

Together building a united Community

A response from the Evangelical alliance.

It is often said that the Church has failed to show leadership or provide vision in the public square. And so we begin with our vision. It is not definitive or exhaustive but rather descriptive of the flourishing society we are working to co-create. We build on the work of [*Seeking Peace and Prosperity*](#) - our response to the PFG 2011-2015 and [*Past/Future/Now*](#) – our response to the Haass Talks. We offer a hopeful vision centred on relationships, identity and purpose. We seek the wellbeing of this place and its people.

Our vision - One United Community

We see a flourishing Northern Ireland, a place that is truly at peace. It is built on strong relationships within our community. One community shaped by generosity, hospitality and risk. We dare to see Northern Ireland as a world-leader, a place where broken things are given the opportunity to be made whole and where relationships grow healthier, stronger and deeper.

- / *We see **one** community.*
- / *One community **united** around their desire for peace, wellbeing and whole-life prosperity.*
- / *One community in which all the broken and dislocated pieces get properly fixed and fit together in **vibrant** harmonies.*
- / *One community bound by a shared history but more so by a determination for a better future. The community is Catholic, Protestant, believers of all faiths and none, Unionist, Nationalist, Loyalist and Republican, those of all political beliefs and none. **Everyone** is respected as an image-bearer of God whether they believe in Him or not. Everyone has a voice, a vote and a part to play.*
- / *One community where all **leaders** lead by example. Leaders in this one community treat everyone with dignity, respect and kindness.*
- / *We see one community brave enough to respect **difference**.*
- / *One community with many differences and disagreements, like any other. But this community thrives on their **agreement** to disagree well - robustly, sensitively, and maturely.*

- / One community marked by respect for their collective cultures, identities and political aspirations. The principle of democratic self-determination is accepted as the umbrella under which opposing loyalties are accommodated.
- / We see a community more concerned with its **character** than its ultimate constitution.
- / One community marked by **forgiveness**. Where all who seek it are given another chance.
- / One just community. Where justice is restorative and mercy is outrageous. For in one community an injustice against one is an injustice against all.
- / One community which views **hurt**, not as a weapon or an excuse for hate, but as common ground on which to empathise with the other. Where the weak show us strength- where victims and survivors inspire us to show grace.¹
- / One **gracious** and humble community.
- / One community which is seasoned in giving the gifts of **generosity** and unconditional love; taking the first step, in going the extra mile, being the unlikely good Samaritan and in turning the other cheek.
- / One community that appreciates the cost of **peace**. Peace is not held lightly or cheaply. We see a community willing to move forward together away from lines drawn in the sand by previous generations. A community committed to creating a post-sectarian culture.
- / One community who **collaborate**.
- / One community who work together in health, politics, business, education and charity. Sides are put aside. There is a vibrant public square in which there is room for all. We see one community able to hold the tensions of **equity** and diversity. Where everyone is equal but accorded the respect of difference. Rights are vital but they flourish in the context of responsibility and relationship. Sectarianism, racism, homophobia, intolerance of religion and poverty are fought together.

¹Victimhood and attitudes towards dealing with the legacy of the past. Brewer, J & Hayes, B. 2014.

- / One community built on **relationships**. Family, community, institutionally - relationships are prioritised. The importance of good relationships is recognised at home, in school and the workplace.
- / One community where the **Church** humbly lives out a radical love of our neighbour and our enemy.
- / One community that **welcomes** the 'other'.
- / One community in which there are no no-go areas. A community which **shares** space, housing, education and infrastructure. A community without 'peace walls' of concrete, heart and mind.
- / One community where everyone can share **education**. Where the role of parents, Church and state are respected. Shared spaces where children learn and grow up together.
- / One community that **celebrates** culture.
- / One community which **respects** each other's flags and symbols. One community where flags can be raised and lowered for a day in celebration or remembrance not left on lamp-posts as territorial markings.
- / One community in which **parading** plays a positive role in our future, with **the loyal orders** moving from a focus on cultural preservation to the creation of new traditions for everyone based on the principles of 'The Glorious Revolution' – civil and religious freedom and democracy for all.
- / One community with a **culture** of peace, unity and prosperity. Culture therefore that can be celebrated – for example in an annual joint peace parade.
- / One community respectful of their forefathers but not trapped by the guilt of betraying them. A community more concerned about becoming **forebears** to new generations to come. We seek to create new culture to be celebrated in years to come, to be cultural architects and cultural pioneers instead of cultural curators.

This is our vision for this place; one hopeful future-facing community. One community requires belief in a peaceful, prosperous and united future. A future where everybody counts and everybody has a role to play.

Identity

Symbols of identity are obvious and everywhere in Northern Ireland, including flags, parades and language but it is also much more subtle than that. It's in the newspapers we read, the sports we follow, the names we carry, even the way we refer to this place. Our identity is so bound up in everything that it would almost be easier in this part of the world if we could just be born again. For Jesus-followers, identity is no longer primarily defined by nationality, social status, politics, ethnicity or even what we've done in the past. Our identity is found in relationship with God and those around us. Constitutional loyalties are still legitimate but they form a secondary part of our identity.

We challenge a culture where identity is too often reduced to national allegiances. We find our identity and purpose in so many other things: faith, family, community and work. Coincidentally these identity-affirmers are in short supply in some of the most disadvantaged areas where sectarianism and paramilitarism thrives.

Statistics from the Long View Community Survey published in December 2013 show that with changing political circumstances comes a change in people's perceptions of their national identities with the most marked increase in 'Northern Irish' identification.

- Is there space to be developed for better political relations, continued peace and stability to help foster a more mutual view of national identity?
- We need long term vision from Government, civic society and Church to improve wellbeing, rebuild relationships and support healthy families and communities. Constitutional loyalties remain under the umbrella of democratic self-determination. However, there is a collective work to be done of re-orientating personal and community identity around shared things like family, civil and religious freedoms over and above contentious symbols.

Relationships

This is perhaps an appropriate place to insert a reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan – A man who belonged to the enemy community yet acted as a neighbour in a polarised society. It was in the encounter that things changed, one man reached across in loving action, transforming him from stranger to neighbour at the point of need. There is no hope for change or transformation of hearts and minds if people do not experience a meaningful encounter with the other.

Transforming society is about getting relationships right. We must understand the value of relationships in our society, articulate a vision for right relationships and create an environment in which these new relationships can flourish. We acknowledge as stated above the strides made in good relations due to shared space initiatives. However, doing life together is more valuable than the spaces and services themselves. Good relationships are vital to building a harmonious community. Relationships are a central part of our community, cultivated at a personal level and the responsibility of all members of our community.

Good community relationships are vital to a balanced and healthy life, physical and mental health. Northern Ireland has 20-25% higher rates of mental health issues than the rest of the UK². The mental health foundation published "The Lonely Society" in 2010, which states that 48% of us think that we are becoming lonelier and 42% of us have suffered from depression because of loneliness³. Can we unite to counteract this dangerous move towards an individualism that isolates and destroys both 'sides' of our community? A society that focuses on real community, family and relationships will prosper socially, economically and politically. Church has a part to play in this. The Church has historically sought to be and continues to be a presence in society which cultivates community. Church is about life, hope, relationship with God and others and seeks the peace and prosperity of the place in which God has placed them.

Moving on to more fractured relationships, parades and protests must be approached from a place of relationship, community respect, responsibility and well-being. We call for an end to the dangerous desire on each 'side' to dominate this land and its people. We call for an end to internal games, party pride and politicking, which has damaged relationships and trust. We call for humility on the part of all involved. If we want to see basic civility, good relations and respect on our streets we need to see it modeled in public leadership. We graciously encourage government, civil and church leaders, to lead by example in their relationships.

² http://www.chex.org.uk/media/resources/mental_health/Mental%20Health%20Promotion%20-%20Building%20an%20Economic%20Case.pdf

³ http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/the_lonely_society_report.pdf.

