local community where all the people just mentioned are brought together on an equal footing. The power of the gospel to unite has fallen off our Christian radar.

28. It must be recaptured - urgently - if the church is to help build the cohesion needed in a deeply divided and deeply hurting society.

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