

GENERAL SYNOD 2017

Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue Report Proposer: The Rt Revd John McDowell

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Bishop,

I am very conscious that, even though we on the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue try our best to keep the summary of our activities for the Book of Reports as succinct as possible, we still take up a fair number of pages – this year 34 pages in all from 288-322. However that gives some indication of the breadth of the work we do throughout the year. Last year, General Synod gave us permission to reorganise our structures, covering much the same ground, but we hope in the long term more effectively.

To some degree and with only a little exaggeration the activities of CCUD could be described as analogous to the Department of Foreign Affairs or the Foreign Office. That is we are fairly outward-facing working with people from many other Christian traditions and also with other non-religious bodies like the European Union.

One of the most effective ways in which we achieved that is through what are rather grandly known as the national ecumenical instruments. In Ireland, these are the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter Church Committee and Meeting. These bodies share the same staff but the latter organisation provides the mechanism whereby the Irish Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland interfaces and works with the non-Roman Catholic traditions.

The Church of Ireland has been a member of the ICC or its predecessor bodies since their foundation in 1923 and, although it was not always the case historically, I think it is fair to say that ecumenical working is by now well-embedded in our DNA.

In the ICC and IICC, we are particularly fortunate to have an exceptional General Secretary in Dr Nicola Brady who cut her teeth for nine years working with the Irish Episcopal Conference before joining ICC and who is very ably supported by Karen Kelly and Alison Meagher in the Belfast office and a field officer, Dr Damian Jackson, here in the Republic of

Ireland. I would want to publically record our thanks to CTBI for part funding the post in the Republic.

These national ecumenical instruments provide the Church of Ireland with regular, focused meetings involving senior representatives of many of the Christian traditions in Ireland, including some of the new immigrant-led churches sitting alongside Antiochian and Greek Orthodox.

The particular advantage of working the way we do with ICC as we do is that we can respond to, usually government, requests to meet with a range of faith representatives on issues as they arise. As a united group we can also lobby or indeed harry again, usually government, on important issues.

For instance, ICC has been very heavily involved in pulling together groups from the Churches to continue to put pressure on the governments on both parts of the island in relation to refugees and migrants. In Northern Ireland, the national instruments have been busy working with those outside the faith sector to bring some of the most unwelcome and avoidable consequences of welfare reform to the attention of the appropriate departments. Again through the good offices of ICC/IICM in Northern Ireland with other churches we have been meeting in a quiet way with people like the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner to see if we can work together to bring our vast pastoral experience to bear on a very difficult range of issues.

The Churches in Ireland have spoken and worked together for many years especially in designated areas – such as the SEC here in Ireland and the Transferors Representative Council in Northern Ireland – but there is today greater pressure than ever from government or quasi-government bodies to deal with and to consult the faith sector together on a very wide range of issues. In some cases that is to be resisted but in many others, such as those I have mentioned in relation to refugees and welfare reform, it greatly strengthens our ability as presenting a voice for those who have none.

As members of IICC we are also very heavily involved in planning and running the annual Irish Inter Church Meeting which gives two days a year to thinking about a major issue of our time. Two years ago it was about Christianity and human rights. Last year it centred on the persecuted Churches of the Middle East. Later this year, and to perhaps catch some of the tide of the visit of Pope Francis to Ireland for the Meeting on the Family, the IICM will look at a range of issue around faith and the family and the modern world.

Another area which you will not be surprised to learn has been taking up a good deal of time on CCUD and ICC is European affairs in the wake of Brexit. Whatever your feelings on the matter, or if you had a vote, how you voted, there is no doubt that a good deal of rearranging and reassuring will be needed over the coming years as the parting of the ways is negotiated and actually takes place, and the churches have their part to play. One of the other ecumenical bodies which the Church of Ireland has been a member of for many years is the Conference of European Churches (CEC). You will see from pages 308-313 some references to our work with CEC. That body has in the past been particularly important as the means by which a permanent dialogue and contact has been nurtured with the Orthodox traditions in Europe. It is a body which also built up a strong expertise in relating to the institutions of the European Union.

It will remain a crucial body into the future as, on the one hand it seeks to broaden its field of vision beyond the EU for the benefit of those member Churches who will be living in whole or in part outside the EU and at the same time deepening its involvement with the EU on behalf of its member Churches who retain connections. The EU has always, at least in theory, had formal mechanisms for consulting Churches and our own EU committee chaired by the Bishop of Tuam and that of the ICC, which happens to be chaired by our own Dr Kenneth Milne have been hard at work trying in our small way (and of course in cooperation with COMECE) to reflect the fears and hopes of the Irish Churches.

I apologise to the members of CCUD whose work has not even been touched on in this speech – those who continue to work and hope that the progress we have made regarding interchangeability with the Moravian Church of Great Britain and Ireland can find an echoing response from within the Church of England to allow the work to progress; the work which the Revd Helene Steed does on our behalf as contact person with the Porvoo Communion; the work planned by the reconstituted inter-faith working group chaired by the Bishop of Limerick and the work done by Canon Elliott and Mr Wilfred Baker on ACC.

It gives me great pleasure to propose the report of the CCUD.