

General Synod 2015

Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue: CCUD

Proposed by: the Ven Helene T. Steed, Archdeacon of Clogher, Diocese of Clogher

Embargoed until Delivery.

Archbishops, Bishops, Members of Synod, or as would be said in ecumenical gatherings: Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

Ecumenism, as a formal exercise, has been part of the life of the worldwide Church for more than hundred years (the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910, is considered by many as the starting point for modern ecumenism). It is from then onwards ecumenical dialogues and conversations have taken place between denominations, with different purposes and for varied reasons. Informally, interdenominational collaboration has a much longer history. In ecumenical conversations, methods and themes have been wide-ranging and as you see from the report, the Church of Ireland continues to be very involved and active on this arena.

When I think about ecumenism, its various themes and methods, the image of dance and music come to mind. The music is there and churches and denominations are dancing to the beat of the rhythm. Sometimes the ecumenical dance resembles a disco. Everybody is dancing on their own, and some are better than others. Sometimes, pairs appear on the dance floor. And watching, it is obvious that some have danced for years and years, they know their partners, they know the steps and they enjoy the flow of the music. Even so, these experienced dancers may stumble or step out of rhythm from time to time.

For almost twenty years the Church of Ireland has now danced and become an accomplished dance partner in the Porvoo Communion. The dialogue with Lutherans in Scandinavia has a long history and 1996 saw the formation of what has become the Porvoo Communion. 2016 will be a significant year in our common history and the theme for the celebratory event is twinning and partnership. Or, in other words, bringing people together to share Christian experiences and learning from each other. In this respect, the Church of Ireland has much to contribute. In the Porvoo context, I hope that the Church of Ireland will send two aspiring young dancers to this year's youth pilgrimage who with other young Porvoo members will waltz along the Way of St James to Santiago de Compostela.

A few years back, the Church of Ireland was asked to begin dancing with the Moravian Church in Britain and Ireland. From early on it was obvious that, despite not having previously danced together, we both knew the steps and this dance adventure is now moving on and appears in the Standing Committee Report as appendix L, pp. 239-243.

Last year an informal dance begun, as a small delegation met with the Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and some of his colleagues. It is our hope that that venture will continue and bear fruit.

The Church of Ireland continues to take an active part in the life of the *Irish Council of Churches* and the *Churches together in Britain and Ireland* as well as internationally through the *Conference of European Churches* and the *World Council of Churches*. The Bishop of Connor has been appointed to the Central Committee of the WCC and in the CCUD report he vividly shares some of his experiences.

Last year the CCUD established a European Affairs working group. We are grateful to those who have agreed to be part of that group and to share their expertise.

Since the last meeting of the General Synod, two of the CCUD dancers have moved on to different tasks and roles. We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to Revd Darren McCallig who has been instrumental in our interfaith work. Likewise we would like to thank Mr Philip McKinley for his commitment and contribution to the CCUD.

CCUD is fortunate to have such experienced and knowledgeable officeholders who very well know the many ecumenical dance steps as well as make sure that our choreography is of highest possible standard. Sincere thanks.

Finally, in all our ecumenical and interreligious dance adventures, let us not forget who the Lord of the Dance is. As the late Japanese Protestant theologian Kosuke Koyama (1929-2009) suggests, it is good to dance with a limp, as it prevents us from becoming overzealous.

I have much pleasure in commending the report of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue.