



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE
Legislation and Politics (NI) Sub-Committee

The sub-committee's work has been clearly set in the context of meetings with political parties - the parties briefing the committee on policy and practice, and the committee responding and presenting its thinking. In general, the engagements have been mutually informative and beneficial.

However, 2005 was a difficult year for the work of the committee. Several matters, including the repercussions of the Northern Bank robbery in December 2004, attributed to the Provisional IRA in the Independent Monitoring Commission Report (10th February 2005), were the cause of considerable concern among the membership. Whatever trust had existed in relation to Sinn Fein was severely damaged. That begged the question of the usefulness of discussions with Sinn Fein. However, the committee remains committed to continuing effective dialogue.

While pressures of time did not allow us to meet all political parties, during the year meetings were held with the SDLP and the DUP. A meeting with the UUP is planned. The SDLP outlined their commitment to opposing Loyalist and Republican criminality, and its morally and ethically corrosive effects on society. They also highlighted the importance of the need for full support for the PSNI by all the political parties; and the transparent commitment by Sinn Fein to exclusively peaceful means. The committee encouraged the SDLP in its positive and principled leadership.

At a meeting in November 2005, the DUP expressed the view that there would not be devolved government in Northern Ireland for at least two years. The party, they said, is committed to power-sharing in a local Assembly with parties which are fully democratic. Hence the importance of transparent and verifiable decommissioning. The committee encouraged the DUP to use its position as the largest Northern Ireland political party to exercise its leadership in promoting justice for all, and in advocating the cause of the vulnerable and marginalized.

In its work over the last year, the committee has found the Reports of the Independent Monitoring Commission helpful and significant in providing authoritative information. It recognises the importance of the Commission's work in bringing fundamental issues such as paramilitary criminality, political intelligence-gathering, and the abuse of restorative justice into the public arena, enabling the community to express its rejection of these ethically unacceptable practices in a democratic and inclusive society.

Such matters demand vigilance and remedial action as the Church seeks to serve the Kingdom of God in our society, through the affirmation and advancement of the positive values of truth, justice, integrity and love.