

COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIALOGUE REPORT 2024

MEMBERSHIP (20)

A Bishop (Chairman): The Bishop of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe
WCC Representative: VACANT
ACC Representative: Rev Canon Katharine Poulton
ACC Representative: Mr Glenn Moore
Porvoo Contact Group Person:
The Rev Canon Helene Tarneberg Steed (resigned 2023)
The Rev Canon Stephen Fielding (appointed 2023)
An Honorary Secretary of General Synod: Rev Canon Malcolm Kingston
Hon Records Secretary: Rev David White
Hon Secretary: Very Rev Niall Sloane
The Archbishop of Dublin
The Bishop of Derry
Rev Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum
Rev Dr Christine O’Dowd Smyth
Rev Suzanne Cousins
Ms Cate Turner
Canon Dr Kenneth Milne
Ms Gina Copty (appointed 2023)
Rev Abigail Sines (appointed 2023)
Rev Canon Kevin O’Brien (appointed 2023)
Mr Femi Atoyebi (appointed 2023)
Dr Bridget Nichols (appointed 2023)
Dr Ryan Hawk (appointed 2023)

INTRODUCTION

The Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue was first established by the General Synod as the Home Reunion Committee in 1905 and assumed its current name in 2007. The Commission was previously known as the Committee for Christian Unity.

Its terms of reference are:

- To promote within the Church of Ireland the vision of Church unity;
- To promote and support movements in Ireland towards co-operation among the various Christian bodies;
- To maintain Church of Ireland membership of, and participation in, national and international ecumenical bodies;
- To address, in consultation with the Standing Committee, developments within the Anglican Communion;
- To encourage and engage in inter-faith encounter and dialogue;
- To report annually to the General Synod.

The membership consists of up to 20 members elected annually by the General Synod.

The Church of Ireland has a rich network of relationships with fellow Anglican churches and other Christian traditions within Ireland and overseas. It is a member of the Anglican Communion and the following ecumenical networks:

- the Irish Council of Churches (ICC);
- the Irish Inter Church Committee;
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI);
- the Conference of European Churches (CEC);

- the World Council of Churches (WCC);
- the Porvoo Communion (which brings together Anglican and Lutheran Churches); and
- the Reuilly Common Statement (between Anglican and French-speaking Protestant Churches).

As an observer on the Meissen Commission, the Church also has links with the Evangelical Church in Germany.

The Commission on Christian Unity and Dialogue's three working groups focus on Anglican, European and inter-faith matters.

The **Anglican & Ecumenical Affairs Working Group** considers the Church's relations within the Anglican Communion and within the Porvoo Communion, and with the Moravian Church. More information on the Anglican Communion is available at www.anglicancommunion.org

The **European Affairs Working Group** works closely with the ICC's European Affairs Committee and the CEC to discuss and consider common concerns for European Churches.

The **Inter-Faith Working Group** seeks to build relationships and encourage dialogue with people from other faiths who are living in Ireland.

The Church of Ireland is in full communion with the other members of the Anglican Communion and Porvoo Communion, the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches, and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Relations between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland are covered by the Covenant Council.

The Commission's members attend the annual conferences of other Christian denominations in Ireland and hold regular meetings with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Presbyterian Church.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Once again, the following pages set before General Synod members and other readers the vast terrain covered by the CCUD and in particular by its working groups as we seek to support the Church's ecumenical vocation. It may sound a trifle self-righteous to say it, but for a small church our level of commitment to wider conversations and international ecumenical structures is frankly remarkable. We owe a great deal to our Commission and Working Group members for whom all of this is a time-consuming labour of love. And in this context once again the indispensable work of our Honorary Secretary, Dean Niall Sloane deserves particular praise. How he keeps his co-ordinating eye on so many evolving issues and dialogues is quite miraculous.

