

Church of Ireland Council for Mission – Report 2012
THE CHURCH OF IRELAND COUNCIL FOR MISSION
REPORT TO THE GENERAL SYNOD 2012

MEMBERSHIP (JANUARY 2011)

The Rt Rev Harold C Miller	House of Bishops
The Very Rev Stephen Lowry	Synod
Vacant	Synod
Mrs Felix Blennerhassett	Synod
Vacant	Synod
Rev Paul Hoey	Synod
Vacant	Synod
Mrs Margaret Crawford	Mothers' Union
Vacant	CIYD
Vacant	Bishops' Appeal
Mr Thomas G Wilson	Methodist Church
Vacant	AMS
Mr John Doherty	AMS
Mr Geoffrey Hamilton	AMS
Ms Linda Chambers	AMS
Captain Colin Taylor	AMS
Rev Ruth West	Cashel
Vacant	Cashel alternate
Mark Dunwoody	Cork
Rev Eileen Cremin	Cork alternate
Mr Colin Ferguson	Down
Rev Peter Galbraith	Connor
Vacant	Connor alternate
Rev Robert Kingston	Clogher
Vacant	Clogher alternate
Rev Andrew Quill	Kilmore
Vacant	Kilmore alternate
Vacant	Meath
Mrs Daphne Wright	Meath alternate
Ven Wayne Carney	Limerick
Vacant	Limerick alternate
Rev Adam Pullen	Tuam
Vacant	Tuam alternate
Rev Canon Derek Creighton	Derry
Vacant	Derry alternate

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Rev Paul McAdam	Armagh
Mr Tom Stephenson	Armagh alternate
Rev Cliff Jeffers	Dublin
Mr Derek Neilson	Dublin alternate
Miss Mavis Gibbons	Co-opted
Rev Canon David Brown	Co-opted
Rev Rob Jones	Co-opted

Alternates attend when the principal representative is unable to.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OBJECTIVES for 2012:

1. To continue to build on Back to Church Sunday and to enable more parishes to make the most of this venture as a missional opportunity.
2. To pursue the re-shaping of the Council in the light of changing needs of the Church.

MEMBERSHIP

As Bishop Harold Miller prepares to step down from his role as Chair, the members of the Council wish to thank him for his energetic and imaginative leadership over many years. He has provided much inspiration and wisdom.

We look forward to welcoming Rt Rev Alan Abernethy as Chair.

During the year Very Rev Maurice Sirr retired after many years faithful service. We thank him for his dedication to the work of the Council.

We welcomed Rev Rob Jones, Rev Ruth West and Rev Adam Pullen as new members.

SYNOD MISSION EVENT

The Mission Event in 2011 was a seminar on *Making the Most of Back to Church Sunday*. It was held in the Armagh City Hotel. Mr Michael Harvey, Director of Back to Church Sunday in UK and Ireland, spoke to over 50 people about ways to make the most of the initiative.

At the 2012 event, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali will speak on the suffering and persecuted church. This will happen on Friday 11th May at 8:00 am at CORE church, Dublin. All are invited to hear Bishop Nazir-Ali at what should be an informative and challenging event.

JOINT MISSION GROUP

The sub-group appointed to develop shared areas of mission with our Covenant Partners in the Methodist Church in Ireland co-ordinated a series of joint training events for churches wanting to participate in the Back to Church Sunday initiative.

The Methodist Church has issued a Call to Prayer. Might this be an opportune time in the history of this island for the Church of Ireland also to take up this call?

The Group facilitated a discussion on the nature of mission in Ireland today between members of the Council and Methodist representatives (Rev Donald Ker, Rev Karen Spence, Mrs Elaine Barnett, Rev David Rock and Rev Des Bain).

The question was asked: What difference will interchangeability of ministry make unless there is a sense of a shared mission?

As relational networks become more significant than geographical definitions in many areas of Ireland new expressions of church are needed. Or might it be better to speak of Fresh Expressions of Mission or of Christian Community?

Both denominations are exploring new expressions of church with mission at the core. There was a common acknowledgement that the existence of a building can severely limit the mission of the church, both in rural and urban settings. The model of church in Belfast's Titanic Quarter demonstrates that church need not be tied to a building-focussed model.

Among examples of shared mission projects the Council noted the work of the House of Hope in Dromore, Co Down. This is an initiative where churches have co-operated to develop a house to welcome all who come with needs. There is shared ownership and no one individual church has any more stake in it than the others.

Christians against Poverty is another initiative that has sparked churches to work together to engage with the needs of people in a local community. The Mothers' Union, too, is demonstrating new ways in mission: members may be connected to the local Anglican Church but the focus of their work is outside the Church engaging with local people through such things as parent and toddler groups or parenting courses.

In parishes covering a huge geographical area it is more difficult to get an idea of the "mission field" and there can also be reluctance on the part of some to even consider mission.

In both denominations there can be a leaning towards spiritual consumerism which places personal spiritual preferences above the life of the Christian community. There may also be a deep seated desire to preserve what we have and who we are rather than face change and growth. In localities where both denominations are well represented, there is need to exercise trust and recognise that visionaries need to be heard and their visions discerned and then acted upon. But national gatherings and voices are needed to keep the mission central and to share the stories.

The group is conscious that there are still questions to be answered:

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Can we have a shared vision for mission and, if so, how might the proposed interchangeability of ministry help bring it to fruition?

What is the theology or mission that we share and what common values might be owned?