- We graciously suggest that MLAs design and sign up to a Good Relationships Commitment. This is not a legal document but a spirited agreement to treat each other with dignity and respect. In politics it's natural and healthy for people and parties to robustly disagree. This is not a naive call for niceness; it's about agreeing to disagree well, to improve the level of political discourse for the wellbeing of all in our society. It is a challenge to each politician to move beyond legal codes of conduct into real relationship and a very practical example of cohesion, sharing and integration. It's about leading by example. We do not seek to dictate the terms of the commitment from the outside but we suggest that these terms must be above partisan politics. For instance, agreeing to refrain from personal attacks, raising issues in private before going public. Could this be an opportunity for Northern Ireland to reframe everyday political discourse more constructively?
- Changing simple terminology from good relations to good relationships instantly brings the term to life, changing it from the general to the personal.
- We suggest that all new policies be "relationship-proofed" for their potential impact on family and community relationships. Policy proofing is an effective tool which is already in existence here in the form of rural proofing, having been used since 2002. In Northern Ireland four out of ten people live in a rural community, yet ten out of ten people are affected by the quality of their relationships. Northern Ireland could become a world leader in terms of innovative policy development which not only grows the economy but improves the quality of our daily life, wellbeing and relationships.

Victims

How we treat 'victims', those affected by the troubles/conflict, is vital to how we deal with division and good relations. Trying to build a united community without addressing 'victims' and the past is like trying to treat cancer with a sticking plaster. There is deep and painful work to be done to allow for new relationships and healing.

This issue sits right in the difficult area between truth, justice and mercy. Ultimately we need heart change over and above legal process. This is evidenced by the fact that whilst there is a legal definition of a victim, it is not universally accepted. There is then a danger that a hierarchy of victims develops and that those at the top have veto over how the past is dealt with. However if this is true, it must also be acknowledged that many of those most affected by the Troubles are most inclined to forgive.⁴ Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (1998) made

⁴ A practical earthing of the potential of victims as 'moral beacons' can be seen in recent research by Professors John Brewer and Bernie Hayes. 'In two pieces of research undertaken as part of the Leverhulme programme, John Brewer and Bernie Hayes report results that show that victims in Northern Ireland can be moral beacons pointing toward a progressive and shared future. The first has yet to be published but forms part of the working paper recently loaded to the Publications Section of the Compromise after conflict website. It conclusively shows that victims are less punitive toward ex-combatants than non-victims with respect to four popularly canvassed policies. The second piece of research has just appeared in the current issue of the journal *Political Studies* (volume 61, issue 2, 2013: 442-61), and uses data from the 2010 Northern Ireland Election Survey, which Bernie Hayes was involved with separately. It shows that individual victims - those who had directly and indirectly experienced violent incidences and perceived themselves as victims - were significantly

the case for a more universal approach to victimhood in Northern Ireland by finding “some substance in the argument that no-one living in Northern Ireland through this most unhappy period will have escaped some degree of damage”. Everyone has suffered because of the conflict in Northern Ireland, including those born since the Agreement. No single group of victims should have a veto over the process.

We commend the establishment of a Victims and Survivors Service on 2 April 2012, we suggest that a change of terminology altogether would be beneficial. However, while in no way seeking to diminish or undermine the hurt caused, we challenge the language of victimhood. The ‘victim’ label diminishes the hope of healing by keeping people tied to past traumas and shaping their identities around acts committed against them. Reducing a person to a ‘victim’ at some level robs people of their human dignity.

- We suggest a mechanism which offers tailored care and support to allow individual ‘victims’ to move beyond victimhood and the vetoes placed on them by politics and other ‘victims’.
- We suggest more hopeful language which emphasises human dignity above any violent acts committed.

Shared Space

In this vision of a united place, space which is shared by the public is very important. Perhaps a sensible starting point would be using the long established principles of private and public property. It is largely people’s own business what they do with their own private property. This is obviously subject to laws on displaying items associated with paramilitaries, other illegal organisations or offensive items. However, publicly-owned streets and their architecture such as lamp-posts, kerbstones etc. should be kept free of flags and symbols erected by private individuals or organisations. It is not the appropriate space to fly flags or paint national colours on these objects.

