

Committee for Christian Unity – Report 2007

COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Report 2007

MEMBERSHIP

The Archbishops and Bishops (Most Rev RL Clarke, Chairman from March 2007)

Rev Patrick Comerford	Ven Gregor McCamley
Rev Canon David Crooks	Mrs Roberta McKelvey
Rev Canon Dr Ian Ellis	Dr Kenneth Milne (Hon. Sec. from March 2007)
Very Rev Leslie Forrest	Mr Trevor Morrow
Rev Robert Gray	Rev Daniel Nuzum
Rev Sandra Hales	Rev Derek Sargent
Mr Sam Harper	Rev Gillian Wharton
Mrs Ruth Heard	Rev Canon Trevor Williams
Rev Iain Knox	Mrs Andrea Wills
Rev Canon Walter Lewis	

In the course of the year we received with regret the resignation of the Chairman, the Rt Rev Michael Jackson, Bishop of Clogher, who had kindly undertaken to hold that office for one year. We were also sorry to receive the resignation the Rev Daniel Nuzum, who had discharged the office of Honorary Secretary for six years. We thank them both for their contribution to our work and are glad that they are prepared to continue their membership of the committee.

THE FUTURE OF THE COMMITTEE

1. As reported to the General Synod in 2006 (*Book of Reports 2006*, p.323), in response to a request from the Standing Committee we embarked on a thorough evaluation of our work with a view to producing proposals for the future role of the committee as it seeks to serve the Church. This process has now been completed. As we considered our remit, a number of significant suggestions emerged, most of which comprise the resolutions now being presented to the General Synod, the most significant of these relate to our unanimous conviction that the new structuring proposed – a more proactive approach to ecumenical endeavour and to inter-faith dialogue-is called for. Coupled with this conviction is the belief of the committee that the many ecumenical and inter-faith issues that present themselves in a new light in a radically changed Ireland require theological reflection and appraisal by all the Christian traditions on the island. It seems to us that the Church of Ireland is well-positioned to promote such a re-evaluation of the theology and ecclesiology of ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue today.

2. Our terms of reference imply the following areas of study and action:
 - (a) **Relationships within Anglicanism**, which would be a new departure for the committee. The Porvoo relationship would come within this area, and we would recommend that while it would remain the responsibility of the existing Porvoo Contact Group, a specific relationship between that group and our committee should be established.
 - (b) **Relationship between the different Christian traditions**. Our recommendation is that the Covenant with the Methodist Church should continue to be the concern of a special group, as at present, but the group would link formally with this sub-group.
 - (c) **Relationship between different faiths**
3. Each of the above categories of responsibility calls for a considerable amount of attention if Church of Ireland commitment to ecumenism is to be taken seriously by others. It is something of a cliché to say that the ecumenical movement is becalmed at present, and we have to ask to what extent we as a church, bear some responsibility for this state of affairs. While undoubtedly we make the correct ecumenical noises, to what extent is this mere rhetoric, unsupported by action? There seems to have been little activity on the part of the committee that could be regarded as proactive, even less that could be considered as serious theological or ecclesiological appraisal of the present situation and future possibilities. This situation may to some extent result from an infirmity of purpose: but it also owes not a little to the fact that the Church of Ireland, which indeed allocates substantial sums of money to provide for membership of ecumenical bodies, has not maximised the potential for the parishes of our belonging to such bodies, while providing less than significant funding for a committee charged with such grave responsibilities.
4. We are therefore proposing a *modus operandi* largely modelled on that of the Church and Society Committee. This would entail the formation of panels or working-groups, one each for (a) relationships within Anglicanism, (b) relationships between the different Christian traditions and (c) relationships between different faiths. Each panel would have a chairperson (appointed by the Committee for Christian Unity) and an honorary secretary appointed from within the group. Each panel would comprise some members of the Committee for Christian Unity, but would be free to co-opt members for specific areas of study and action. It would be the responsibility of the Chairman and Honorary Secretary of the Committee for Christian Unity to ensure that the panels discharged their duties, that their work was co-ordinated and that action was taken. In the event that the proposals outlined above are adopted, considerable demands will be made on the membership of the committee. Each panel will require the energetic support of committee members.

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In addition, consultations will have to take place with the General Synod Office to secure additional support of personnel and other resources.

ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

1. Of recent months, as may be imagined, much of our time has been devoted to endeavouring to propose a fresh way forward for the committee. We have, however, been endeavouring to strengthen our relationships with the various ecumenical bodies to which the Church of Ireland is committed:
 - (a) Meetings have been arranged in Ireland with the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, with the General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and with the President of the Irish Council of Churches.
 - (b) We have nominated Church of Ireland representatives to the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, to be held in Romania in September, and to represent the ‘Celtic Churches’ at the forthcoming meeting of the Meissen Commission (which is concerned with Anglo-German ecumenical links)
 - (c) Church of Ireland Publishing has issued *Guidelines for Interfaith Events and Dialogue*, prepared by the committee and the bishops of the Church of Ireland.

