

GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND 2008
THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BY THE MOST REVD ALAN HARPER,
ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH
RADISSON SAS HOTEL, GALWAY

Members of the General Synod, our annual meeting is one of those crucial institutions of the Church of Ireland which binds us together as a family even though we live, work and minister in very different social and political contexts within our island. This year is no exception as we are welcomed to the fair city of Galway.

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Our visit to Galway is unique in three respects: first, because we have never met in this city before; second, because we have never met in Connacht before and, therefore, our visit completes the sequence of meetings that has taken us to all four of the historic provinces of Ireland; and third, because this is the first time a meeting of the General Synod will have been addressed by a head of state.

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Tomorrow it will be our great honour to receive a visit from President Mary McAleese, who will address the Synod after lunch. To enable this to happen, immediately before lunch tomorrow, the Synod will be asked for consent to suspend Standing Orders for the duration of the President's visit.

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Much has been said about momentous and historic changes taking place both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. When we met last year our meeting coincided with the inaugural day of partnership government in Northern Ireland. One year later the United Kingdom has a new Prime Minister, the Republic of Ireland has a new Taoiseach and Northern Ireland a new First Minister in waiting. Comfortingly, transition has so far not threatened stability. This is due, in no small measure to the commitment of all those in positions of political influence and responsibility. They deserve to be assured of the support and prayers of the churches as they work to achieve the normalization of society and transition to structures and relationships built upon freedom, honesty, justice, equality, trust and compassion. This is no easy task. It is a task from which, I believe they will not allow themselves to be diverted by the abhorrent assassination attempt last evening on a member of the PSNI at Spamount near Castlederg. Our first concern in this synod must be to pray for the full recovery of the officer concerned. Our second is to thank God for the courage of the member of the public who pulled the officer from the wreckage. Our third is to declare unequivocally that such actions by whomsoever perpetrated are totally unacceptable, an affront to God, to human decency and to the democratically expressed will of the overwhelming majority of people in Ireland today. The perpetrators are yesterday's men, they do not represent the aspirations of any significant body of opinion in Ireland. The future will not be determined by violence, it will be determined by building on trust, respect and consensus. Devolution of policing

and justice powers in Northern Ireland poses particular challenges. Nevertheless, this additional piece of the jigsaw is rightly regarded as an essential component in completing the transition to normality, signalling a new level of confidence in the robust nature of the new political dispensation.

There is emerging, albeit piecemeal and despite events like yesterday's atrocity, a new vision of an Ireland that lives with its past but not in it. It is a vision at least partially shaped by recognition of the interdependent nature of contemporary life in an interdependent Europe and in the context of global economic interdependence.

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If I am right that one of the characteristics of any new vision of Ireland must incorporate interdependence as a significant component, it is necessary also to assert the falsity of those outdated understandings which assume that all of life is a nil sum game: that is to say that for there to be winners there must always be losers. Experience insists that either all must be winners or all will be losers. No conflict is fully ended and no economic benefit permanently assured until all parties derive some, preferably equal, advantage. What might most threaten continued stability in Northern Ireland is any well founded perception that one group has gained at the expense of another. Peace and stability depend on the creation of "win-win" situations.

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Such an outcome is of equal importance to the grievously suffering people of Israel and Palestine. As long as Palestinians suffer what they experience as Israeli occupation, aggression and oppression, and as long as Israelis endure guerrilla attacks undertaken by militant Palestinians, (some of whom deny the right of the State of Israel to exist,) so long will there be no justice, no peace, no stability and no hope. And yet justice, peace, stability and hope are what all right minded Israelis and Palestinians long for, including the Christians of the Holy Land, most of whom are ethnic Palestinians. If the vision of peace and an interdependent future can take root in Ireland, aided by the patient commitment and enlightened self interest of the governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and the Republic of Ireland, may not a similar vision overtake the embattled peoples of Israel and Palestine?