Roads and publically owned housing should not be referred to as ‘Unionist’ or ‘Nationalist’, ‘Loyalist’ or ‘Republican’. There is no such thing as a Loyalist Road or a nationalist street, these are publicly owned spaces. This is not to negate or minimise the feelings of the Protestant or Nationalist residents living in particular areas, it is simply to make the important linguistic distinction between residents who are people and publicly owned concrete and tarmac.

more supportive of power sharing arrangements under the Good Friday Agreement than non-victims. This held true regardless of whether Protestants or Catholic victims are considered.’ – *Compromise after conflict*

It is important then, that spaces are created to allow for transformative encounters like we saw in the parable of the Good Samaritan. While we very much welcome shared places like sports facilities and housing as outlined in the TBUC programme, this is not enough. There is a real need for structured and informal conversations that encourage the development of these radical relationships.

- People are free to display what they wish on their own private property. As long as it is not illegal or criminally offensive. However, publicly-owned streets and their architecture such as lamp-posts, kerbstones etc. should be kept free of flags and symbols erected by private individuals or organisations.
- The Executive parties should agree as a matter of urgency a consistent protocol on flying flags from public buildings and estate.
- **It must be very clear which body the public should contact when they have a complaint over an illegally erected flag, symbol, mural etc.**
- Language used to describe this public space needs to be fitting. Although subtle, it is not appropriate to describe residential areas as 'Nationalist' or 'Loyalist'. There needs to be a distinction between people and places eg. 'In an area where the population is largely nationalist.'
- **The move needs to be to shared bricks and sports pitches yes, but more so to shared hearts and minds.** Moreover, it is important that government policy encourages this transformational space approach when dealing with all aspects of education, housing, planning, interfaces and cultural expression etc.

Education

We commend the plans to establish 10 new shared education facilities and new schools on the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus model. However, the long-term community relations surveys spanning from 1989-2012 showed that over half of Northern Irish School children attend schools with 95% of the same religion or more (www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/voices.pdf). Notably, there has been a considerable shift away from the terminology of 'integrated schooling' to 'shared education' which raises questions as to whether this will require as much engagement or interaction between the two communities? We challenge any sort of drift from a commitment to furthering this cause. Part 2.1 of the TBUC programme states that 'Research indicates that prejudicial attitudes and behaviours can manifest early in childhood', emphasising the importance of children from different communities engaging at an early age.'

- While the specific politics and policies of education will vary and we as an organisation do not hold to a specific model, it is abundantly clear that children must socialise together as early as possible to transform relationships in this society.
- It could be profoundly beneficial for young people in our schools to have a compulsory education about our history and culture. This would not simply be taught as history but part of personal development and present day culture – Why there are parades, bands, why there are protests? What the troubles were all about and hearing different perspectives. This 'curriculum' could be facilitated and delivered by any number of credible NGO's.

Housing

'It is in the Shelter of each other that we live.' Irish Proverb

In terms of housing, we want to move beyond co-existence to co-habitation. We commend the vision to implement a neighbourhood housing scheme which would create 10 new mixed housing estates.

The Church has been active in developing mutual spaces in the community. For instance the Dock Café, established in the Titanic quarter of Belfast as a neutral/mutual space for meeting and engagement to promote the united community aspect of that area. It uses a boat known as the Nomadic to hold services, to try to bring some church unity to an area of Belfast that was being given a new start –one united community. A further example of the church's regeneration is the celebrated Skainos project run by the East Belfast Mission. It is inclusive of the whole community, a place where people can gather, eat meals together, worship, and find help for health, employment, education, childcare, housing, and spiritual concerns. This sort of re-creation and regeneration is the perfect place for the church to put into action its call to be an agent of transformation in society.

'It's about integrating care and developmental support for children, families, young people, people who are homeless or unemployed, and the elderly. And it's about providing shared space for people from all backgrounds and communities in East Belfast.' (The Skainos project, East Belfast Mission, <http://www.ebm.org.uk/skainos/>)

- We believe the church should offer encouragement for such initiatives and could provide support by offering space and/or mediation for dialogue and inter-community development in whatever forms are relevant to their particular cultural context.
- Churches close to the new neighbourhood housing schemes could collaborate to create a space of welcome and community for those moving into the area. It is critical that good relationships are formed to overcome the inevitable tensions that will arise between mixed groups who will be living together.

