

Bishop,

The Bishop of Clogher - the CCUD's new Chairman, and indeed the new Vice-President of the Irish Council of Churches, having been elected to that office just last month - has highlighted some of the aspects of the work of the Commission.

The report is before the Synod in all its detail but I do want to take this opportunity of reflecting for a few moments more widely on ecumenism itself.

Why bother? Why not just get on with our own concerns and let others get on with theirs? Why spend time and money on ecumenical endeavour?

The answer at one level is quite simple: because that is the command of Jesus, to be 'one' so that the world may believe. We have all heard that many times, but getting closer to that place of being 'one' requires not only discussing our differences and trying to resolve them but also acting together in the world, showing a common witness for what is right and what is just and what is good.

Christian Aid week is coming up, 11th - 17th May, and that organisation, it should be recalled, was originally set up as a vehicle for ecumenical aid and has continued to be just that. So, Christian Aid is an example - a very successful example - of working together for good in God's name.

Relations with the Roman Catholic Church, happily, have continued to deepen over the years, right across Ireland but, of course, there is still further to go in our common journey to fulfil our Lord's command.

Only a couple of weeks ago Taoiseach Enda Kenny told the Pope that while it is up to the Roman Catholic Church to invite Pope Francis to Ireland, the Government would provide whatever support was necessary if he were to come. It was a welcome statement and there surely would be no more welcome a visitor to these shores than Pope Francis. If a papal visit does happen, I for one hope that Northern Ireland would be included in the itinerary. I do believe that such a visit, to whatever part of Northern Ireland, would help build up community relations in general.

Naturally, a papal visit would have an ecumenical dimension and I would hope that the Church of Ireland would take such an opportunity not only of saying 'welcome' but also of raising, in an open and constructive spirit, some of the difficult matters that still need to be effectively addressed between our two communions. But all of this is still of course a case of 'if and when'.

There are many subjects which could be addressed in reflecting on this report, Bishop, but time imposes its constraints. So, with the foregoing brief observations I have much pleasure in seconding the adoption of the report before us.

Canon Ian M Ellis