None of the above activity counts for a great deal if it does not impact on the life of the parishes of the Church of Ireland and their members. At the same time, we have a role, indeed a distinctive role, to play in the wider Irish society. It is our earnest hope that the measures that we are putting before the General Synod for its consideration will enable us to discharge these obligations more effectually.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

A report from the Rev Daniel Nuzum on the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006 is appended.

RESOLUTION FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE GENERAL SYNOD 2007

That the name of the Committee for Christian Unity be changed to ‘The Church of Ireland Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue’ and that the following terms of reference replace those of 1995:

- (a) To promote within the Church of Ireland the vision of Church unity;
- (b) To promote and support movements in Ireland towards co-operation among the various Christian bodies;

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- (c) To maintain Church of Ireland membership of, and participation in, national and international ecumenical bodies.
- (d) To address developments within the Anglican Communion;
- (e) To encourage and engage in inter-faith encounter and dialogue.
- (f) To report annually to the General Synod.

APPENDIX

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES – 9th ASSEMBLY FEBRUARY 2006

The 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil from 14 to 23 February 2006. The Church of Ireland (which was one of the founding member Churches in 1948) was represented at this global gathering by Ms Yvonne Naylor and the Rev Daniel Nuzum. This reflection only scratches the surface of what was a very deep experience and we were only able to taste some of what was on offer. The theme of the assembly was *God, in your grace, transform the World*. There were just under 700 delegates and over 3,300 visitors, participants and observers from every part of the world.

Following a long flight and our arrival into the tremendous heat of Brazil, it was obvious that something important was happening in the city of Porto Alegre. There were banners welcoming us at the airport and the recognisable logo of the Assembly was on display at several places in the city en route to the Pontifical University where the assembly was being held. The most visible image of an event such as this is the sheer variety and diversity of the Body of Christ. From every part of the world Christians journeyed to be together to celebrate their oneness in Christ, the communion which already exists through baptism, and to commit to continue on the journey together towards the full visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. It was significant that the first meeting place we encountered as we arrived, and the last as we left the campus each day, was the large worship tent. A reminder that in a very practical way all of our ecumenical encounters should begin and end in the presence of God – in prayer.

The WCC is a fellowship of 348 Churches and that fellowship was expressed in so many ways, not least through our Common Prayer at the beginning and end of each day as we gathered in the large and colourful worship tent. The worship was very creative and led by various traditions

In his opening address the General Secretary, Dr Sam Kobia encouraged us to think of the spiritual base of the ecumenical movement as the ‘festa da Vida’ or ‘feast of life’ and the assembly certainly was that. We engaged with many issues which included Church unity, economic justice, youth overcoming violence, HIV/AIDS, environmental issues, Christianity in Latin America and Christian identity & religious plurality. The Archbishop of Canterbury delivered a superb keynote address during the plenary on Christian identity & religious

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plurality. For many this was the best paper of the Assembly and was very well received. As an aside, this was also the first time that this writer has been at a gathering of our global Anglican family. This was a very enriching experience and the Anglican Communion Office was very helpful in the persons of the General Secretary – our own Rev Canon Ken Kearon - and his deputy, in bringing the Anglican delegates together at various points in the assembly. These included a meeting for young Anglicans and a session with the Archbishop of Canterbury. The local Anglican Bishop, the Most Rev Orlando Santos de Oliveira, who also happens to be the Primate of the Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil, hosted a wonderful party for the Anglican delegates, where we had the opportunity to meet fellow Anglicans from Brazil. What a refreshing encounter it was to communicate with fellow Anglican pilgrims who could not speak English. We also visited the local Cathedral of the Holy Trinity for the Eucharist on Sunday 19th February at which Canon Kearon was the preacher. Once again wonderful hospitality was extended to us. At a time when many think the Anglican Communion is in bad heart let me tell you this was not the case in Brazil or amongst the Anglican delegates at the Assembly. I, for one, was thrilled to be an Anglican and give thanks to God for the rich diversity and sense of family in our Communion.

This was the first Assembly of the WCC to take place in South America and it was a delight to have a very strong South American input into the proceedings both business and plenary. The Moderator of the newly-elected Central Committee of the WCC is the President of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, the Rev Dr Walter Altmann.

As well as the official business sessions dealing with constitutional matters and reviewing the work of the WCC since the last Assembly in Harare in 1999 and planning for the future, there were also over 200 workshops on offer during the ten days in what was called the 'Mutirão'. This word comes from a Brazilian word meaning 'meeting place' and an opportunity to work together for a common purpose. This Mutirão was a tremendous way to involve so many more people in the life of the Assembly, in particular, and the ecumenical movement in general. It also brought together a wonderful spectrum of interest from around the world in an informal way.