My recent visit to the Holy Land in the company of Cardinal Brady, Moderator Finlay and President of the Methodist Church Cooper, at the invitation of local church groups and with the generous support of Trocaire and Christian Aid, was a harrowing but not hopeless experience. I find myself deeply moved by the resilience of West Bank Palestinians in circumstances of intolerable hardship, denial of dignity and severe restriction of freedom of movement. I weep that the only Israelis encountered by Palestinians are either young conscript soldiers at innumerable checkpoints, or armed settlers who, in turn are guarded by the Israeli Defence Forces. The settlers continue to be permitted to occupy greater and greater tracts of what was Palestinian land and they are provided with infrastructure, including good roads and assured water and electricity supplies, far superior to that afforded to resident Palestinians.

The denial of opportunity for ordinary Israelis to meet ordinary Palestinians, share their stories, their hopes and especially their fears, is a tragic consequence of the policy of separation symbolized most dramatically by the Separation Barrier. Israel rightly requires security for its citizens with freedom from attacks by militants. There is no doubt that the building of the Separation Barrier has significantly reduced the number of such attacks. Yet, in truth, security is never guaranteed by force of arms, but only by the creation of circumstances that disarm hostility. I believe that any country which takes upon itself the responsibility to annex additional territory also takes upon itself the responsibility to treat the inhabitants of the annexed territory with the same respect, care, justice and equality it accords to its own citizens. Not to do so is at the least discrimination and at worst may amount to collective punishment.

I pray that the efforts of Secretary of State Rice and other members of the Quartet may be successful. Failure to reach an agreement before the end of the term of President George W Bush may presage further long delay since new American administrations rarely engage in their first term of office. The longer the delay, the greater the likelihood that moderates will be supplanted by extremists.

Meanwhile, the Christians of Israel and Palestine are steadily reducing, both in numbers and as a proportion of the population of both Israel and the West Bank. I should make it clear that Christians express no sense of any threat from Islam. Rather what threatens is the intolerable conditions in which they are forced to live together with opportunities for a peaceful and prosperous future elsewhere.

For two thousand years the ancestors of Palestinian Christians have worshipped at and preserved the Holy Places. The places themselves, evocative though they be, are inanimate stones. It is the people who are the "Living Stones" and who through living and worshipping there make the Holy Land much more than merely a museum. The Living Stones need our active support and solidarity. They need to know that they are not the forgotten people of the Middle East. We need to ensure that those who go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land are as committed to the Living Stones as they are to the Holy Places. Let us put Palestinian Christians at the heart of our continual prayers for peace and justice.

As in Ireland so in Israel and Palestine, religion is a component of a conflict about land and identity. It seems to me important for people of faith to try to contribute positively to the resolution of such conflict. Three great faiths have the Holy Land as both meeting place and common ground. In these days of inter-faith dialogue might it be possible to pursue the search for peace and parity of esteem by an exploration and articulation of shared ethical values? Spiritual values have the power to influence both political thought and social action. Pursuit of an articulation of shared ethical values could offer possibilities that build upon factors that Christians, Muslims and Jews already have in common, namely monotheistic faith and some shared spiritual roots in Old Testament scripture. If religion is part of the problem it must become part of the solution. Only by working constructively towards it may religious people, with integrity, pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

If I have spoken a little about the emergence of a new vision for Ireland, let me now speak about the identification of a new and sustaining vision for the Church of Ireland in the 21st century. Members will recall that last year I asked radical questions about the way in which we do our business in General Synod and the appropriateness of the structures we have inherited for the pursuit of our contemporary mission. You will also recall that I wrote to every member of the General Synod, inviting comments and suggestions for improvement. Fifty responses were received. They have been collated and summarized and are set out for your information on the sheets to be found on your seats in this Synod Hall. I want to thank all who responded, and I wish to commend the outcome to the Standing Committee for mature consideration. You will observe that already the most popular of the suggestions - that of meeting over a weekend rather than midweek – will be trialled in Armagh in 2009.

Alongside that exercise relating to the work of the General Synod there had already been inaugurated an examination of our central committee structures. As part of that examination, every committee was requested by the Honorary Secretaries to contribute to the review. The Honorary Secretaries wrote in similar terms to the House of Bishops.

