

**COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIALOGUE
REPORT 2022**

Election of Commission – That the following be elected to serve on the Commission

The Most Rev Dr Michael Jackson (Archbishop of Dublin and Glendalough)
Rt Rev Andrew Forster (Bishop of Derry)
The Rt Rev Michael Burrows (Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe)
Very Rev Niall Sloane
Rev Canon Patrick Comerford
Rev Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum
Rev Canon Elaine Murray
Rev Suzanne Cousins
Rev Cathy Hallissey
Rev David White
Ms Cate Turner
Dr Kenneth Milne
Mr Glenn Moore

**COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIALOGUE
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MEMBERSHIP (20)

A Bishop (Chairman): The Rt Rev Michael Burrows 1
WCC Representative: VACANT
ACC Representative: Rev Canon Katharine Poulton
ACC Representative: Mr Wilfred Baker
Porvoo Contact Group Person: The Rev Canon Helene Tameberg Steed
An Honorary Secretary of General Synod: Rev Canon Malcolm Kingston
Hon Records Secretary: Rev David White
Hon Secretary: Very Rev Niall Sloane
The Archbishop of Dublin
The Bishop of Derry

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Rev Canon Patrick Comerford
Rev Canon Elaine Murray
Rev Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum
Rev Suzanne Cousins
Rev Cathy Hallissey
Ms Cate Turner
Dr Kenneth Milne
Mr Glenn Moore
Vacant x 2

INTRODUCTION

The Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue was first established by the General Synod as the Home Reunion Committee in 1905 and assumed its current name in 2007. The Commission was previously known as the Committee for Christian Unity.

Its terms of reference are:

- To promote within the Church of Ireland the vision of Church unity;
- To promote and support movements in Ireland towards co-operation among the various Christian bodies;
- To maintain Church of Ireland membership of, and participation in, national and international ecumenical bodies;
- To address, in consultation with the Standing Committee, developments within the Anglican Communion;
- To encourage and engage in inter-faith encounter and dialogue;
- To report annually to the General Synod.

The membership consists of up to 20 members elected annually by the General Synod. The Church of Ireland has a rich network of relationships with fellow Anglican churches and other Christian traditions within Ireland and overseas. It is a member of the Anglican Communion and the following ecumenical networks:

- the Irish Council of Churches (ICC);
- the Irish Inter Church Committee;
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI);
- the Conference of European Churches (CEC);
- the World Council of Churches (WCC);
- the Porvoo Communion (which brings together Anglican and Lutheran Churches); and
- the Reuilly Common Statement (between Anglican and French-speaking Protestant Churches).

As an observer on the Meissen Commission, the Church also has links with the Evangelical Church in Germany. The Commission on Christian Unity and Dialogue's three working groups focus on Anglican, European and inter-faith matters.

The **Anglican & Ecumenical Affairs Working Group** considers the Church's relations within the Anglican Communion and within the Porvoo Communion, and with the

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Moravian Church. More information on the Anglican Communion is available at www.anglicancommunion.org

The **European Affairs Working Group** works closely with the ICC's European Affairs Committee and the CEC to discuss and consider common concerns for European Churches. The **Inter-Faith Working Group** seeks to build relationships and encourage dialogue with people from other faiths who are living in Ireland.

The Church of Ireland is in full communion with the other members of the Anglican Communion and Porvoo Communion, the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches, and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Relations between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland are covered by the Covenant Council.

The Commission's members attend the annual conferences of other Christian denominations in Ireland and hold regular meetings with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Presbyterian Church.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At its meeting in Dun Laoghaire in 2015 the General Synod approved a Resolution to reform the make-up and working methods of the Commission. Prior to 2015 all bishops had been members ex officio. The 2015 Resolution made provision for one Bishop to chair the Commission and for its Working Groups on Anglican and Ecumenical Affairs, Inter Faith matters and Europe to be convened by three other Bishops. However, over time, the working groups have been chaired by a range of people and the Commission is grateful not only to the Bishop of Cashel, the Rt Rev Michael Burrows, and the former bishops of Limerick and Tuam for their work in this regard, but also to Canon Dr Ian Ellis and Canon Katharine Poulton who have in succession chaired the group on Anglican Affairs.

Each of the Working Groups has 3 members who are also then members of the full Commission. Each group may also and often does co-opt expertise from beyond the Commission membership. The Commission also includes the Church's representatives on the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) and the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC). We trust that the reorganisation has also allowed the Commission and Working Groups to refresh and widen their membership, endeavoring to bear in mind gender, age, clerical/lay, and geographical spread.

The reforms initiated in 2015 are now firmly embedded and have provided a serviceable framework for the Commission to undertake its largely "outward facing" work on behalf of the Church. The Commission is indebted to its Honorary Secretary, the Very Rev'd Niall Sloane who largely devised the reorganisation and who has worked tirelessly to ensure its smooth operation.

The Commission has been in existence in one form or another for 114 years and in that sense at least might be considered something of an Institution. If so, it is one which ensures a continuity and an accountability of ecumenical activity across those years without, we hope, being hidebound. Members of the Commission and others approved by Standing Committee represent the Church of Ireland on National and International Ecumenical Instruments such as the Irish Council of Churches and the WCC. In Ireland at least, these

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bodies provide an opportunity for different Christian Traditions to engage on a regular and basis and to jointly speak into the public space as well as to consult with one another.

The Church's membership of the Irish Inter Church Meeting (IICM), which is the formal means whereby we engage with the Irish Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church, has provided an invaluable forum to address, in a constructive way, the many perplexities across the whole island, arising from Brexit. In similar vein, and at the request of the Church Leaders Group (Ireland)¹, the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) has organised extremely well attended and well received consultations through Northern Ireland where not least during interruptions to a functioning Legislative Assembly or Executive), representatives from civic society has been able to engage with politicians on many matters in addition to Brexit.

Occasionally a question is raised about the appropriateness of European Affairs as a constituent part of CCUD. There are many good reasons why it should be so, not least the significant recognition which the European Union (EU) gives to religious bodies and the formal mechanisms, through Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty, which it provides for formal consultation, both at EU and Member State level, with such bodies. Indeed, there is a strong case to be made that it is through neglect of this important aspect of the Social Pillar that much of the positive potential of the Union has been undermined. The Christian churches of Europe, speaking together, have still much to offer our troubled yet also exhilarating continent.

In addition, the Church of Ireland's membership of the Conference of European Churches provides us with both an influential forum within and beyond the EU and an important formal point of encounter with the Orthodox churches in Europe, who have often provided much of the material and spiritual support to many caught up in the migration crisis. The Churches ecumenical involvement in European affairs will continue to grow in importance and perhaps in prophetic witness in the years ahead.

As you will see from the reports of the Working Groups below, this has been a busy year in every area of activity and the Commission is grateful to all who have contributed to its work and especially to its Hon Minute Secretary, the Rev Ken Rue for his concise and diplomatic recording of our deliberations. We are grateful to the Rev David White who has kindly agreed to undertake this role in the times ahead. On a wider level of ecumenical personnel we note with great joy the appointment of Dr Nicola Brady, to be General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Dr Brady had previously served with considerable distinction as General Secretary of the ICC and all who worked with her there can testify to her mastery of her brief, great efficiency and utter commitment to issues of reconciliation and justice.

¹ The Church Leaders Group (Ireland) comprises of the Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic Archbishops of Armagh, the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the President of the Irish Council of Churches.

Michael Cashel, Ferns and Ossory
The Rt Rev MAJ Burrows,
Chair

ECUMENICAL INSTRUMENTS

Considerations of space allow for only limited coverage of the work of the ecumenical instruments to which the Church of Ireland belongs. Their respective websites (given below) should be consulted for detailed reports. Full particulars of Church of Ireland membership of ecumenical organisations and their remit may be found in the appropriate directory on the Church of Ireland website (www.ireland.anglican.org).

ANGLICAN & ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP

Membership

Mr Wilfred Baker, Rev Julie Bell, Canon Dr Maurice Elliott, Canon Dr Ian Ellis (Chair), Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum, Rev Canon Katharine Poulton, Rev Canon Helene Steed and Ms Cate Turner

The Revd Canon Dr Ian Ellis became Convenor of the Anglican and Ecumenical Affairs Working Group in 2017 and on retirement from Stipendiary Ministry in late 2020 relinquished this role. The Group is indebted to him for his hard work which, combined with his vast knowledge of all things ecumenical and Anglican meant that much ground was covered. The Revd Canon Katharine Poulton has agreed to Convene the group and Ms. Cate Turner will act as Secretary.

The Group, meeting entirely online has completed its work looking at the Resolutions from ACC17 (held in April 2019). Although the ACC was due to meet in early 2022, this has now been postponed. In the interim, the bulletin from the Anglican Communion Office is issued, keeping all those interested up to date with what is happening in Anglicanism worldwide. There are now representatives from the Church of Ireland on many of the Anglican Network groups and it is the intention to have each of them speak to the working group in 2022.

Report on the Assembly of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) 2021

The biennial assembly of ECEN was held (a year late) virtually in May/ June 2021. It brought together over 200 participants from Churches across Europe, from a wide range of denominations.

The theme of this year's conference was "Reconciled with Creation: A Call for Urgent Action on Climate and Biodiversity" It was fascinating to hear how much is being both done and discussed about climate change and biodiversity across the continent, in a wide variety of contexts and stages of economic development.

The opening addresses were from Bishop Prof. Dr. Jochen Cornelius-Bundschuh, Protestant Church in Baden and Greek Orthodox Archbishop Job of Telmessos. I found

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Archbishop Job's address particularly fascinating: the Orthodox churches have had a long history of environmental engagement, and they are very comfortable with a dialogue between theology and science. He referenced particularly the theological insights of "Humanity as priest and steward of creation", "The ascetic way of life" (which rejects unbridled consumerism), and "The Eucharistic mind" (gratitude and thanksgiving at the heart of liturgy and life). Later sessions discussed the European Green Deal with members of the European Parliament and also the UK government's plans for carbon emission reduction, and heard about a number of environmental twinning projects across the continent.

The second day was more concentrated on practical matters; with various churches giving examples of their environmental schemes, and young members of the assembly spoke of school and student action. A scheme involving church young people in Norway (Known as The GreenHouse) won the Roman Juriga award (Roman was one of the main founders of ECEN).

The final session was a briefing on the upcoming COP26 talks which will be held in Glasgow in November.

I found this a wonderful event to be part of: clearly not being present "in the flesh" is a loss but I would hope to be at next year's event in Karlsruhe. I would like to thank the CCUD for asking me to be a delegate at this fascinating and inspiring assembly.

Andrew Orr

FOUR NATIONS FAITH AND ORDER CONSULTATION 2021

Communiqué

Representatives of the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales met, via Zoom, on Wednesday 26 May 2021 to discuss a broad array of issues related to Faith and Order concerns. In total, this involved 22 people, as well as others invited to deliver specific sessions. The Consultation was arranged by the ecumenical officers of the four churches and chaired by the Rt. Rev. Gregory Cameron, Bishop of St. Asaph (Church in Wales). The day began and ended in prayer, with the morning office led by the Church in Wales and the evening office by the Church of Ireland. The remainder of the day comprised four sessions:

1. During the opening session, each of the churches presented reports which had been circulated in advance, focusing on particular areas of concern with respect to Faith and Order. This was followed by an open discussion about cross-cutting themes and areas of common interest.
2. The Archdeacon of Croydon (Church of England), the Venerable Dr Rosemarie Mallet, gave a challenging and wide-ranging presentation entitled *Theology, Race/ism, and Reparations* which explored the Church's collusion with slavery and racial differentiation and the moral duty to make reparation, restoration and restitution. This was followed by lively discussion in groups and in plenary.
3. The National Ecumenical Officer of the Church of England, the Rev Dr Callan Slipper, presented an inspiring position paper on the fundamental nature of ecumenism, entitled *A Threefold Vision or Jesus the Ecumenist: Rethinking Christian Unity* as well as an action

plan, inspired by the 1920 Lambeth Conference principle that ‘God wills fellowship’. Discussion ensued.

4. The Rev Prof Oliver O’Donovan and the Rev Prof David Jasper of the Scottish Episcopal Church’s Doctrine Committee presented the Commission’s recent paper *Learning from the Pandemic*. The thought-provoking questions raised with respect to pastoral care and the conducting of public worship in times of emergency were then considered in groups and in plenary. It is hoped that circumstances will allow an in-person Consultation in 2022, to be hosted by the Church in Wales and held at Gladstone’s Library, Hawarden, between 11 and 13 May.

THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (ICC: www.churchesinireland.com)

The ICC is an ecumenical Christian body and is a sister organisation of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The Church of Ireland is a founding member of the ICC, which was established in 1923.

The 98th annual meeting of the Irish Council of Churches took place on Thursday 25th March 2021, on Zoom. As a member of the ICC, the Church of Ireland is invited to appoint 20 representatives to attend the AGM (they are appointed each year by the Standing Committee), in addition to the members of the ICC Executive, who are automatically entitled to attend.

Regular AGM business includes presentation of the accounts for the previous year, the annual appointment of the Honorary Treasurer, and the receipt of the report of the ICC. There were also 3 addresses, each followed by a question-and-answer session; in the case of the two plenary addresses, there was also a break-out session after each. In times when the ICC is able to meet in person, seating around tables was pre-assigned, and each table formed a discussion group at the appropriate time. On Zoom, attendees joined breakout rooms, which offered a similar, if less convivial, experience.

Dr Gladys Ganiel of Queen’s University Belfast spoke on her survey, carried out from June to December 2020, of faith leaders’ and Churches’ responses to the pandemic across the island of Ireland. 24% of respondents from the Church of Ireland reported that they had had some form of online service before the pandemic; 88% reported holding online services during it, with 70% declaring an intention to retain some aspects of online ministry once the pandemic reaches an end. It was noted, however, that some leaders fear change and loss as a result of “digital church”. The problem of the urban/rural divide in terms of digital access was also noted. Other topics raised by respondents during the survey included stress: 46% reported that their ministry is more stressful than usual during the pandemic. Interestingly, Dr Ganiel noted that the respondents from the Methodist Church were most likely (58%) to report an increase in stress, but also reported the second highest rate of being able to cope with that stress (32%; just behind Roman Catholic priests, who reported at 33%). The factors contributing both to the high stress and to coping with it were not explored but would be interesting to consider. One aspect of Dr Ganiel’s research that perhaps merits consideration is its implicit hierarchical underpinning – from its title, “People Still Need Us”, which indicates a possibly stultifying conception of “them” and “us” in the relationship between congregations and “faith leaders”, to her final suggestion that the laity should be empowered to take on voluntary roles for the purpose of reducing

the stress felt by clergy, rather than as an essential part of the mission of the Church. This falls rather short of the radical, transformative, vision of church for which she had called earlier in her presentation.

The second plenary address was provided by Prof Philip McDonagh, of the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for Conflict Intervention, NUI Maynooth, who explored ways in which Church-state relations can be challenged by, and can learn from, the pandemic experience. He spoke of the need for states, and for individuals, to reach beyond their own borders to the whole human family, and pointed to engagement in the public sphere as a revelation of divine love. Prof McDonagh noted that governments tend to value religious communities when they need their partnership in delivering healthcare or education. However, as he observed, Churches are not lobby groups who present housekeeping lists to governments; instead, they must maintain their moral standpoint from which to criticise laws. Drawing on the work of William Temple and J.H. Oldham, Prof McDonagh suggested 6 axioms of the religious imagination on its journey towards a more just world, including exploration of the factors that accompany healing in a wounded social structure, and discernment in the midst of opacity in accordance with a common standard as a core value in the conduct of international relations. Concluding his plenary with discussion of individuals who exemplify some of these axioms, Prof McDonagh discussed the life and activism of Ken Sara-Wiwa and Franz Jägerstätter, before ending with a suggestion that a global spiritual retreat, perhaps modelled on the 10 days of deep reflection and acknowledgement of truth of Yom Kippur, is needed as we engage with the global economy and its magnifying inequalities.

The Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, President of the ICC, offered the concluding address, on the theme of listening and hearing, which, he noted, in its act of creating a space for an encounter, allows both parties to pursue peace and understanding. The President spoke of those whose cries for help are ignored or neglected, and who must be offered the healing of conversation, which allows them to create new memories, and makes room for them to speak and to be listened to. Such actions also change those who listen, challenging them as they take on another's viewpoint. We find it hard to imagine a narrative that is not our own, but by listening and by hearing the words and the pain of others, we stretch and open ourselves to love. Dr Patterson concluded by pointing out that we are under a divine obligation to be peace *makers*, not merely peace *keepers*, and that listening is one of the ways in which we may make peace and give it space to dwell.

Catherine Smith, Synod Officer

IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING (IICM: www.churchesinireland.com)

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) was established in 1973 as a forum between ICC's member churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The current Co-Chairs are the Most Rev Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, and the Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, President of the Irish Council of Churches.

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting of 2021 was held on Thursday 11th November in Dromantine Conference Centre, Newry. The title of the meeting was "Identity and Belonging – Past, Present, Future."

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The event was well attended, and many participants expressed a sense of pleasure in being able to attend in person.

The day was divided into sessions as follows:

11.30-13.00: *Identity and Belonging: Past, Present, Future*

The IICM Co-Chairs led participants in a session concerning initiatives of inter-church work that were undertaken during the previous year.

14.00-15.30: *Response of Church Leaders to Partition*

Dr Éamon Phoenix, of Stranmillis University College – a political historian, and member of the Taoiseach's Expert Advisory Group on Centenaries – presented on how various expressions of the Church responded to partition and the formation of the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, and suggested relationships with the ongoing work of reconciliation.

The lecture was well received, and generated a great deal of interest among participants. In fact, several of those who were seated at my table expressed a wish that there had been a long slot time-tabled for this item, as they would like to have continued the discussion with those present.

16.00-17.30: Roundtable Discussion: *Racial Justice and Inclusion*

This session considered people's experiences of racial/ethnic diversity and inclusion in the Church in Ireland. It was chaired by the Rev. Dr Sahr Yambasu, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, and expanded on the research conducted by IICM in partnership with Evangelical Alliance, Tearfund, and VOX magazine, viz. *Every Nation, Tribe and People? Race and the Churches in Ireland*. Arising from a contribution made earlier in the day, this panel was expanded shortly before the session began to include Ms Geraldine McDonnell, who spoke about racism with respect to that experienced by the Travelling Community in Ireland.

The Very Rev. Dr Ivan Patterson, President of the Irish Council of Churches, and the Most Rev. Dr Brendan Leahy, Co-Chair of the IICM, led expression of thanks to Dr Nicola Brady, ICC General Secretary, and also led those present in warmly congratulating her upon her appointment to the position of General Secretary of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

I am grateful to the Standing Committee for appointing me as one of the Church of Ireland's representatives to the IICM. I found the event thought-provoking and collegial, and have since been in contact, both by email and in person, with several other representatives, to discuss the ongoing work of the meeting.

