

Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue Report

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The Church of Ireland sits within a network of relationships with fellow Christians in other Anglican Churches, Churches which are part of other traditions, and increasingly other faith communities. These webs of relationships vary greatly, but each is increasingly important in our globalised world.

The brief report in the Book of Reports belies the effort we as a Church put into sustaining these relationships.

In one of its prayers, the Book of Common Prayer enjoins us “to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions.” I believe that the significant effort we have put into participation in ecumenical dialogue shows that we are taking that prayer seriously. The outward manifestation of this lies in the heavy theological and ecclesiological documents typical of such dialogues. These outline a framework within which the more local engagement can and does take place. At the personal and practical level ecumenical relationships with our Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran neighbours are a world away from where they were say 50 or 100 years ago.

I often take issue with those who say the motto or guiding text of the ecumenical movement is Jesus’ prayer “that they may be one”; that is insufficient as the following verses continue “that they may be one ... that the world may believe that you have sent me”. That’s the goal and mission of the ecumenical movement – to enable the world to believe that God sent Jesus into the world.

The engagement with the networks of the Anglican Communion is a welcome development of our inter-Anglican relationships to which we can bring a lot of experience and insight. The chosen Networks – The Safe Church, Environmental, Peace and Justice, Family and Women’s Networks – are relevant to our own life, and are areas of engagement where other Anglican Churches expect a contribution from the Church of Ireland. Here in Ireland we are very conscious of the size and resources of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in America, but in fact most Anglican Churches around the world are much smaller than we are. Such small Anglican Churches, with much shorter histories than ours look to the Church of Ireland for wisdom and experience in a way we aren’t always conscious of, but which is valued overseas. Engagement with the Anglican Networks is an important step forward in this.

Inter-faith engagement is becoming increasingly important in our globalised world. These are not theological or faith conversations – they simply seek to engage and understand. That engagement can often ease tensions at a local level, when issues such as inter-faith marriage, or new arrivals with a different faith background, arrive in an area.

Finally the implications of Brexit have been closely monitored by the European Affairs Working Group. As a Church we are now in a unique position, having members in the EU and outside the EU at the same time.

As its title suggests, this Commission seeks to further both Christian Unity and Dialogue with the wider Church and society.

I'm happy to propose the Report of the Church's Commission for Unity and Dialogue.