It would be easy to single out many other individual members for special praise also, but on this occasion, I really must mention Canon Dr Kenneth Milne who is stepping down from most of his work with us and in particular from the task of steering the European Affairs Working Group. I have at this stage a fairly long memory myself of the affairs and counsels of the Church of Ireland, and throughout my lifetime Dr Milne has always 'been there', a unique repository of wisdom and experience. Long before the demanding era of Brexit, and much encouraged by figures such as the late Archbishop Donald Caird, he and others realised that the Church of Ireland must work with other churches to allow the voice of faith to be heard in the European public square, and that opportunities offered in the European treaties for that voice to be sounded must be taken up. To this task over recent years Dr Milne has devoted himself indefatigably, travelling to a myriad of events, networking with key people in Brussels and in Ireland, writing an array of papers, familiarising himself with so many of the issues being addressed by the European institutions. And all of this is not arcane or theoretical work ... European policies affect people on the ground, from farmers to small businesses, in their decisions and their discipleship and therefore the churches must engage with the formulation of those policies. Dr Milne deserves hearty gratitude for being one of those who, in the immortal words of the late President Jacques Delors who died last December, worked tirelessly to give 'a soul' to the European project.

One historic ecumenical moment deserving mention is being planned at the time of writing of these few words. In 2022, after a long shared theological journey of discovery, the Church of Ireland and the Moravian Church of the Province of Britain and Ireland entered into a special relationship involving interchangeability of ministry by decision of both their Synods. This has been based upon what I think will come to be known as the Armagh Agreement. A liturgical celebration of all that has been achieved together is to take place on March 18, 2024. There will be a single seamless liturgy celebrated partly in St Patrick's Ballymena and partly in the Moravian church at Gracehill. At the ministry of the Word in Ballymena the archbishop of Armagh will preach;

at the ministry of the Sacrament in Gracehill Bishop Sarah Groves will preside. Commemorative trees will be planted and much fellowship enjoyed. The Armagh agreement brings the Moravian Church (as is already the case with the Methodist Church in Ireland) into a relationship of remarkable closeness to the Church of Ireland in terms particularly of ministry, and this can only be a source of joy and mutual strengthening. The Moravian church may appear to be very small on this island, but we have much to learn from it, not least its cherishing of a non - diocesan yet personal understanding of the historic episcopate which rather echoes some of our own Celtic roots. And, even if they are not quite aware of it, anyone who enjoys a Christingle service is immediately indebted to the Moravian tradition!

Our new enriched relationship is timely at a moment when Bishop Groves is about to take up the presidency of the Irish Council of Churches, and as a result her voice will be added to the membership of the Irish Church Leaders' Group. We wish her well in all she undertakes, and we gratefully congratulate the bishop of Derry and Raphoe on his energetic and imaginative two year presidency of the ICC, which included its historic centenary meeting - a truly memorable event - in 2023 in Limerick.

And at the mention of Limerick, I will as it were set down my pen, and ask you to consider carefully the rich and varied content of the pages that follow.

Michael Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe
The Rt Rev MAJ Burrows,
Chair

ECUMENICAL INSTRUMENTS

Considerations of space allow for only limited coverage of the work of the ecumenical instruments to which the Church of Ireland belongs. Their respective websites (given below) should be consulted for detailed reports. Full particulars of Church of Ireland membership of ecumenical organisations and their remit may be found in the appropriate directory on the Church of Ireland website (www.ireland.anglican.org).

ANGLICAN & ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP

Membership

Very Rev Susan Green, Rev Julie Bell, Canon Maurice Elliott, Mr Glenn Moore, Canon Daniel Nuzum, Rev Canon Katharine Poulton (Convenor), Canon Stephen Fielding and Ms Cate Turner (Hon. Secretary)

The group continues to meet via zoom which is convenient for the scattered membership.

The Very Rev Susan Green and Mr Glen Moore attended the Anglican Consultative Council meeting in Ghana. They spoke to the group about their experiences there.

Following publication of the ACC 18 Resolutions, the working group began considering them and plans to conclude this work during 2024.