Rev. Dr Leonard Madden

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CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (CTBI: www.ctbi.org.uk)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is an ecumenical organisation. The members include most of the major churches in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It was formed on 1 September 1990, as the successor to the British Council of Churches, and was formerly known as the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland.

Report from the Dean of Limerick on the Annual General Meeting of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland held on-line on 22nd September 2021

Introduction

Over 40 people were in attendance. Opening prayers included material from the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021. Dr Nicola Brady was welcomed as the new CTBI General Secretary and introduced to the AGM (by way of a short interview with the Moderator, Graham Sparkes).

AGM

The AGM was held at which the minutes from the 2020 AGM and the annual accounts and reports were approved. Several Trustees and Directors of the Company were appointed including, Ms Gillian Kingston.

Keynotes

2 presentations were delivered

- 1) Racial Justice is everyone's business (Richard Reddie, CTBI)
 - 13TH February is Racial Justice Sunday and a resource is being prepared for it and should be available from CTBI by the end of this year.
 - Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022 is being prepared in conjunction with Churches in Minnesota, USA (state where George Floyd was murdered). The theme will be around Racial Justice.
 - A Racial Justice Advocacy Forum is to be launched.
 - The importance of the 4 Nations working together was emphasized.
 - General updates and comments were presented by some members.
- 2) Unity and Witness
 - Further information of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2022 was provided. Next year will be the first year the material will be produced in Scot Gaelic.
 - CTBI's Mission and Theology Advisory Group is preparing some daily spiritual resources. More information available through www.ctbi.org.uk
 - The CTBI Church's Forum for Inter-Religious Relations has been carrying out work on Inter-Faith responses to the Pandemic, Islamophobia and Inter-Faith work developments since 9/11.
 - Israel-Palestine: Support for Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme.

The meeting closed with prayer.

Niall J. Sloane

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES (CEC: www.ceceurope.org)

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The Conference of European Churches (CEC) was founded in 1959 to promote reconciliation, dialogue and friendship between the churches of Europe at a time of growing Cold War political tensions and divisions.

CEC is a fellowship of some 116 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 National Council of Churches and Organisations in Partnership.

Report from the Rev David White on the General Assembly of CEC 2021

The 2021 General Assembly of CEC which was to be held virtually on the 30th of June was unable to take place as the required quorum of delegates was not reached. The Assembly then took place on the 30th of September 2021. At this meeting, a quorum was not required for it to go ahead. The morning session concluded with prayers led by the President, the Rev Christian Krieger and the Vice-President, His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia.

In the afternoon, a webinar was held with the title, ‘Impact of Covid-19 on Churches. Positive outcomes?’ This was moderated by Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen, CEC General Secretary.

Keynote Address

While we are all aware of the challenges and negative effects of Covid-19 perhaps the positive outcomes have been neglected. The keynote address was given by the Revd Dr Richard Sudworth, Secretary for Inter-Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury and National Inter-Religious Affairs Adviser for the Church of England. He began with an overview of statistics relating to online services in the Church of England. Some of interest were: 1 in 5 viewers were not regular attenders; 15% of viewers across Facebook and YouTube were 34 or under. He said that there is an opportunity now to proclaim the Gospel particularly among a demographic missing from physical Sunday services. Drawing on the statistics, he suggested that, ‘Online church will be a determining factor in our worshipping life going forward.’ While the future may be uncertain and threatening, online services offer some hope. There has been significant engagement by the Church in the UK public square, he claimed, which means that the Church is seen as a vital agent of social transformation moving out of the pandemic.

Reflection 1

Fr Stavros K. Kofinas, Coordinator of the Network of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Pastoral Health Care gave the second reflection. He made the point that the pandemic has debunked the myth that human power is limitless. It has unearthed the reality of our powerfulness and fearfulness which we often choose to deny. He suggested that as we emerge from the pandemic, evangelisation needs to seriously address the issue of death. This has not been adequately dealt with by the Church. The challenge is not to deny or beautify death but to perceive it as a reality of human existence. Responding to the idea of continuing online service as we emerge from the pandemic, he said that body and soul must be present in the liturgy so that we can completely place ourselves in God’s presence for sanctification.

Reflection 2

Revd. Dr Vilmos Fischl, Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary gave a very helpful overview of how the churches in Hungary coped with the pandemic. While Protestant and

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Anglican churches held online services, the Roman Catholic and five Orthodox churches remained open, as the government gave the churches freedom to remain open if they wished. His main concern was about people remaining at home on Sundays and preparing the main Sunday meal while watching services online. He suggested the posting of services online a couple of days after the service is held, so as to avoid this problem. He also pointed out that the International Eucharistic Congress will be held in Hungary in September with Pope Francis due to attend. Finally, he said, ‘Everything has changed and we will just have to get used to this new world.’

David White

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC: www.wcc-coe.org)

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a worldwide inter-church organization founded in 1948. Its 349 members today include the Assyrian Church of the East, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, most jurisdictions of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, the Old Catholic Church, Anglican Communion, most mainline Protestant churches (such as the Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian and Reformed) and some evangelical Protestant churches (such as the Baptist and Pentecostal).

The 11th Assembly will be held in 2022.

MEISSEN (Meissen: www.europe.anglican.org/ecumenical-information-and-links/agreements-and-partners)

The Church of England’s relations with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) are based on the Meissen Agreement, signed in 1991. The Church of Ireland is an observer at meetings and is currently represented by the Rev Markus Dünzkofer of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Meissen Commission Meeting 2021
Church Of England/Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)
Report of the Celtic Churches Observer
(*Representative: Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott (Church of Ireland)*)

The 31st meeting of the Meissen Commission was held via Zoom on 7-8 October. Those in attendance were six representatives each from the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland and the Church of England (the Co-chairs are respectively Landesbischof Ralf Meister and Rt Rev Jonathan Gibbs) with observers from the Diocese in Europe, the German-speaking Synod of Great Britain and the Celtic Anglican Churches. The meeting is essentially bilingual, however the lead-language is customarily determined according to the host church. This year’s agenda covered four principal areas during the two days – the ongoing work of the Meissen theological conference; reports from the churches; theological and journalistic perspectives from invited guests; review of existing work and future planning.