The bishops recognized immediately that before we could usefully comment on the appropriateness of structures there was a need to articulate a vision for the work of the Church that new structures might be expected to facilitate. Therefore we had to answer a question something like this: “What vision do we have of the life and work of the Church of Ireland in the 21st century as we seek to participate in God’s mission to the world?” We were particularly led to engage with this issue in light of our experience in re-thinking training for ministry. I shall say more on that subject later.

During the process of reviewing the work of the Church of Ireland Theological College, the review team communicated to the bishops the following observation: “We cannot offer a view about the shape of training for ministry until you tell us what type of ministry will be required by the church of the 21st century.” In short the team sought a “mission statement”. The mission statement we ultimately agreed upon is this:

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The Church of Ireland, as an authentic part of the universal church of God, is called to develop growing communities of faith, in and through which the Kingdom of God is made known, and in which the whole people serve together as followers of Jesus Christ for the good of the world to the Glory of God.

Three key words were extracted from that “mission statement” to summarize its key components. The words are

Growth – Unity – Service

That initial statement and its three components surfaced afresh as the bishops worked together to articulate a vision for the Church. Here is the vision the bishops

enthusiastically agreed upon. It is a shared vision, the corporate vision of the Bishops of the Church of Ireland. We commend it to the whole church.

In the power of the Spirit, our mission requires us to order our contemporary worship and life in a manner that nurtures growth, promotes unity and liberates us for service in the world that is God's

WORSHIP & SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Through stillness, through celebrating, through drinking deeply of the wells of salvation, we are called to explore God's beauty and love, to renew the face of the earth and to recover the divine image that is within us.

Hence we must:

- **Acknowledge that worship is humanity's primary purpose**
- **Offer worship that articulates truth and evokes holy beauty**
- **Ensure that our worship is rooted in the faith once delivered, but is never static**
- **Pray that it may be magnetically attractive, energizing and informing the building of the kingdom**
- **Rejoice that through it countless individuals form one body in Christ**

UNITY & DIALOGUE

The Church is called to be an agent of God's purpose to bring all things together in Christ; to be the sign, instrument and first fruits of that oneness in Christ that is God's gift and God's will.

Hence we must:

- **Strive to live in unity and peace among ourselves and with the whole family of God**
- **Model respectful relations with humanity and the whole created order**
- **Develop common life and action with other Christian traditions**
- **Work for greater mutual understanding with those of other faiths and of none**

LIVING GOD'S KINGDOM & SERVING THE WORLD

Aligning ourselves daily with Christ's own prayer and example, the calling of the Church is to pray for, discern and realise the presence of God's kingdom among us.

Hence we must:

- **Engage compassionately with the world and society in all its rich variety of need and opportunity**
- **Be both disciples and discipling; perpetual learners in the school of Christ as we ourselves strive to teach and serve others**
- **Daily and energetically embody and proclaim the values of the Kingdom for whose coming we long. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! Amen**

This is the statement of vision discerned by the bishops. We are mindful that the mission in which we are engaged is not our mission, it is God's mission. Our task, therefore, has been to be directed by God through the operation of the Holy Spirit. That is why, as bishops, we set about our task jointly, receiving from one another and recognizing that corporate discernment is needed to balance individual enthusiasms.

Our statement of vision has been offered to the Standing Committee and to the Representative Church Body. We believe it may be an important component in assisting the process of decision making at central church level. In particular, it offers an approach to the process of re-structuring our committees and ordering future priorities.

- I can imagine the work of the Church of Ireland at central level as being structured in three divisions reflecting the three categories of "growth", "unity" and "service".
- I can imagine that this could give a rationale for the re-shaping of committee structures within each division, with many committees disappearing and new ones emerging.
- I can imagine the coordination of the work of committees within each division with an emphasis on working synergistically and a practice of calling temporary working groups to address identified issues rather than creating portmanteau committees formed to work indefinitely.
- I can imagine one identified member of staff of the RB for each of the three divisions, providing administrative support and coordination.
- I can also imagine the work of the General Synod being shaped in such a way that one division each year might be given priority in reporting to the synod through the triennial cycle.
- I also suggest that the mission and vision statements taken together set overall priorities for the work of the Church of Ireland, making it easier to determine the focus of our energies.