ANGLICAN AFFAIRS

FOUR NATIONS FAITH AND ORDER CONSULTATION

The Faith and Order Consultation will next meet in May 2025 when the Church of England will be hosting.

THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (ICC: www.churchesinireland.com)

The ICC is an ecumenical Christian body and is a sister organisation of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The Church of Ireland is a founding member of the ICC, which was established in 1923.

The 100th annual general meeting of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) was held in St Mary's Cathedral, on 30th March 2023 – the first occasion that the AGM had been held in Limerick.

The AGM was attended by the following Church of Ireland representatives: the Rt Rev Michael Burrows; Very Rev Niall Sloane; Rev Dr Leonard Madden; Canon Dr Kenneth Milne; Dr Catherine Smith; Dr Nicole Gallagher; Rev Canon Kevin O’Brien; Mr David Ritchie; Rev Suzanne Cousins; Ven John Godfrey; Very Rev Susan Green; Ms June Butler; Ms Ros Stevenson; Ms Cate Turner; Mr Joc Sanders; and Mr Glenn Moore. The Church of Ireland’s four representatives on the ICC Executive Committee were entitled to attend: the Rt Rev Andrew Forster; Ms Georgina Coptoy; Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum; and Dr Bridget Nichols.

The meeting began with a welcome by Cllr Kieran O’Hanlon, Deputy Mayor of the City and County of Limerick. The opening address was then given by the Rt Rev Andrew Forster, who spoke of the work of peace and of developing ecumenical relations that has taken place since 1923, and particularly since the signing of the Good Friday agreement, 25 years ago. He concluded by drawing attention to his pectoral cross, which is made of bog oak: the likelihood is that the particular oak tree from which it is carved was growing and flourishing when Columba was in Derry. Derry is a city which is used to being referred to by several names – Londonderry and Stroke City among them – and the work of peace there is ongoing, and shaped by a recognition of the importance of journeying together as the family of God.

Once the business of approving the ICC’s minutes, annual report, and accounts, and the appointment of its Executive, was concluded, the Rt Rev Michael Burrows, Bishop of Tuam, Limerick, and Killaloe, provided the keynote address, “Serving a 21st century Ireland in peace, reconciliation and justice”, in which he set out a series of ten dreams which face the Church in the coming generation. The dream with which he began was one of turning the tide of biblical illiteracy together and to give to those who ask of us a reason for the hope that is in us, and to do so intelligently wherever conversation takes place. Another of the dreams was that of receptive ecumenism – a mutuality of shared positive insight as opposed to suspicion. To adopt and embrace the true possibly is to free us from the tyranny of negative self-definition. For far too long, the Irish churches have defined themselves by looking at others and saying they do that, therefore we don’t. However, he noted that receptive ecumenism – walking in parallel – can take us only so far. There is a danger that a journey may become internal and the destination never be reached. the danger of resting in plateau of niceness and feeling that it should be left to others to enter a new place - He challenged the audience to keep the doors open to how the world sees us, and so do our business that those who would like to be our friends are not alienated. He concluded by speaking of a recent conversation class at which he asked the group to suggest a potential 11th commandment, and all of them spoke of environmental concerns. The Bishop suggested that if God were writing on stone now, he would command us to cherish creation and renew the face of the earth.

Mrs Gillian Kingston, of the MCI former ICC president provided the response to the keynote address. reflected on where we have come from, noting that a hundred years ago, the us/them situation was present ecclesially and theologically. She spoke of how, in the 1990s, the revelations of abuse of children and adults that had taken place in many Churches created a shock and revulsion, leading to disillusionment and antagonism towards faith-related matters.

She asked what our vision is for the next hundred years, and used a title of a book published by the Rev Canon Dr Ian Ellis, whom many will remember as a long-time editor of the CoI Gazette, which was Vision and Reality. She noted that Scripture has an unchanging place in the life of faith, but what does change is our interpretation of it. For instance, 1 Peter 3 – there are now more slaves on the face of the earth than there have ever been.