The Theological Conference

Professor Mark Chapman (Oxford) reported on the most recent theological conference in the July 2021 which further explored the outstanding issue of full consensus between the two traditions in relation to ‘the historic episcopate’. He observed that aspects of how

Anglicans are apt to understand this touchstone amount to little more than ‘wishful thinking’, and that the interpretation of its significance has repeatedly proven challenging in other ecumenical dialogues. Chapman noted the willingness of the Church of England to live with certain anomalies in other areas, not least in matters of its own internal polity, and the extent to which the overall profile of the English church within society had changed substantially even since the first signing of the Meissen Agreement in 1988. In light of this new reality, typified by a steeply declining membership and sense of adherence, he suggested that certain markers of Anglicanism from the past, such as an overly inflexible way of recognising the historic episcopate, may need to be re-visited, and that there should be greater willingness on the part of Anglicans to ‘live with anomalies for the sake of mission’.

Church Reports

Not surprisingly there were many overlapping themes amongst the various church reports submitted: Responses to the global pandemic, with genuine levels of apprehension as to the impact of the pandemic in terms of church attendance and material resources; climate change, with a particular focus on the forthcoming COP26 conference in Glasgow; Brexit and its ongoing impact; young people; human sexuality; and safeguarding. Particular concerns were noted in relation to the Diocese in Europe which reported ‘devastating consequences’ to its congregations as a result of the cumulative combination of Brexit and the pandemic.

Theological and Journalistic Perspectives

There were three contributors to this section of the business: From a German perspective Horst Thoren, editor-in-chief of the Rheinische Post, challenged the churches to face into a deepening contemporary crisis of faith and moral standing. He voiced his perception that the church appears to have lost both its distinctiveness and its voice within wider society. Revd Dr Brendan McCarthy (a son of the Church of Ireland now working as an advisor to the Church of England in Mission and Public Affairs) outlined the Church of England’s national response since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 and its commitment to the international Covax programme for vaccine justice. Of interest here were his, and the English Co-chair’s, comments that the Church of England now sees itself as ‘a church *for*, and not *of*, the nation’. Lastly, Professor Traugott Jaenchen, a lecturer in Christian sociology, shared some stimulating thoughts on ways in which the gospel might be more effectively communicated in contemporary society. He contrasted the continuing influence of the Christian churches within society, for example in so many facets of the social calendar, with the reality that for many post-modern people organised religion feels at best ‘strange’, and he posited the need for churches to do more creative thinking in areas such as ‘spirituality’ and ‘mystery’ as possible pathways towards re-establishing a meaningful sense of societal connection.

Review and Future Planning

The final session of the meeting reviewed the progress of the work of the Meissen Commission over the last five years and outlined its future trajectory. In view of the forthcoming Lambeth Conference and next year’s Kirchentag it was agreed that the focus for 2022 would be ‘the churches in their international context’. Beyond this it was left to the secretariat to advance other relevant agenda items.

M.J. Elliott

October 2021

REUILLY (Reuilly: <http://strasbourginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Reuilly-Declaration.rtf>)

The Reuilly Common Statement calls for a closer relationship between the Anglican Churches of Britain & Ireland and the Elgise Réformée (a grouping of four French Protestant Churches, namely the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France and the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of Alsace and Lorraine).

(Observer: Rev Dr Christine O’Dowd-Smyth (Church of Ireland))

2021 was a very important year for the Reuilly Agreement, as on June 23rd the Committee celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Reuilly Agreement.

When the Committee had last met in person in Edinburgh in late February 2020, we had discussed holding a service of celebration in St Mark’s Anglican Church Versailles on the 23rd of June, and in the Autumn of 2021 a theological conference at Lambeth Palace, opened by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The pandemic changed everything however.

The Committee met on zoom in March 2021 and agreed on a zoom celebration on the 23rd June. That March meeting was very important as the delegates of all the churches present spoke of the importance of the Church being “a cloud of witnesses/une église de témoins” in our outreach to wider society. All present spoke on the one hand of the weariness experienced by all because of the pandemic lockdowns. The Bishop of Warwick spoke of the burnout felt by many clergy and Christian Krieger of the United Protestant Reformed Churches spoke of la lassitude de tous. However all registered increased attendance at online services. There was a discussion on how to proceed post lockdown. The French reformed churches discussed the increase in ordained local ministry (something interesting from an Irish point of view). They also emphasised the importance of youth outreach and youth ministry.

There was a discussion on how to develop the pilot joint ministry envisaged in France in Lyon and Strasbourg between the Anglican and Protestant Reformed Pastors.

The Anniversary Celebration took place as planned on zoom on the 23rd June 2021 at 6pm Irish time. (The Bishop of Cashel Ferns and Ossory the Right Reverend Michael Burrows attended as invited by the Church of Ireland representative Rev Dr C O’Dowd-Smyth.)

The ceremony was opened by the Co-Chairs: Bishop John Stroyan of the Church of England, Pastor Christian Krieger of UEPAL. Peter Hooper of the Anglican Diocese of Europe is the new representative replacing Archdeacon Meurig Williams who is now a Rector in the Church of Ireland.

There were reports from Lyon and Strasbourg about the progress of the joint initiatives in ministry between the Anglican churches and the Reformed Churches. There was an organ and choral recital with music played on Albert Schweitzers organ at Grunsbach; as well as the Old Saint Paul’s Edinburgh choir.

Intercessory Prayers for unity were from England, France and Scotland. The prayer for peace was prayed by Rev Christine O’Dowd-Smyth in Irish as well as French and English. Bishop John Stroyan said goodbye to us all as he was retiring. The new liaison between the Church of England and the Reuilly Group is Revd Dr Isabelle Hamley.

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The closing blessing was given by Bishop Robert Innes the New Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Europe. There was a pre-recorded message of encouragement and blessing from his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury.

COMMUNITY OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN EUROPE (CPCE):

<https://www.leuenberg.eu/>

The CPCE is the umbrella organisation of the protestant churches. 94 Lutheran, Methodist, reformed and united churches from over thirty countries in Europe and South America belong to it. With that the CPCE represents altogether around 50 million Protestants. The CPCE exists thanks to the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973

The next General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe is due to take place in 2024

PORVOO (www.porvoocommunion.org)

The Porvoo Communion of Churches, (with members from the Lutheran Churches in the Nordic and Baltic countries and the Anglican Churches in Britain and Ireland and on the Iberian Peninsula), continued its work of bringing the Porvoo Churches and its member closer together in mission and ministry during 2021.