So far I have addressed the issue as though both the mission and the vision statements are intended to apply only to the work of the Church at the centre. This is absolutely not the intention of the bishops. Important though the work of the Church in its central councils may be, we all recognize that the work of the kingdom takes place first and foremost in the dioceses and parishes. The bishops are very clear that these statements are intended to have particular relevance in shaping daily life at diocesan and parish level. We are also clear that there is a tremendous variety of need and emphasis among dioceses. Each diocese, therefore, under the leadership of its bishop and through its synod and diocesan council, is free to interpret the components of the mission and vision statements in ways

that most faithfully meet the priorities of mission in their own back yard. One size does not fit all. We offer our vision so that each diocese and parish in its own way can consider its individual expression of God's mission in the light of a vision for the Church as a whole. We offer our vision also in the profound conviction that a vision is an empowering thing, inspiring engagement, energizing intent and directing action. Catching a vision can bring about profound changes in thinking and acting in the name of God. To illustrate this, I want now to break with the pattern of past Presidential addresses to offer a video clip of the way in which a shared new vision can bring new life and new opportunities in parish life. I recognize within this example the empowerment that comes through vision. I also draw attention to the tenacity and sheer constancy of nerve required to turn vision into venture: being visionary requires, perhaps, even more perspiration than it does inspiration. Without both the end result will be failure.

8 PAUSE FOR VIDEO CLIP

Part of what the General Synod ought to be about is the sharing of insight, information and imagination. That was my purpose in examining the vision and venture of the Parish of Shankill, Lurgan. I do not imply that similar ventures are appropriate in other parishes. Rather, I want to encourage the conviction that, by seeking and sharing the right vision, extraordinary things are possible in the service of God. Suitable parish halls are part of the concern of most parishes. In the case of Lurgan, the realization of a grander vision shows how the needs of a parish can make a major contribution to the well being of wider society.

While we are thinking in expansive terms, I want to return to the exercise I referred to earlier in connection with the re-shaping of ministerial training. As we began to grapple with issues of training for ordained ministry certain things rapidly became apparent.

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First, the old and ultimately false distinction between training for stipendiary ministry and training for non-stipendiary ministry is unsustainable. Men and women should be trained for ministry, the distinction between stipendiary and non-stipendiary is a matter of deployment not training.

Secondly, non-residential, distance learning models of training are more suitable for some candidates than for others. Therefore, both pathways should be available to candidates who then choose the pathway most suited to their personal circumstances. The outcome will be that there will be no qualitative difference between those trained on the residential pathway and those trained on the distance learning pathway. The latter will take longer than the former but the qualifications will be fully equivalent. Transfer, therefore, from a non-stipendiary appointment to a stipendiary appointment will be a deployment issue not a training and qualification issue.

Third, there needs to be much closer integration of theory and practice; that is to say, we need to develop a model that from the outset provides for theologically reflective practitioners. This will involve blocks of "on the job" training overseen by incumbent

clergy with gifts and specifically developed skills in the art of training. The outcome should be that clergy entering their curacy proper will be much better trained and resourced than currently they are.

Fourth, we need to develop a culture of life-long learning so that Continuing Ministerial Education is not confined merely to the first three years of ministry. Furthermore, because diocesan provision for CME is very diverse, we need to develop a system that is managed and partly provided centrally, so that all clergy have access to the same resources regardless of the diocese in which they serve.

Fifth, because men and women are accepted for training from a wide variety of backgrounds and with various levels of experience and academic achievement, we need to ensure that a standard level of prior accredited learning has been achieved before entry, not merely to meet the entrance requirements of the university but also to be fair to all students offering themselves for training. Therefore, we require a Foundation Year, devised and resourced centrally but delivered at the Fellowship of Vocation stage, so that, not only is that year put to good use by all candidates, but also that even those who decide not to offer for selection may receive a valuable and accredited grounding in Christian studies.