She then spoke of the changes in ecumenism and the challenges, bringing up the notion of the “dead mouse gift”, which is something that is offered to you with great pride, but which you don’t in the least want to take. To avoid offering our ecumenical partners a dead mouse, we must actively engage in conversation with each other about the things that divide us. We cannot ignore these things and leave it to those who come after us. And we must include people of other faiths with us and beside us, so that our ecumenism is as wide as possible. Can we complain that our church pews and chairs are empty, if we’re not welcoming and hospitable? She concluded by noting that certain tasks are assigned to us by the circumstances in which we live, but that our constant task is the unfinished and continual work of peace.

Thanks to the Dean of St Mary’s for his generous hospitality, and to all who helped on the day to ensure that this stimulating and thought-provoking event ran smoothly.

Catherine Smith
March 2023

IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING (IICM: www.churchesinireland.com)

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) was established in 1973 as a forum between ICC's member churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The current Co-Chairs are the Most Rev Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, and the Rt Rev Andrew Foster, Bishop of Limerick, President of the Irish Council of Churches.

The thirty-third Irish Inter Church Meeting took place on Thursday 19, October to Friday 20, October in Dromantine Conference Centre, Newry. The theme for the meeting was “Our Reconciling Vision of Hope: Fifty years since the Ballymascanlon Talks.” After a warm welcome from co-chair Bishop Andrew Forster, Dr Ian Ellis set the context for the delegates by discussing the priorities, challenges and achievements of the early years. In honour of the centenary of the Irish Council of Churches and the fiftieth anniversary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, Dr Ellis was invited to write a book to reflect the history of the churches across the island working together. Dr Ellis used some of the themes highlighted in his book, *Called to be One*, to inspire the delegates through underscoring the influential role churches played in stepping across deep divisions. Dr Ellis challenged delegates to question whether we are doing as much as we can, and if our actions speak louder than our words.

The keynote speaker, Fr Martin Browne, from the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, explored current dynamics in international inter-church relations. Fr Browne shared how recent developments in international ecumenical work have influenced what is happening in the Irish context. Browne argued that on the island of Ireland, the story of ecumenism has been intertwined with the story of the troubles. Although reconciliation is still needed, the relative peace of the past years has made it easier for churches to relate to each other as ecumenical partners. Yet new member churches are less familiar with the history of the troubles and we must be cognisant of that point in relating to them. Browne argues that although reconciliation remains a necessity, the vision for the future must also include unity, and that the verse “that they will all be one” remains behind all our hopes and prayers. Browne stated that the Catholic Church is committed to ecumenical work and he demonstrated this commitment by highlighting an extensive list of initiatives that the Catholic Church is currently involved in.

In the afternoon, a roundtable workshop took place which offered the delegates an opportunity to reflect on their vision for inter-faith relations in Ireland. In the evening, a worship service was conducted giving thanks for the Ballymascanlon Talks and the creation of IICM.

Day two of the conference began with morning prayer led by the Lutheran Church. In the morning session, Rev Dr Donald Watts (Presbyterian Church in Ireland) shared some of the positive accomplishments of IICM and highlighted many of its initiatives over the years. Dr Watts argued that ecumenism means being involved in a dynamic movement rather than a static structure. He shared how a review of IICM led to the development of its vision, purpose and values and how that in turn led to the development of its logo and strapline of “Churches in Ireland - Connecting in Christ” which links the work of IICM and ICC.

A panel consisting of Bishop Sarah Groves (Vice President of ICC), Rev Dr Heather Morris (Secretary of Conference for the Methodist Church in Ireland) and Dr Damian Jackson (IICM joint secretary), explored the current challenges to our vision of a more connected Church in Ireland, and offered opportunities for closer relationships and collaboration. In this session the aspect of hospitality was discussed as a vehicle to building trusting relationships.

The conference ended with a facilitated discussion to examine how we could build upon and strengthen our unity in diversity over the next 20 years. The conference seemed to be well received by the delegates and generated thought-provoking discussion.