During the business sessions we received the report of the Joint Working Group which is the main contact point between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church. We received their Eighth Report at the Assembly. We also received the report of the 'Special Commission' which was set up following the Harare Assembly to look at Orthodox concerns and participation in the life and prayer of the WCC and the ecumenical movement. The mid term of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence was celebrated at the Assembly and we were privileged to have Archbishop Desmond Tutu to address us on this theme. He also led a peace march in the city of Porto Alegre to inaugurate the annual focus of the decade in South America.

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Towards the end of the Assembly, priorities were set for the next phase of the life of the World Council. Due to financial constraints, budgetary limitations in the years ahead and rapidly changing Church and social contexts, it was agreed that the World Council should do less and do it well. It was in this light that the following four areas were identified as priorities for the new elected Central Committee: unity, spirituality and mission, ecumenical formation (with a particular focus in young adults) and global justice.

The 150 members of the new Central Committee were elected amidst the usual tensions about representation that goes with such a process and there is also a new presidium. Dr Heather Morrow from the Methodist Church in Ireland was elected to serve on the Central Committee. Dr Mary Tanner from the Church of England was elected as the European area President of the WCC.

To have been afforded this privilege to represent the Church of Ireland was very humbling and for that both delegates express their gratitude. We hope that by our presence and participation we were faithful to Christ's prayer for the unity of all. We hope that in some small way we contributed to the ongoing witness to the unity of the Church universal in an age when many are sceptical. We hope that through our participation we will have increased a sense of ownership of the WCC and all that it does and stands for at the grassroots level of our Church. The WCC is our council of Churches. We hope that members of our own Church will be encouraged by the warm sense of family that was experienced by Anglicans at the Assembly. In conclusion, I attach the message from the Assembly to the Churches which was worded in the form of a prayer. I hope that we can say Amen.

Daniel Nuzum
February 2006

“God, in your Grace, Transform the World” Message of the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches: An Invitation to Prayer

Sisters and brothers, we greet you in Christ. As representatives of Churches from all the world's regions, we gather in Porto Alegre, Brazil, meeting in the first decade of the third millennium, in the first assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Latin America. We have been invited here to join in a *feita da vida*, the feast of life. We are praying, reflecting on the scriptures, struggling and rejoicing together in our unity and diversity, and seeking to listen carefully to one another in the spirit of consensus. Meeting in February 2006, we are made aware by Assembly participants of cries arising daily in their home countries and regions due to disasters, violent conflicts and conditions of oppression and suffering. Yet we are also empowered by God to bear witness to transformation in personal lives, Churches, societies and the world as a whole. Specific challenges and calls to action are being communicated to the Churches and the world in the reports and decisions of the Assembly, such as: the quest for Christian unity; our mid-term call to recommitment to the

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Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010); discernment of prophetic and programmatic means to achieve global economic justice; engagement in inter-religious dialogue; full inter-generational participation of all women and men, and common statements addressing the Churches and the world on public issues. The theme of this Ninth Assembly is a prayer, “God, in your grace, transform the world”. In prayer our hearts are transformed, and so we offer our message as prayer: God of grace, together we turn to you in prayer, for it is you who unite us: you are the one God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - in whom we believe you alone empower us for good, you send us out across the earth in mission and service in the name of Christ. We confess before you and all people: We have been unworthy servants. We have misused and abused the creation. We have wounded one another by divisions everywhere. We have often failed to take decisive action against environmental destruction, poverty, racism, caste-ism, war and genocide. We are not only victims but also perpetrators of violence. In all this, we have fallen short as disciples of Jesus Christ who in his incarnation came to save us and teach us how to love. Forgive us, God, and teach us to forgive one another. *God, in your grace, transform the world.* God, hear the cries of all creation, the cries of the waters, the air, the land and all living things; the cries of all who are exploited, marginalized, abused and victimized, all who are dispossessed and silenced, their humanity ignored, all who suffer from any form war of disease, from and from the crimes of the arrogant who hide from the truth, distort memory and deny the possibility of reconciliation. God, guide all in seats of authority towards decisions of moral integrity. *God, in your grace, transform the world.* We give thanks for your blessings and signs of hope that are already present in the world, in people of all ages and in those who have gone before us in faith; in movements to overcome violence in all its forms, not just for a decade but for always; in the deep and open dialogues that have begun both within our own Churches and with those of other faiths in the search for mutual understanding and respect; in all those working together for justice and peace - both in exceptional circumstances and every day. We thank you for the good news of Jesus Christ, and the assurance of resurrection. *God, in your grace, transform the world.* By the power and guidance of your Holy Spirit, O God, may our prayers never be empty words but an urgent response to your living Word - in non violent direct action for positive change, in bold, clear, specific acts of solidarity, liberation, healing and compassion, readily sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Open our hearts to love and to see that all people are made in your image, to care for creation and affirm life in all its wondrous diversity. Transform us in the offering of ourselves so that we may be your partners in transformation to strive for the full, visible unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ, to become neighbours to all, as we await with eager longing the full revelation of your rule in the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. *God, in your grace, transform the world. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Amen.*

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