

Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue – Report 2008

**COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIALOGUE**

**REPORT 2008**

**MEMBERSHIP**

The Archbishops and Bishops

Revd P Comerford	Mr WT Morrow
Revd Canon DWT Crooks	Revd DR Nuzum
Revd Canon Dr IM Ellis	Mr N Richardson
Mr SR Harper	Very Revd PW Rooke
Revd IJE Knox	Ms CS Turner
Revd Canon WA Lewis	Revd OC Ulogwara
Revd DM McCallig	Revd GV Wharton
Mrs R McKelvey	Revd Canon TR Williams
Dr K Milne	Mrs AJ Wills

In 2007, the General Synod changed by resolution the name of the former ‘Committee for Christian Unity’ to ‘Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue’. The terms of reference of the Commission are as follows:

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

The Commission elected the Bishop of Meath and Kildare, the Most Revd RL Clarke, as Chairman, and Dr Kenneth Milne as Honorary Secretary. The members wish to pay tribute to the work of the former Chairman, the Bishop of Clogher, the Rt Revd Michael Jackson, and the former Honorary Secretary, the Revd Daniel Nuzum.

We are convinced of the need to convey to the parishes an understanding of the Church’s responsibilities in the field of ecumenism, and it is our view that communication with the dioceses and parishes where ecumenism is concerned needs to be greatly improved. We firmly believe that our Commission’s participation in ecumenical and inter-faith activities on behalf of the Church of Ireland is only part of our duty, and that it is equally urgent to bring to the attention of the dioceses and parishes those issues that are on the ecumenical agenda both nationally and internationally.

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In order to discharge our terms of reference as effectively as possible, we have established, as proposed in the report to General Synod last year, the following three working-groups:

***Ecumenical Affairs***

The Bishop of Meath and Kildare (Convenor)  
Dr Kenneth Milne (Honorary Secretary)  
The Bishop of Tuam  
Revd Canon DWT Crooks  
Revd D Nuzum,  
Mrs R McKelvey  
Mr WT Morrow  
One Church of Ireland representative from the Covenant Council  
One Methodist representative from the Covenant Council

***Anglicanism***

The Bishop of Cashel and Ossory (Convenor)  
Ms Kate Turner (Honorary Secretary)  
The Bishop of Down and Dromore  
Revd Canon IM Ellis  
The Church of Ireland representative on the Porvoo Contact Group (Very Revd Desmond Harman, d. 18 December 2007)  
The Church of Ireland representatives on the Anglican Consultative Council (Dr Maurice Elliott and Ms Kate Turner)  
Mr I Smith  
Mrs P Wallace

The group concerned with Anglican affairs and also with the relationships via the Porvoo Agreement is at an early stage of its work. Seven members of the main Commission have joined this group. Like so many in the Church of Ireland we were stunned by the untimely death of Dean Desmond Harman and were particularly conscious of his contribution in recent years as the Church of Ireland's Porvoo contact person. As recently as our November meeting, he was speaking of this task with typical insight, enthusiasm and humour.

As part of its initial agenda the group had undertaken a textual review of the Porvoo Agreement and process, seeking from this to draw lessons in relation to possible emerging covenantal relationships within Anglicanism itself. The unhappy loss of Dean Harman obliged us in addition to consider, in effect, a likely job specification for the next holder of the position of Porvoo contact person. Within the specifically Anglican world, we have been analysing, in this Lambeth year, the significance and impact of some of the less publicised but nevertheless highly significant Resolutions of Lambeth 1998.

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At the time of writing it is quite impossible to predict what will be the mood and direction of Anglicanism post-Lambeth. However, it is very likely that continuing discussion of the scope of a possible Anglican Covenant will remain centre – stage. Our group is one of a number of bodies within the Church of Ireland – including, of course, the Standing Committee itself and the bishops – which would expect to maintain a creative and demanding involvement in this process. Conscious too that the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council will not be long after Lambeth, it is good that we can provide a forum in which Ireland’s two ACC members, Dr Maurice Elliott and Ms Kate Turner will be able to consult locally concerning the ACC themes. In wishing Dr Elliott well in his new role at the Theological Institute, we are aware too that a common approach to Theological Education and its content is now, rightly, a pressing issue at the heart of the inter-Anglican agenda.

#### ***Inter-faith***

The Bishop of Clogher (Convenor)  
Revd Canon Patrick Comerford (Honorary Secretary)  
Very Revd PW Rooke  
Revd O Ulogwara  
Revd D McCallig  
Mr S Harper  
Ms Susan Hood

#### *Interfaith events and dialogue*

The 31-page booklet, *Guidelines for Interfaith Events & Dialogue*, prepared by the Committee for Christian Unity and the bishops of the Church of Ireland, and published by Church of Ireland Publishing, was launched at the Hard Gospel conference, ‘A Pilgrim People,’ in Swords, Co Dublin, on 19 January, by the Minister for Integration, Mr Conor Lenihan, and the Bishop of Clogher.