*Gina Copty
October 2023*

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (CTBI: www.ctbi.org.uk)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is an ecumenical organisation. The members include most of the major churches in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It was formed on 1 September 1990, as the successor to the British Council of Churches, and was formerly known as the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland.

Annual General Meeting
Monday 2nd October 2023
Online via Zoom

1. 10.00 am Welcome and Opening

Reflection was given by Graham Sparkes drew on Micah and concluded with prayers for the world. Andrew Forster gave a presentation about the anniversary celebrations of ICC including the symposium held in DCU and the launch of Ian Ellis' book. Liz Harris spoke about her interfaith work especially in Sri Lanka. There, the land especially, is the focus of interreligious and interethnic tensions. The aim of her most recent visit was to assess the relevance of current projects.

2. 10.30 am AGM

Special resolutions included that 'Friends of the Holy Land', 'Sports Chaplaincy' and 'Faith in Later Life, were approved as a Class C member (Bodies in Association) of the Company.

3. 11.00 am General Secretary's Report

Nicola Brady expanded on the CTBI strategic plan which outlines priorities that have been identified, in consultation with member churches, for the period 2023 to 2027. It centres on five priority areas of focus: Strengthening ecumenical engagement in Britain and Ireland; Working together for mission and the common good; Healing society's fractures: identities, borders and nationalities; Working for Global Peace and Justice; and Promoting Ethical and Inclusive Leadership. The full document, 'Endurance: Inspired by Hope', is available here: <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/CTBI-Strategic-Plan-2023-2027-FINAL.pdf>

4. 11.45 am Break

5. 12.00 pm Roundtable: Inter Faith Relations and Public Life

Topic: Across the four nations of Britain and Ireland we have witnessed significant changes in the place of religion and public life. Increasingly secularized, our societies are becoming consciously diverse in terms of religious affiliation. Religious pluralism is now a reality for many of our communities with people of non-Christian faith being increasingly visible in public life. Therefore, in light of these developments (including a Hindu Prime Minister for the UK and a Muslim first minister in Scotland) are we now a society at ease with religious diversity or are there still significant challenges to overcome? We shall explore this question through a panel drawn from different faith traditions – Hindu, Jewish and Muslim.

The Jewish speaker said that true interfaith work is about having the courage to explore differences and not just commonalities. This requires a great deal of respect on all sides, but it opens us to the possibility of mutual enrichment.

The Muslim speaker noted that many people are wary of religion while most people are at ease with multiculturalism. This is something for religious people to ponder.

The Hindu speaker encouraged the need to develop places of reciprocal hospitality.

6. 1.00 pm Close

*David White,
October 2023*

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES (CEC: www.ceceurope.org)

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) was founded in 1959 to promote reconciliation, dialogue and friendship between the churches of Europe at a time of growing Cold War political tensions and divisions.

CEC is a fellowship of some 116 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 National Council of Churches and Organisations in Partnership.

**Report on General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches
Tallinn, Estonia
15th – 20th June 2023.**

General Assembly website: www.2023cecassembly.org

The Conference of European Churches (CEC)

CEC is a fellowship of some 113 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Old Catholic and other reformed churches from countries around Europe, plus 40 National Councils of Churches and partner organisations. It brings together different Christian denominations and of all ages (the main Assembly was preceded by a Youth Assembly) to build bridges between smaller and larger churches and people of all European nations and beyond Europe to provide a valuable platform for dialogue.

CEC priorities are Peace, Justice and Human Rights and it works on many issues. These include dialogue with the European political institutions, peace building initiatives, reconciliation, economic and ecological justice, employment and social issues, bioethics, education for democratic citizenship, migration and asylum and EU policy and legislation. CEC is based in Brussels and is an international non-profit association.