Interfaces

The ironically named 'Peace Lines' simply make the dividing walls in people's hearts and attitudes more obvious. A society which is physically and visibly divided stands little chance of building harmonious relationships. We hope for, and work towards, the removal of such barriers. We welcome the Northern Ireland executive's commitment to remove all Peace Walls by mutual consent by 2023. Fruits of this are already visible with the opening of the gates in areas such as Alexandra Park Avenue.

- We learn to celebrate the removal of each interface removed as true progress.
- Before each peace Wall is removed there is a programme of Community engagement addressing the deeper issues of hurt, fear, identity and relationship.

Change and Grace

Beyond the removal of physical walls, we need to address the walls in peoples' hearts and minds. A duty of the Church is to speak life and love into society with its message of restoration, renewal and redemption to the hopeless and hurting through Jesus (the Gospel). Both Protestants and Catholics share a Christian heritage and understanding of the importance of forgiveness, grace and repentance in the context of relationships. These virtues are central to the Christian faith and the restoration of broken relationships. This process requires:

- **Repentance:** An acknowledgement of wrong, remorse and turning away from wrong/sinful/harmful actions, mind-sets and attitudes, to change direction and seek change for the better.
- **Forgiveness:** To grant free pardon, to give up all claim on account of an offence or debt. A choice to let go of hurt and wrong caused. In this context it is not giving up the pursuit of truth and justice or betraying loved ones but accepting the reality that in this life the truth does not always come out and justice is not always served.

- **Grace:** Unmerited favour, giving and getting what is undeserved, not always seeking a pound of flesh, not dragging up the past for political gain, showing mercy.

We cannot and should not legislate to make people repent, forgive or be graceful. However, these principles are vital in some way at an institutional level if we want to empower and lead our citizens on to a better future not dictated by the events of our past. These are heart changes but they could be led by the Church and accompanied by very practical measures. The implementation of such framework principals can be challenging. Repentance is an unpopular concept because it involves admitting we were wrong and putting responsibility above rights. Repentance and forgiveness are deeply personal things which Christians understand through personal experience. If we cannot collectively agree on both sides that some things were wrong, murder and sectarianism, then we are bound to live through these things again. We need a new, shared mind-set, a forgiving and gracious attitude (not always dragging up the past or seeking our pound of flesh) to overcome difficulties which will definitely arise. This is about moving beyond constitutional agreements to a place of relationship commitment which we're calling for at Stormont. A commitment to go beyond partisan politicians and treat each other with respect and dignity, working for the common good.

We propose a joint statement of acknowledgement on the past. Acknowledging death, pain, violence, hurtful and actions and attitudes and a turning away from this. This would be a line in the sand statement issued jointly with humble remorse and a commitment to future distance from harmful actions and attitudes.

Forefathers

In this part of the world, the idea of forefathers is an extremely important part of our collective community culture. Loyalists and unionists celebrate the victories of their forefathers. Forefathers are equally respected in the Republican and Nationalist tradition. From the United Irish Men and the Easter Rising through to the more recent Troubles there is a custom of remembering and respecting the Irish 'patriot dead'. Many of our forefathers are long since dead but their grievances live on, profoundly shaping the culture of our entire community. Deeply engrained within the psyche of our entire community is a profound reverence and respect for the sacrifices of those who have gone before. It's time for new sacrifices to be made on behalf of our for-fathers. These new sacrifices will also cost us our lives – not in the sense of death but a completely new way of living. At the crux of our inability to move on from the past is fear. A fear that unionist politicians often use as a political strategy – fear of a United Ireland, loss of gospel freedom, terrorism, loss of control, loss of a flag, losing the right to parade. The same can largely be said of the Nationalist/Republican culture, there are things to be condemned and critiqued. Each side is

so scared of betraying our forefathers that we've forgotten we are forefathers to generations to come. Let's not become so concerned with cultural preservation that we miss creating new shared culture in the here and now. Perhaps the most profound way to honour our forefathers is to let their victories and defeats rest in peace with them. Can we honour forefathers in new ways, not by picking up their grievances but by taking up a new cause? Can we offer more creative ways of remembering, commemorating and celebrating?

