

**The Chairpersons of the European Affairs Working Group and Social Justice and Theology (NI) Working Group prepared a document on the Church of Ireland and the Irish language**

1. Recent discussion in Northern Ireland concerning the place of the Irish language there has shown that there are those who hold the view that the nationalist community alone places a value on the language and wishes to promote its use.
2. While it is certainly the case that attachment to the language is more prevalent in that community, and that it has, to some extent, been appropriated by elements within it, we would be failing in our duty if we were not to draw attention to the long tradition of support for the Irish language in the Church of Ireland.
3. We wish further to point out that the membership of the Church of Ireland spans both parts of the island of Ireland and indeed draws the majority of its membership from Northern Ireland. This membership reflects all shades of political opinion, with probably a majority being unionist in political sympathy. The Church of course takes no position on constitutional matters but upholds the existing constitutional order and rule of law in both parts of the island and in her services in Northern Ireland, offers prayers for Her Majesty and the Royal Family. We affirm our belief that an interest in the Irish language is entirely compatible with a unionist political outlook, and believe that links with Scottish Gaelic and Manx, and remoter connections with Welsh and Cornish, can be a means of fostering strong cultural and linguistic links with other parts of the United Kingdom. In this regard we note that languages form a part of the areas for cooperation under the remit of the British Irish Council.
4. The strong revival of interest in Irish that occurred in the late nineteenth century owed a great deal to Church of Ireland scholars, some working in Trinity College, Dublin, and others in the Royal Irish Academy. Furthermore, much of the credit for the founding of the non-political Gaelic League in 1893 is accorded to Dr Douglas Hyde, whose hopes for Irish were not only academic, but included a wish to see the language come into everyday use in Ireland. Indeed it was Hyde's ambition that the people of the entire island, whatever their religious or political traditions, would find a common bond in the language. In very recent years, Gaelic psalm-singers in the Scottish Free Church Presbyterian tradition have contributed to acts of worship in Dublin and on the Aran Islands, thus enabling local communities to appreciate the riches of that form of worship in a sister language of Irish. We recognise the fact that Irish also has a place in the public worship of other churches.
5. In pursuit of Hyde's ideals, in 1914 a society was formed in the Church of Ireland to promote the use of the Irish language in the church's worship. 'The Irish Guild of the Church' (Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise) continues to hold regular services in Irish (with financial support from central church funds). There is an Irish language edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* (2004) and a number of hymns in the Irish language (with translations) appear in the *Church Hymnal* (2000). A regular column in Irish appears in the *Church of Ireland Gazette*. We also recognise the fact that the Irish language has a place in the public worship of other churches. Modern interest in 'Celtic spirituality' is widespread, far beyond Ireland, and it should be remembered that it was in the Irish language that such spirituality first found expression.