The Lambeth Conferences in 1988 and 1998 called for greater work to be done locally and internationally to facilitate the dialogue of life and the dialogue of ideas across world faiths, yet this booklet is the first of its kind in the Provinces of the Anglican Communion. People of different world faiths are present in Ireland as immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, international students and because of family ties. It is of the utmost importance to challenge fear and ignorance, while being true to our own faith, living it confidently and compassionately.

The working group hopes to receive feedback and responses to the guidelines from the different faith groups in Ireland, and initial contacts have been made with the Islamic, Jewish and Sikh communities in Dublin. In a positive response to the booklet, RTÉ has recorded five two-minute radio contributions by the Revd Canon Patrick Comerford to *A Living Word*, looking at five monotheistic faith communities: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs and Bahais.

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### *Working group membership*

The working group has been joined by Dr Susan Hood, who has extensive experience in Israeli-Palestinian and Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue.

### *Chinese community in Ireland*

Meanwhile, a major study of the diverse faith and religious practices of the Chinese community, one of the largest minority ethnic groups in Ireland, has been published by the Dublin University Far Eastern Mission and the China Educational and Cultural Liaison Committee. This study estimates that there are at least 60,000 Chinese people in the Republic of Ireland, of whom 25.4 per cent say they believe in religion; of that 25.4 per cent, 56.3 per cent believe in Buddhism and 39 per cent in Christianity (23.4 per cent “Protestantism” and 15.6 per cent “Catholicism”).

The study, by Dr Richard O’Leary of Queen’s University Belfast and Dr Lan Li of University College Dublin, illustrates how little we know in Ireland about the religious beliefs and practices of the new communities in Ireland, and offers an example of how similar work needs to be carried out among other ethnic and religious communities.

### *Training programmes*

The group is exploring ways sending target groups from the Church of Ireland to take part in the multifaith programmes organised by the Saint Philip’s Centre, Leicester, which provides training and enables Christians and churches to be a confident presence in a multifaith world, prepared to share their own faith and learn from others. The centre director is the Revd Dr Andrew Wingate. The Centre has been developed by the Church of England Diocese of Leicester, and is supported by the Methodist, United Reformed, Roman Catholic and Baptist Churches.

### **Ecumenical Affairs**

The Chairman and Honorary Secretary have held informal meetings with Roman Catholic and Presbyterian personnel and have made personal contact with the ecumenical organisations to which the Church of Ireland belongs, in order (a) to give assurances of the Church’s continued commitment to ecumenism and (b) to provide for the members of the Commission some indication of the current state of ecumenical affairs in Ireland and beyond. As part of this exercise the Chairman and Honorary Secretary were part of the Church of Ireland representation at the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania, in September; the other members of the delegation being the Bishop of Tuam, the Revd Canon David Crooks and Ms Andrea Wills. The Commission has reported on the Sibiu Assembly to the Standing Committee, with recommendations.

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### *Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Irish Inter Church Meeting (IICM)*

We welcome the appointment of our Chairman to be Vice-president of the Irish Council of Churches. He has regularly attended meetings of the ICC Executive Committee and of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. We are glad to report that there was a good attendance of the Church of Ireland representatives at the ICC Annual General Meeting in recent years.

### *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)*

The Chairman has been appointed one of the ICC trustees of CTBI, and Mr Trevor Morrow has attended a meeting of one of its forums.

### *Four National Ecumenical Officers*

The Honorary Secretary attended a meeting in London of the ecumenical officers of the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

### **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

The leaflets for use in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity were this year, for the first time, downloaded and formatted by the General Synod Office for distribution in the Church of Ireland.

### **Meissen Conversations**

The Church of England has a relationship with the German Lutheran Churches through the 'Meissen Conversations' held alternately in England and Germany. The other Anglican Churches in these island take it in turn to provide jointly one observer on behalf of the Church of Ireland, the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church at these conversations, and as it is now falling to the Church of Ireland to assume this responsibility, Canon Ian Ellis has been appointed.

### **Future work**

It is hoped that our Commission's future activities, operating through our working groups, will include:

- Initiating an ecumenical response to the recommendations of the Sibiu Assembly;
- Carrying out a textual review of the Porvoo Agreement in the hope of identifying lessons in relation to possible emerging covenantal relationships within Anglicanism itself;
- Identifying church members in each diocese, lay and clerical, who can act as 'resource persons' for advice on interfaith issues;
- Exploring the possibilities of participating in inter-faith programmes, both at home and elsewhere, having in mind in particular the needs of school and hospital chaplains.

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