Given the macho obsession with "Forefathers" and the fact that 91% of those who lost their lives in the troubles were men (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/violence/cts/smyth97a.htm>), we suggest the establishment of a program for young men in Loyalist/Republican areas. The idea is to help people examine the influence of previous generations and determine what legacy they want to leave for their children and grandchildren - transforming their passion and pride for their past into thoughtful reflection upon the impact of their own actions on the future.

Time for New Language and New Understanding on Sharing

It's interesting that we sometimes share by dividing. If I was to share a loaf of bread with a friend I would split it in two. Ironically this understanding of sharing actually leads to more division. This is often the approach taken to sharing in Northern Ireland. Each side has their own broad culture with no relationship or dependency on the other. We need to rethink what it means to share. It is often understood as giving something away, having less for yourself - a parent making their child share their toys or sweets, being met with protestation. Sharing because one should and one has to, not to bless others or to achieve fairness. The Unionist community particularly has seen sharing in this way, as losing ground, giving things away, suffering loss to the other's gain. Shared future, shared space, shared island, shared history, shared culture. The prevailing experience of 'sharing' in Northern Ireland is closer to 'divide and conquer'.

- Shared spaces are sometimes divided and used, or seen to be used, to dominate the other through murals, flags, parades or other activities.
- Shared history is divided. Narratives are fought over, rewritten and used to dominate the other.
- There are shared forms of cultural expression; language, parading, protesting, flags, music, storytelling - but on the whole we're not telling the same stories. Each side uses their culture to draw their own boundaries against the other.
- Although we understand the concept of a shared future, it remains divided. In one sense this is entirely legitimate, everyone has the freedom to pursue different constitutional aims. However the futures of a United Kingdom or United Ireland are not united, they appear to be mutually exclusive.

Mutual creation and cultivation are perhaps better ways to understand 'sharing'. The word 'mutual' refers to something held in common by two or more parties, something owned by its members with the profits distributed between them. It's about being interdependent. This idea of common ownership and common benefit is important. When a mutual venture does well everyone benefits. Our culture will only truly be shared if we create or cultivate it together. This process of mutual creation gives ownership to the whole community. **We, and many others, care more about the character of NI than its constitution. We are more interested in the common cause and common values of our people than our flag.**

Mutual Cause

In the 2007 Sinn Féin document 'A new beginning - A new Ireland' we see one of the aims being 'guaranteeing **civil and religious liberty for all.**' The Orange Order may centre around defending Protestantism but its origins and indeed the 'Glorious Revolution' was all about the exact same aim - guaranteeing '**civil and religious liberty for all.**' The Glorious Revolution was also about laying the framework for democratic government in these islands. This is something both Republicans and Loyalists affirm strongly as part of a modern day UK or Ireland. **Therefore three mutual causes to unite around on a daily basis are civil freedoms, religious liberty and democracy. This could be a useful mutual framework for policy development.**

Mutual values

MLAs have a 'general duty to act in the interests of the community as a whole' and a 'special duty to their constituents.' But what are the common or mutual values between Republicans and Loyalists? Values which the Church, Republican and Loyalist communities could seek together are civil freedoms, religious liberty and democracy as outlined above as well as equality and justice. We would also suggest a framework incorporating family, human dignity and well-being.

We need a framework for public discussion on the values held in common in our society, to create a value framework that everyone can affirm to guide mutual decisions and culture-making. Such values include; Equality/diversity, justice/mercy, truth/grace, freedom/responsibility.