Are there ways that we can work together to sustain ministry in rural areas and to help rural churches engage in mission in a new way?

BACK TO CHURCH SUNDAY

Some ninety-two Church of Ireland parishes registered in 2011 (up from forty in 2011). The number of Methodist churches participating was around sixty. Figures compiled from the feedback given to the Back to Sunday office show that the normal average attendance in the ninety-two Church of Ireland parishes that responded is one hundred and one but that on *Back to Church Sunday* the average attendance was one hundred and thirty-eight, an average increase of thirty-eight per cent.

The Council is aware that the initiative might not be relevant for all contexts but feels that it is worth encouraging as a simple opportunity to engage with the many people who are open to going back to something they once were familiar with and probably have drifted away from. Part of its value is in the questions it leaves with any parish that gives it a go; “If some of our people didn’t want to invite anyone “Why?” and is there anything we can do about it?” And, “If we did manage to welcome some people back what might we do to keep them?”

NEW CHURCHES

Rev Rob Jones spoke to the Council about the new work he was undertaking in Holy Trinity Church (HTC). It started in August 2010 and was funded for three years by the parish of Harold’s Cross. The congregation grew to about 80 in a short space of time. Services are discussion based. The undergirding principle is of taking people from where they are, rather than where the church wishes them to be. HTC works ecumenically with others in the area. At an appropriate stage the new church will move from interdependence to independence. See www.htrinity.ie

THE CHANGING FACE OF MISSION PARTNERSHIP

The Council noted the trend towards shorter-term mission service. It is getting harder to get people to commit long term to an area, a person or an agency. The priority now is to ‘resource’ indigenous Christians to serve where they are e.g. funding a local youth worker. This can be done much more cheaply and effectively than sending a mission partner. Some mission agencies are scaling back overseas mission teams in the face of accusations of religious tourism. At the same time others from overseas are being placed in Ireland. This is much more effective engagement with the local and international church. Financial reasons may be responsible for some of these changes but they also present very real missional opportunities.

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The Council has invited the Association of Mission Societies to guide its thinking in this area.

DISCOVERY COURSE

The Council wishes to commend the Tearfund *Discovery* Course for use in parishes.

The Discovery process arose out of an experience in Norok diocese, Kenya. The local church employed people to meet needs of victims of drought. The experiment didn't work because the church assumed it knew the needs. Only when it employed facilitators to listen to the people did the project begin to make a real difference.

Discovery employs similar methods. It seeks to guide churches through six steps:

- Celebrating who and where we are;
- Understanding the needs of the community;
- How to respond;
- Dreaming dreams and mobilizing communities;
- Planning for action;
- Organizing and building teams.

Each stage is resourced through a toolkit. An external facilitator trains local facilitators to guide the process.

For further information see www.tearfund.ie/get_involved/resources/discovery/

STATISTICS FOR MISSION

The Council wishes to thank the Diocesan secretaries and clergy of the three dioceses that volunteered to act as pilots for the gathering of statistics. However, after several attempts to collect the required information the Council has to report that it is of a mind that unless the provision of such information becomes required under legislation it will be impossible to gather the volume of responses required to provide accurate analysis of trends etc.

It was noted that the Standing Committee may have plans for gathering information.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The Council devotes some time at each of its meetings to theological reflection on God's mission in the world.

In a study of the relationship between God and his world it was pointed out that in any mission you need to know what sort of person has sent you out. God's mission is out of an overflow of love. Our part in it is in making that radical love known. It involves seeing God in the other and recognizing that sometimes "I" am the "other".

The Council suggests the following as possible questions to help parishes wanting to look at this area of mission:

Describe mission in your parish.

How has it benefited your partners in mission and you?

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Where do you see God at work?

How can you join in?

How does this square with the religious picture of a “national” God?

How might we relate to people of other faiths?

Is there a compromise involved in religious dialogue?

The Council is currently exploring the nature of the gospel and the implications for sharing the gospel in today's Ireland.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND MISSION STRUCTURES

The Council has discussed the possibility of the Church of Ireland developing something akin to a “Department for Mission” which would reinforce the different emphases in mission while at the same time enabling the mission agencies to work together more effectively.

The Council considers that one of the ways that it can more effectively serve the Church is by devoting time to prayer and seeking God's direction for the mission of the Church. It also seeks to listen to those in the Church who have a passion for mission, so that it can set a relevant agenda for its work.

It continues to be of the view that a more streamlined structure would enable it better to achieve these ends. The Council put forward a resolution to the Synod of 2011 to amend its membership and structure. Lack of clarity in the wording and the fact that the debate was curtailed due to lack of time led to the withdrawing of the resolution. On reflection and in view of the fact that the wider structures of the Church of Ireland are themselves under review, the Council has decided to postpone the presentation of a further resolution until it has had the opportunity to see how the overall committee structure develops. Notwithstanding this the Council intends to put forward a new structure and remit as a matter of urgency.

Mission News and Prayer

An important part of each meeting is the time spent finding out what mission agencies, dioceses and individuals are doing in terms of mission and in praying for these initiatives.

Among other news the Council noted:

1. The appointment of Ronnie Brigs as Mission Director of CMSI
2. The appointment of Bishop Ken Clarke as Director of SAMS.
3. The establishment of a Dublin office for USPG
4. The fact that of five Church Army Trainee Evangelists completing their training this year, three are from the Church of Ireland and a fourth has been training in the Church of Ireland.