



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE

CHAIRPERSON RESPONDS TO ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

The Rt Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher and Chairperson of the Church in Society Committee, has issued the following response to the Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland, *Lifetime Opportunities*:

'Lifetime Opportunities sets out comprehensively the Government's aims for Northern Ireland in addressing poverty and social exclusion. The Secretary of State describes it as a 'cross-cutting priority' in the current Comprehensive Spending Review. He further promises the establishment of a Ministerial-led Poverty and Social Inclusion Forum to progress implementation with strong support for continued partnership working.

I broadly welcome *Lifetime Opportunities* for a number of reasons. First, it witnesses to a joined-up approach at departmental level which is allied with the co-ordination of services at local level. Secondly, it recognizes that poverty is a feature not only of towns and cities but also of the countryside. Thirdly, it takes a broad-brush approach to social exclusion and inequalities together, based on three explicit criteria: religion, gender and disability. Fourthly, it openly recognizes poverty as a social ill which severely impedes and truncates the life-expectations of children and pensioners. We are told that 327,000 people in Northern Ireland live in poverty, including 102,000 children.

Economic regeneration does not create community. In some cases, it can provide little more than bigger opportunities, publicly funded, for individual success. The key to proofing Northern Ireland society with the ideals and aspirations of *Lifetime Opportunities* will be the active engagement in the delivery phase of local stakeholders, critically selected and professionally monitored. The churches have much to contribute as stakeholders in terms of local knowledge, long-term commitment and hope in a shared future. In my opinion this has to be done in co-operation with others in an emerging multi-ethnic and multi-faith society.'

This statement comes ahead of the Church of Ireland Child Poverty Workshop which is being held in the Armagh Synod Hall tomorrow, 5th December 2006. Here various groups from within the Church will meet to share experiences and discuss the implementation of an integrated approach for tackling the issue of child poverty on this island.