The Porvoo Communion of Churches, (with members from the Lutheran Churches in the Nordic and Baltic countries and the Anglican Churches in Britain and Ireland and on the Iberian Peninsula), did not meet in person during 2020 and 2021. During both these years scheduled meetings had to be moved to online platforms. The Theological Conference in October 2020 raised the question of how we see and develop the Porvoo portrait – as we considered our identity, closer contribution and unity. Dr Mary Tanner was among the speakers. In 2021 the Primates in the Porvoo Communion had hoped to gather in Tampere, Finland, with members of the contact group to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Porvoo Communion. Unfortunately, this meeting was postponed and will take place in October 2022, with the same theme of: Portrait, Unity and Vulnerability.

The Porvoo contact group met for a day conference on Zoom in October 2021 at which we discussed the current situation in our churches and shared some insights and experiences of ministry during a pandemic. We also discussed:

How Porvoo can support exchange and twinning between dioceses and parishes. (If you are interested, please contact Rev Canon Helene T. Steed)

Transitivity: The difficulties regarding recognition of Lutheran and Anglican pastors from churches outside the Porvoo communion.

The Church of Ireland was represented in by:

Rev Canon Helene T. Steed, Church of Ireland member of the Porvoo Contact Group

Archbishop Michael Jackson, Anglican Co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group

Work plan for the next three years:

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2022: Primates' Meeting, Tampere, Finland: Celebrating the 25th Porvoo Anniversary
2023: Thematic conference, Madrid, Spain.
Thematic suggestion: Life in the Eucharist / the Eucharistic life in our churches.
2024: Church Leaders' Consultation in Sweden
Thematic suggestion: Environment and Eschatology - Hope for Future Generations.

The Churches in the Porvoo Communion pray for each other. Every Sunday, Diocese, its bishop/s, clergy and people are remembered in prayer by congregations and parishes, as well as by individuals. The prayer diary for 2022 is found on-line at: <https://porvoo communion.org/prayer-diary-2022/>

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS WORKING-GROUP

Membership

Vacant (Chair), Dr Ken Milne, Rev Cathy Hallissey, Rev David White (Hon Sec).
Co-opted - Canon Adrian Empey, Ms Maxine Judge, Canon Eithne Lynch.

Conference on the Future of Europe

The European Union has embarked on a Conference on the Future of Europe, a major critique of its agenda and of how the Union operates in the light of the new world order that is emerging in which countries in Asia and elsewhere are assuming increased influence. Furthermore, a Union of 27 nation states must recognise that its character has changed considerably from the original much smaller (and entirely Western) membership. It now faces huge demands such as climate change, migration, the digital revolution and a rapidly developing global economy, which can best be tackled internationally. The Conference on the Future of Europe will report during the French presidency of the EU in 2022 and President Macron attaches huge importance to its work.

A major flaw in the EU is perceived to be a 'democratic deficit' whereby there is insufficient engagement between the institutions of the Union and the citizens of the member states. The Conference attempts to address this problem by ensuring the involvement of 'citizens assemblies', one of which will be held in Ireland early in 2022. It is hoped that the Irish Churches will play their part in the formulation of recommendations to the Conference and to this end Dublin City University has, through its Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations, convened a 'Consultation on the Conference on the Future of Europe'. Participants in this Consultation include the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. It has already met by Zoom and is intending to meet (if possible, corporally) in February.

The founding fathers of what has become the European Union did not see it as simply a 'Common Market' but believed that it should be guided by human values and the Churches have an obligation to support that aspect of the Union's life at a time when there are divergent views in Europe as to what these values are and when basic democratic principles within the EU need to be secured.

Beyond Brexit

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While we have been preoccupied with the implications of Brexit, members feel that we also need to consider our place in Europe and the key international relationships which will be needed for the future. We noted Paul Gillespie’s report on a conference of the *Irish Association for Contemporary European Studies* entitled “After Brexit, what next?”

One speaker of note was Eoin Drea from the centre right Wilfried Martens think tank in Brussels who according to Gillespie “lamented the failure to articulate a vision of Irish policy reflecting his own priorities. Ireland is seen as an exemplar of an Anglo-American socio-economic model in Brussels; but it is caught between the neoliberal northern European Hanseatic model and the deeper fiscal one of southern states led by France – which does it prefer?”

“Likewise, he [Drea] outlined the benefits his child receives from public social care services where he lives in Belgium ... There is little political or media awareness or debate here about how much of an outlier Ireland is on social care in Europe, where most such services are provided at local level from local taxation. Our weak local government powers combine with privatised US-style welfare and health arrangements to make the issue invisible. This is despite evidence from polling and the recent Citizens’ Assembly on equality that most citizens would prefer publicly provided care.” The issues raised will be of interest to the EAWG in the coming year.

Ms Janet Barcroft

We were saddened to hear of the death of Janet Barcroft on September 13th 2021. We would like to extend our sympathies to her brother Stephen, sister-in-law Birgitta, nephews and niece, Peter, John and Vanessa, and their partners Katie, Sonja and Peter, great nieces and nephews, Luke, Michael, Eva, Ashley, Hannah and Owen, extended family and her wide circle of friends and former colleagues and pupils of The High School, Rathgar.

INTER FAITH WORKING GROUP

Membership

Rt Rev Dr Kenneth Kearon (Chair), Rev Suzanne Cousins, Rev Canon Patrick Comerford, Rev Canon Elaine Murray (Hon. Sec)

While COVID-19 restrictions have naturally curtailed events, the Interfaith Working Group continued to meet by zoom and to report following these meetings to the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue.

The Chairperson, Bishop Kenneth Kearon, retired at the end of the year and will be replaced by the Rev Suzanne Cousins. The group would like to express their sincere thanks to Bishop Kearon for all he achieved during his years at the helm. In March, the Most Revd John McDowell, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, appointed one of the members of the Interfaith Working Group, the Rev Suzanne Cousins, Rector of the Benburb Group of Parishes, as his Inter Faith Adviser. The group congratulates Suzanne on this well-deserved position which will prove very beneficial to the Church of Ireland.

