

## **Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue**

**Revd Canon Patrick Comerford**

**Dublin and Glendalough**

**Embargoed until Delivery**

Archbishops, Bishops, Members of Synod,

For some years now, it has become a common and popular question to ask whether we are living in an “ecumenical winter.”

Once again this year, I am one of the synod members who have been asked to welcome and offer your hospitality to our ecumenical guests. It may appear to some of you that this a polite but nevertheless a mere formality, one of those processes that we go through year after year, listening politely to what they have to see, perhaps asking them a polite question or two in the hotel corridors, reminding them of boring facts about a Presbyterian uncle, or a Methodist cousin, or how strange we felt when we visited a Coptic Church or a Quaker meeting house in a remote or exotic holiday location.

The reality is that away from this main hall and the corridors, away from the formal welcomes and the polite introductions, we have been getting on really well with one another, and indeed some of us are – without being effuse about it – old friends, who have worked with one another and known one another for many years.

It’s a truism that we share more in common than there are barriers that divide us. That goes without saying.

But when it comes to us, to each other, to us as members of the General Assembly – we can, so often, descend into finding – and picking at – what divides us. Please ask yourself whether any of our divisions that we are so conscious of more important than the things that divide us?

The command to love God and to love one another?

The love the Crucified Christ shows to each one of us?

Our common baptism?

Or, to be more reductionist but nevertheless practical, our shared membership of the Church of Ireland and our shared, common identity as Anglicans?

And, even if physically I am not pointing a finger, mentally you may be now imagining I am pointing a finger. So let me confess, that every time I consider our failures in General Synod to show that love, I have to remind myself of that old saying from Ray Davey and the Corrymeela Community, “Every time you point a finger at someone, remember four other fingers are pointing back at you.”

Every time I point a finger at someone – in this General Synod, in the Church of Ireland, in the Anglican Communion – four other fingers are pointing back at me.

The truth is, we are all expert hands when it comes to pointing fingers.

We probably invest more energy into our relationship with other Churches than we do when it comes to our relationships within our dioceses, within the Church of Ireland, within the wider Anglican Communion.

So, logically, Anglican Affairs are an equal and important part of the agenda for the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue, alongside Ecumenical Affairs, alongside Ecumenical Affairs, Interfaith relations, and monitoring our place within all that happens in Europe.

The Revd Darren McCallig, who is second this report and Motion No 26, is going to speak on Interfaith relations, and some of the interesting work that is going on in this area.

When it comes to Ecumenical Affairs, could I draw your attention to those parts of the report in particular that refer to the exciting new dialogue that has opened up with the Moravian Church [p. 330] and to put work as a Church within the Porvoo Communion [pp 329-330], which includes conferences and consultations in Turku on migration, and in Edinburgh and Dublin on *diakonia* and diaconal ministry.

In addition, as part of the work of the commission, and mainly through the energies of one of our secretaries, the Revd Niall Sloane, has also created a directory of Anglican, Porvoo, ecumenical and inter-faith links, which is available at this website address: [www.ireland.anglican.org/ccud/directory](http://www.ireland.anglican.org/ccud/directory)

But our inter-Anglican relations are important too. I among those who think that the divisions within Anglicanism are not only a sad scandal, but are also a barrier to effective mission. No matter where I stand on the current debates that are dividing Anglicanism, I have to ask myself what I am doing to promote the mission of the Church, what am I doing to promote unity within the Anglicanism I love and that I love being a part of?

One of the most effective examples of the way unity and mission come together in the sphere of Anglican affairs is provided in the recent work that was carried out at the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC-15), where the Church of Ireland was represented by my colleague at the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, the Revd Dr Maurice Elliott.

The ACC is one of the four instruments of communion in the Anglican Communion – alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates' Meeting and the Lambeth Conference. And lest you think ill of meetings such as the Anglican Consultative Council, lest you think of international gatherings such as this as being irrelevant to the life, witness and mission of the Church of Ireland, let me tell you a little of some of its work.

The ACC meeting revised the five marks of mission to so that the Fourth Mark of Mission now reads: “To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation” (ACC 15.34).

The debates and resolutions cover important issues including health, the environment, refugees and migrants, people trafficking, gender-based and domestic violence, violence and the family, youth work, development and relief work through the Anglican Alliance, the Bible in the life of the Church, “Safe Church” networks, our relations with other churches and other people of faith, peace, and Indaba, which is all about how we talk to one another as Anglicans.

Naturally, as you can imagine, Maurice was interested in how these and so many other topics feed into the life of the Theological Institute, and therefore in the life and ministry of the Church of Ireland.

These are not dead resolutions that die when the paper we find them on is fed through the office shredder. They are vital to the life of the Church of Ireland as well as to the witness and mission of Anglicans worldwide.

And so we are in the process of circulating these resolutions to each relevant body, each relevant commission, committee and other bodies, in the Church of Ireland.

What we say to each other as Anglicans, and how we then act on it, shapes how other people see us, and shapes out effectiveness in mission. When these resolutions reach your committee or commission or working group, give thanks to God that as Anglicans we can talk to one another, we can work with one another, that we can teach and learn from each other, and that our work together is part of building up the Kingdom of God.

The Mission Statement of the House of Bishops issued a few years ago emphasised three priorities and areas of work: Growth, Unity and Service.

All three priority areas are reflected in the priorities found at ACC -15. This is not an abstract, theoretical intra-Anglican search for co-operation and unity. It really invites us to be concerned for those on the margins, those on the outside, that we exist for as a Church, calling them through our mission and through the Church into experiencing the liberating joys of the Kingdom of God.

And that makes the work of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue not only an exciting task, but a joyful part of living out the kingdom. In fact, it makes all our own internal differences seem so insular and inward looking.

And so, I ask you to receive the report of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue.

[Seconded by the Revd Darren McCallig, Dublin and Glendalough]

**Motion 26:**

That the following be appointed members of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue: [names on Papers]

Seconded by the Revd Darren McCallig, Dublin and Glendalough