As the bishops' vision for ministerial training clarified certain other issues emerged. The first is that training for ordained ministry is, nowadays, only part of the full scope of training for Christian ministry. The ministry is Christ's, the ministering community is the whole people of God, expressed locally in diocese and parish. Many needs and opportunities for ministry are emerging which cannot and should not become the responsibility of ordained clergy but are distinctively part of the ministry of the laity. Such lay ministry, however, needs to be called out, resourced and enabled through training; it also needs to be recognized, validated and authorized appropriately.

It is too small a thing, therefore, in the changing circumstances of the Church of the 21st century, to focus solely on training for ordained ministry. We need also to aspire to provide training for lay ministry, together with the provision of an educational resource for church people who simply hunger to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Christian Way. The institution that succeeds the Church of Ireland Theological College should be one enabled to satisfy these much wider aspirations.

I need to make it plain that the conclusions the bishops reached do not stand as criticism of the work of our Theological College, its Principal or Staff. On the contrary, the College has nobly fulfilled all that we have ever asked of it in the past. What we now envisage, however, is something entirely new.

Some concerns have long been evident, not least that the present Theological College buildings are inadequate even for their existing purpose and that, even were nothing to change, major expenditure would be required to rebuild or re-fit. With a new and larger vision, plant that is already inadequate becomes a total inhibitor of change. We had to consider alternatives.

Freed of the constraint of thinking solely in terms of the existing estate, the bishops were prompted to ask, “Does not consideration of a new Theological Institute open the way to a wider examination of the location and suitability of the whole of the estate occupied by the central organs of the Church?” Furthermore, “Might there not be virtue in bringing together, on a single site, all the major components of our central church functions: Theological Institute, Church of Ireland House, Representative Body Library, perhaps even the Church of Ireland College of Education? Might there be scope for shared meeting facilities, teaching facilities, utilities, accommodation, refectory and IT? Might not such a development become a ‘flagship’ signifying and facilitating efficient interaction between components of the Church which otherwise have little such opportunity?” It had, after all, been clear from the outset that relocation of the Theological Institute should not go ahead without relocation of the Representative Church Body Library, since the library is an essential resource for both the staff and the student body.

I can report to you that the Representative Church Body, the Chief Officer and his colleagues have been immensely helpful in investigating the possibilities offered by the bishops’ vision. Furthermore, an enormous amount of work has gone into developing the proposed new curriculum as well as agreeing and defining the requirements for access to the new Master in Ministry course. Negotiations with Trinity College have been protracted. However, time available for concluding negotiations is not unlimited and full agreement needs to be concluded with despatch. I need to make it clear that the bishops are fully committed to the new direction I have set out and that we are reassured in this by our consultations within the wider Anglican Communion through TEAC (Theological Education in the Anglican Communion), by the support we have received from distinguished educators, and by the positive response our plans have elicited from within the Church of Ireland.

Finally, on this issue, I need to say this: the gifts and the sheer tenacity and capacity for hard work displayed by my colleagues in the House of Bishops fill me with considerable awe. Work on the Theological Institute has engaged a team led by the Bishop of Clogher and which has included, from time to time, the Bishops of Connor, Kilmore, Derry, Cashel and Meath. The Archbishop of Dublin has been particularly involved in facilitating the discussions with Trinity College. I pay tribute to the vast amount of thought and work all have contributed. The overall vision has been that of the whole House but the brunt of the work of coordination has been undertaken by the Ministry Formation team facilitated and guided by Mr Andrew McNeile and Professor Aine Hyland, Vice President of University College, Cork. We owe them all a great debt of gratitude.

I have, nevertheless, to accept that not everything has been handled as well as we should have liked. It would be untrue to say that we have made no mistakes in taking forward our proposals, particularly in managing the flow of information between the bishops and the staff of the Theological College. I want to express to the staff our regret that

sometimes we could not, for reasons of confidentiality, keep them fully informed. I hope that Professor Empey and his colleagues will accept the genuineness of my expression of regret. This has been and remains a complicated and fast moving scenario throughout which we have learned important lessons. We remain genuinely grateful to the staff of the Theological College for their service to the Church of Ireland over the past years. We are also very appreciative of the support and help of the Chief Officer and the staff of the RB for their professionalism and support.