Can we have a structured public discussion on the values held in common across this place. There are examples of various models attempting to approach policy from a basis of common values. This goes far beyond the Nolan principles of public life and an MLA's duty of office. These are civic values. For example, on a large scale the commonwealth charter outlines the values that all countries under the commonwealth hold and work under and together in (<http://thecommonwealth.org/our-charter>). Other examples include the 'African charter on values and principles of public service' (<http://www.au.int/en/content/african-charter-values-and-principles-public-service-and-administration>) and the adopted bill 'A policy for civil society' 2010 in Sweden. Within the framework of the policy there is intense dialogue with value based organisations, beginning in 2008 with the government entering into an agreement with 90 value based organisations within social sphere and the Swedish association of local authorities and regions, (<http://www.government.se/sb/d/14291>). This has resulted in many benefits for the community. For example it has worked towards improving the integration of newly arrived immigrants. Northern Ireland in its post-conflict state needs to adapt this approach more than ever to move forward.

The Church's Role

We acknowledge that the church hasn't always got it right. We remind ourselves that God is not Protestant nor Catholic. He is not conservative, liberal, unionist, nationalist or any other man-made label we try to make stick on him. We cannot tether God to our limited theology. May he forgive us for making him into an idol in our image. Jesus prayed for future believers that all of them may be one (John 17:21). Some have been so busy barricading the doors of the reformed church against the Catholic tradition that they have failed to notice the elephant of sectarianism in the pew. We acknowledge that the local Church continually needs a unified view of the church of Jesus Christ and his gospel beyond this time and place.

However, as noted above, Churches can and are working together for a much safer and united community. The scholar Bonhoeffer argues that we need to let our guards down and confess with each other to be in true community. We need to share with each other our common and dark experiences in a way that opposes hostility and finds common ground in our desire for a peaceful society. The aforementioned principles of repentance, forgiveness and grace are vital at an institutional level if we want to empower and lead our citizens on to a better future.

Hard work, good laws and political agreements will only take us so far – we need grace/generosity to create spaces for transformation.

- The church is a missional body across the globe. The church must constantly ask if the way it ministers enables it to reach across class, age, race and gender. Locally it must also ask if the flying of national flags and singing the national anthem is impacting its mission positively or negatively. The issue is not about what is right and wrong but what is wise and missional.
- For over a thousand years a rich Christian heritage has shaped the culture of this island. Today we continue to seek the peace and prosperity of this place. Could we as a church, help our community to creatively celebrate and commemorate things that aren't linked to one side defeating the other? Are there new spaces in the public square to work collaboratively on issues like family, well-being, social justice and the sanctity of life?
- There is no biblical mandate to parade or prohibition against it. People have the freedom to parade and express their culture within the law. The question for the church is a missional one. We suggest that the church have an important conversation about the place of loyal institutions within the mission of the church.
- Jesus calls us to love God and our neighbour. The simple act of opening our homes is not just Christian hospitality but an intentional contribution to good relations. More controversially Jesus calls us to love our enemies. This is so revolutionary to our cultural norm that violence erupted recently at an event on forgiveness. We inhabit a new dimension of human relationships. It can't be forced or legislated for it's a work of grace. We suggest that the church source a way of ensuring that love, hospitality, forgiveness and grace are part of our defining characteristics.
- It is imperative that we learn how to pass peace-making into the next generation. Peace-making language isn't fashionable compared to other social justice issues and can be lost on a younger generation of Christian who see the troubles as a previous generations moral failure. We suggest that the church create a new language and fresh ways of communicating reconciliation and conflict resolution. Training colleges also need to give proper and specific history and context for ministry in Northern Irish society.
- Our cultural, political and spiritual forbears continue to influence us today. We recommend that churches publicly give permission to new generations to think and dream differently about the future of this island.

The Evangelical Alliance, formed in 1846, is the largest body serving the two million evangelical Christians in the UK. We have a membership of denominations, churches, organisations and individuals.

In the UK we work across 79 denominations, 3,300 churches, 750 organisations and thousands of individual members.

We are a founding member of the World Evangelical Alliance, a global network of more than 600 million evangelical Christians.

Our Northern Ireland office was established in 1987 and for the last 25 years we have been contributing to public life here.

Our mission is to unite evangelicals to present Christ credibly as good news for *spiritual and social transformation*.

Our 2 main objectives are bringing Christians together - Unity, and helping them listen to, and be heard by, the government, media and society - Advocacy.