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The group advertised a World Council of Churches essay competition on ‘The Future of Interreligious Dialogue ’and were delighted that the Rev Christopher West, then curate in Taney Parish, was one of five international winners, the others were Lea Schlenker from Germany, Kritsno Saptanno from Indonesia, Ioannis Christodoulakis originally from Greece, Nicole Kallsen from the USA. In July, Christopher, along with the other winners, took part in an online intergenerational conversation to mark the 50th anniversary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation Programme. They had an opportunity to briefly share salient points of their prizewinning essays as a starting point for the conversation. They spoke with Rev Dr Wesley Ariarajah, former deputy general secretary of the WCC and director of the Dialogue programme, and Dr Clare Amos, former WCC programme coordinator of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation.

The group commended the Cork 3FF interfaith leaflet as an example of an effective local initiative.

There was an important publication by the WCC’s Office of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation (WCC IRDC) with the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) of *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During Covid 19 and Beyond*. An excellent summary of that publication and of the Search Colloquium (August 2021) “Who is my Neighbour? *Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity*” is contained in the summer 2021 edition of Search (Vol. 44.2). The emphasis is on dialogue with members of other faiths as collaboration and working alongside one another to be healing hands in a suffering world.

Following on from publicising and supporting the IFUK statement on refugees in November of this year, the Interfaith Working Group also raised the question of who in the Church of Ireland has responsibility for refugee matters. It was decided that CCUD, as an interim measure, will take on this role until the Honorary Secretaries can make a final decision on who will have responsibility for being the Church of Ireland’s voice for Refugees.

<https://www.ireland.anglican.org/news/11071/safe-humane-and-dignified-treatment>

The Interfaith Working Group expanded their membership with the addition of the Rev Abigail Sines, currently Dean’s Vicar in Christ Church Cathedral. Rev Sines has been involved with many Refugee initiatives in recent years and the group are delighted she has agreed to come on board.

Future Work

Plans are in place for friendly visits by the Archbishop of Armagh along with the Interfaith Adviser to the Belfast synagogue and to the Belfast Islamic Centre (covid circumstances and restrictions allowing).

The group are waiting for a full complement on the House of Bishops before requesting Bishops to nominate two representatives from their diocese to be part of a wider Interfaith

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Forum which would meet a couple of times a year. This Forum would help equip parishes to develop pastoral and theological responses to interfaith challenges, issues and dilemmas arising in an increasingly multi-cultural Ireland.

The group are exploring the idea of a conference or seminars in the area of both 'Women Theologians and Faith Practitioners' and 'Chaplaincy' in an interfaith context.

Appendix 1 ~ Annual Church Meetings

The Church of Ireland extended invitations to ecumenical partners to attend the online meeting of the General Synod in 2021, but not all partners were able to send a representative.

The guests who attended were:

Very Rev Dr William Henry	Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Mrs Joan Doherty	Methodist Church in Ireland
Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu	Methodist Church in Ireland
Dr Nicola Brady	Irish Council of Churches
Rev Richard Wood	Church in Wales

The Church of Ireland was not present at the following
General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Ireland
The General Synod of the Church of England
The General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IRELAND YEARLY MEETING On-line, 8th – 11th APRIL 2021

Report from the Very Rev John Bond

A TIME TO ACT TOGETHER IN FAITH AND HOPE

(Let us try what Love can do - William Penn.)

I was invited to attend the Quaker Yearly Meeting in 2020 but like so many other events it was cancelled because of Covid-19. This year it was a privilege to be asked again (with my wife Joyce who was an observer) and Gina Coptly to represent the Church of Ireland at the 2021 Quaker Yearly Meeting via Zoom. I attended Thursday evening - Saturday evening. The theme of the Meeting was "**A Time to Act together in Faith and Hope**", which proved very timely as violence erupted on many streets in towns across Northern Ireland, The Good Friday Agreement was signed on 10th April 1998 - 23 years ago. It has been easier to find a vaccine for a Global pandemic than a solution for a corrosive/toxic hatred that not only destroys property and the economy in Northern Ireland but also destroys lives. There is a terrible evil in our land. Ghandi once said, "Prayer, properly understood and applied ... it is the most potent instrument of action". Easter is a time of hope and

celebration and with the vaccine being rolled out we will once again be able to see a future, hug our loved ones and worship in our Churches D.V.

Thursday Evening - MINISTRY & OVERSIGHT - The opening Session on Thursday evening focussed on various reports (Epistles). Monthly meeting venues included newly added St. Finbarr's, Cork, Limerick and Churchtown. The merits and demerits of Zoom were discussed together with the Carbon Footprint and lack of personal contact.

Two Friends spoke of their pilgrimages to the Lake District in 2020 to the heart of Quakerism. In 1652 the Established Church was in control and not favourably disposed towards 'outsiders'. However, George Fox did preach at Ulverston Parish Church for three hours by invitation, I suspect he was not invited back!

In the present day's challenging situation the Society has a real heart for the advancement of the Gospel, wanting to connect with Churches and groups working for Peace and dealing with issues such as Abortion with compassion and sensitivity, and especially as some 400,000 women in Ireland have had to cope with abortion.

Friday Morning Session - FAITH IN ACTION - began with a half hour meeting for Worship. The emphasis was the charitable concern of Quakers, working with Christian Aid and Right Sharing of World Resources, supporting projects in Uganda, Palestine, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Kenya. Their new website with a Pay Pal A/c. will soon be functioning. The Society is committed to give practical and spiritual support in Ireland and elsewhere through donations from Friends, Quaker Meetings, occasional bequests, and fund raising. Unfortunately fund raising events were cancelled in 2020 because of Coronavirus.

Friday Afternoon - CONNECTING WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS - began with a silent tribute to the Duke of Edinburgh who died earlier. Representatives from the Churches were welcomed - Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian, Jewish, Baha'i and Roman Catholic. Bishop Leahy, Limerick, was unable to be present until Saturday afternoon. Both Gina and I conveyed greetings from the Church of Ireland. Friends from different parts of the world were also welcomed via Zoom.

In Reports (Epistles) the major issues included Climate Change and also violence against human-beings against the Earth. The focus was on reaching out to the most marginalised, helping prisoners, mother and babies, young people, speaking truth to Power. There was a useful meeting with Justice Minister Naomi Long in N.I., cross community work and making sure families were supported during lockdown and able to have a break at the Quaker Cottage, Belfast. Friends have a Charity Shop on the Lisburn Road, Belfast. "We try to make Love visible" as one member said. A Challenge was issued - "Is there anything Friends can do to support and promote the work that is already being done?"