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Before I leave the topic of ministerial training, I want to pay particular tribute to Canon Professor Adrian Empey who has been Principal of the Church of Ireland Theological College for the past seven years. Adrian Empey is a scholar of international repute who also brought to his oversight of clergy training a wide experience in parochial ministry, both urban and rural. He took responsibility for the Theological College at a crucial time for the Church of Ireland, during a period of great change, which also included the first formal academic inspection of the College – an exercise he encouraged and supported throughout. In thanking him for all that he has contributed throughout his ministry, I take this opportunity to wish him and Mrs June Empey everything that is good for a long and rewarding retirement.

When I was elected Primate 17 months ago I remarked upon the range and quality of the talents present among the members of the House of Bishops. I also indicated my belief in the strength of the team compared with the incomplete range of the gifts possessed by any one of its members. I am strongly confirmed in that belief as I enter my second year as Primate. It is a privilege to serve the church as part of such a team.

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One member of the team in the House of Bishops was Bishop Michael Mayes, formerly Bishop of Limerick. Bishop Michael is a distinguished and much loved servant of the Church of Ireland: indeed the extended Mayes family has served in the ministry of the Church over three generations. Michael's ministry took him as far afield as Japan, where he served with USPG; to that academy of the episcopate known as the Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross; to the Diocese of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh in succession to Bishop Gilbert Wilson; and finally to the Diocese of Limerick and Killaloe in succession to Bishop Edward Darling. Bishop Michael has been very closely associated with the work of the Bishops' Appeal and he also served with great distinction on the Commission on Ministry and its predecessors, functioning also as coordinator of training for the Auxiliary Ministry. Within the House of Bishops Michael acted as Secretary of the House and here his consummate drafting skills were much appreciated. His was always a wise and constructive head whose counsel will be very much missed.

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It is a pleasure to welcome as Bishop Michael's successor to the See of Limerick Canon Trevor Williams.

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Another, whose loss to the Church of Ireland, but especially to the diocese of Dublin has been grievous indeed, is the late Dean Desmond Harman. A distinguished, thoughtful and industrious son of Carrick on Shannon, Des Harman served the whole of his ministry in Dublin, finally succeeding Dean John Patterson as Dean of Christchurch. There, his gifts of music and administration, as well as his pastoral skills, enhanced the already notable reputation of the cathedral and its worship, as well as securing its financial sustainability.

Desmond Harman also served the Church with great distinction in the Standing Committee, especially during his tenure as an Honorary Secretary. There his acuity of mind allied to his direct and incisive manner made a major contribution to the smooth running of this our main, central, consultative and executive committee. Desmond brought similar skills to the work of Bishops' Appeal, giving clear direction and purpose to its deliberations; and his contributions were much admired in other central bodies, including the Central Communications Board. The untimely and sudden death of Dean Harman is deeply regretted by us all.

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Tenure as an Honorary Secretary makes heavy demands upon the individuals concerned. It is, therefore, reassuring to see Mr Sam Harper once again in rude good health and to be able to report that Canon Ian Ellis is making a full recovery from his recent surgery. We wish them both well. We also welcome the Venerable Robin Bantry White to the quartet of Honorary Secretaries.

The fourth member of the quartet, Lady Sheil, has had a particularly busy year especially in connection with the changes required for the Clergy pension scheme and also the proposals for the replacement of Chapter VIII of the Constitution. Lady Sheil will lead discussion on both of these important items at this meeting of the General Synod.

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In drawing my address to a conclusion may I return to the theme with which I began, namely that of capturing and realising the divine vision of God for the work of His Church. Without a vision the people perish. I commend to you all, for interpretation in the circumstances that are uniquely your own, the vision of the bishops for the Church of Ireland. May it nourish and direct us as we seek to discern what God is already doing and then to join in.