There is a need to hold the uncomfortable conversations - the response to racism must be as important as the response to war, the inhumane treatment of immigrants especially in Ireland. The need to speak to people we would not normally speak to... Gender Equality, LGBTQ, the way the Pandemic has affected people and the huge loss of life and mental health. There was an opportunity to ask questions, to express views, and just like General Synod some people enjoy the sound of their own voices! In all this Friends are to reflect on the "light within", and their work to discern and carry out the will of God as individuals and as Meetings!

Friday Evening - 7.30pm PUBLIC LECTURE "RESURRECTION AND PERSONALITY" by Eoin Stephenson was erudite, thoughtful and grounded in the reality of life. In this Lecture, Eoin challenged us to listen deeply and think anew about our experience of God, exploring how the Risen Jesus of Nazareth is experienced as a Presence, as a friend. We were reminded that the Resurrection is core to our faith and that Jesus is experienced in ordinary life by us as ordinary people each with our different personalities. In this relationship, in this encounter with a living Presence it is possible to grow as open personalities, balancing our positive and dark aspects and addressing the challenge of fear, And it is this quiet Presence that we hope is within us in death experienced as if we are coming into a new life. The silence that followed, as at the end of each Session was effective and meaningful - much to ponder, challenge and reflect on.

Saturday Morning - "PEACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE" Stop Fuelling War - Karen King - gave an overview of the development of "Stop fuelling War", formally established in 2017 in France after 20 years of Quaker witness against the world's biggest Arms Fair, Eurosatory. Its goals include raising awareness about the widespread impact of the arms industry on civil society, to reframe the way we think about security, to divert resources to peaceful ends and offer alternatives to militarisation. Karen pointed to the arms industries enabling war, the immense social deprivation that results and this industry is also central to many other issues of concern to Quakers, such as Climate Change where armaments are central to the use of carbon. We need to work together i.e. with Churches and other groups to find a better way to stop fuelling war.

Campaign to Stop Killer Robots - Claire Conboy-Stephenson shared her concern on the insidious development of weapons systems that lack meaningful human control and lead to digital dehumanisation. She described the work of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots with which she is also involved and referred to the paradigm shift in society from gun powder to nuclear power. Claire said, "self-driving cars do not recognise dark skin only white skinned people"... and yet production is going ahead. Technology should improve all lives. Quakers in Ireland were urged to sign an interfaith document with other faiths to work for international action towards peaceful resolution to ban fully these autonomous weapons. These issues are enormous and hope is the decision not to give up.

Saturday afternoon - Sustainability - Young Friends' Activities. Young Friends reported on the wide range of activities achieved online - Climate Change, the importance of Relationships, how to take our Testimonies forward to build community and to create opportunity for all to be involved. What is happening to confront the difficult issue of the lack of diversity within our worshipping communities? Do we do enough to link with other organisations and speak out about our concerns? All are challenging questions but the experience of Zoom meetings has taught how to develop and build relationships online, how to cope with a virtual hug!

Owing to commitments I was unable to attend on Sunday. Attendances at sessions: Thursday Evening 120; Friday - 90; Public Lecture - 200 and Saturday 110.

I am grateful to the Standing Committee for the opportunity to attend this Yearly Meeting of Quakers in Ireland - Religious Society of Friends. There was care and sensitivity in dealing with a wide range of delicate and contentious issues and an excellent quality of debate throughout the Meeting. I was impressed with the role of women in the Society and the excellent way Denise Gabuzda, Clerk of Ireland Yearly Meeting, held it all together.

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Any speaker going over their allotted time was muted, more effective than the red light at General Synod!! Maybe our Synod could take cognisance of this effective method? The Society looks forward to 2022 Yearly Meeting in person, with renewed commitment and confidence, and with God's loving support in faith and hope to put their faith into action in the world moving forward to a future in which we can live in harmony with God's creation.

Report from Ms Gina Copty

The meeting was held over zoom starting Thursday evening, April 8 till the afternoon of Sunday the 11th. It was a long event to be held over zoom but I tried to attend most of the sessions, most crucially both opening and closing sessions. It was good as I was called upon on a few occasions to introduce myself and say a few words. I got the impression that it was important for the meeting to see other church bodies represented there. They also do some projects with the Palestinians and seem to hold them in high esteem which I think may have elevated my status somewhat when I spoke directly to that topic. I found their meeting to be well organised with the backing of an impressive technical team. The range of topics was also very interesting most notably on climate change, Stop Fuelling War advocacy and the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. In the closing session on Sunday, attendees were invited to share their reflections and give feedback. I took that opportunity to speak for a few minutes. I thanked the meeting on behalf of the CoI, praised them for running a smooth operation, told them how much I learnt and even highlighted some of the take home lessons I got. I also thanked Denise Gabuzda, the IYM Clerk and Mary McNeilly, the IYM Recording Clerk.

I thought I should let you know that our church was well represented and the IYM participants seemed to greatly appreciate our involvement.

CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND

The Methodist Conference with the theme “People First, Under God, was held online from 9-13th June 2021.

The opening service at which the Revd Dr Sahr Yambasu was installed as President was attended by a small number of people and streamed to all who wanted to watch and participate at a distance.

As with most church conferences and meetings the agenda was packed with items to do with church administration, mission, and outreach. One of the interesting discussions centered on governance and it was interesting to see how the Methodist Church has tackled this issue, in the hope of freeing local communities from the burden of compliance to concentrate on pastoral care, mission, worship and youth ministry. There was also considerable discussion on matters of Safeguarding, which is also a common theme in all churches working with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

One of the unique features throughout the Conference was the opportunity built into the timetable for participants to pause and reflect whilst being led through this by different members of the Conference. Another feature was the early morning (7am) bible studies.

The considerable emphasis on and time devoted to celebrating the lives of those ministers who had died during the year, those being ordained and those selected for training for ministry was interesting. Another session of note is what they call “Conversation on the

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Work of God". This allows anyone to speak about anything significant, of wider interest or innovative that is happening in their church. There is a day session just for clergy. The length of conference is interesting - Wednesday (clergy) day, and installation of the President, morning, afternoon, evening of Thursday, Friday and Saturday plus Sunday morning. Evening sessions were more informal. Whilst perhaps ok for an in-person conference, such a long conference online was, we conclude, somewhat wearing. Whilst hard to be precise, particularly with an online event, our perception is that the age profile of participants might be somewhat better than ours.