CEC was founded in 1959. It was created as a response to the fragmented and divided Europe of the 1940's and 1950's and the need to surmount political divisions. At this time, a small group of church leaders in Europe, East and West, began to enable churches of Europe to become instruments of peace and understanding. These efforts were formalised when a full-time secretariat was established in April 1968 following CEC's fifth General Assembly in 1967. The Assembly now takes place every five years and this year's Assembly was the 16th.

The assembly was held in the beautiful city of Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. Tallinn is a coastal city that contains one of the most intact medieval walled cities in Europe and yet is surrounded by a flourishing tech industry. The assembly itself met in The Creative Hub. This building was formerly the Tallinn City Central Power Station (1913). After a long hiatus, this stunning industrial complex was renovated and then re-opened in 2015 as an all-purpose creative and events centre. This centre, which cleverly blends the old with the new, was the venue for the main events held during the presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2017.

The General Assembly

The assembly was kindly hosted by the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church and The Orthodox Church of Estonia had as its overall theme "Under God's blessing – shaping the future". Interestingly, with a population of 1.3 million, organised religion in a minority in Estonia. In the words of one speaker, '[Estonians] love God but not organised religion as much'.

Ireland was represented by the Rev Helen Freeburn (Presbyterian Church in Ireland) and myself. Dr Nicola Brady (CTBI) was also present.

The timetable for the assembly was extensive and demonstrated strong civic engagement with our host city. The days were interspersed with worship, business sessions, networking, plenaries, talks and workshops.

The war in Ukraine overshadowed nearly all of the proceedings and it was difficult to forget just how close the assembly was meeting to the Russian border – this was highlighted by the fact that a cruise ship was berthed in the harbour (within eye shot of the venue) unable to travel to St Petersburg (a natural stopping point on a tour of this region of the Baltic).

On the first night of the assembly, the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church hosted a special dinner at the new Cruise Terminal Building where delegates were generously entertained in beautiful surroundings, including some traditional Estonian folk music. I was seated next to the Irish Ambassador to Estonia (James

Sherry) who hails from county Monaghan and it was interesting to learn more about the country from an Irish perspective.

Business Sessions

These sections contained the usual round of committee business, what was unusual was the significant input from members and the tedious election process that CEC has in place.

Speakers

There were a broad range of speakers from theological, academic and political fields. Among them were the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams; His Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch; German sociologist, Prof. Dr Hartmut Rosa and Belarusian politician, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya.

A number of the speakers at the assembly spoke about Europe and indeed, the churches in Europe, being at a cross-roads and there were comments such as:

- *Europe needs to be a space of resonance*
- *The Churches should look at what they have, not what has been lost*
 - *Democracy needs ears as well as a voice.*
- *Europe is not the same at the EU and we need to remember this in our discourse*
 - *Churches are here to offer hope.*

Ukraine

As already reported, the situation in Ukraine dominated the proceedings. There was a dedicated plenary which included speakers from church leaders in Ukraine. Speakers shared first hand experiences of the on-going crisis in Ukraine, and I believe this part of the assembly was one of the most profound and solemn. Some insights shared included:

- *Genocide has come to Ukraine*
 - *A just peace cannot be achieved by giving up the truth*
 - *Only respect for rights of minorities makes a country strong*
- *The historic links between Ukraine and Russia make the war even more traumatic*
- *The prevailing narrative in Ukraine is ‘never forgive, never forget’; therefore, the churches have a role to play in talking about reconciliation*

In addition to the latter comment, it was highlighted of the importance of educating the younger generation ‘post-war’ not to harbour hatred but to move towards reconciliation. Perhaps the Northern Ireland experience and the Irish Council of Churches has something beneficial to add to this piece of work?

Conclusion

The Assembly is perhaps a hybrid between an Ecumenical parliament and a Christian convention. Whilst the primary work of the assembly centres around CEC business I felt there was some clever timetabling to keep delegates engaged.

The Assembly was a positive experience as delegates shared ecumenical fellowship and hospitality in witnessing to Christ. It was enriching to worship and witness with diverse Christians across Europe and listen to and learn from their experience. I wish to thank CCUD and the Church of Ireland for allowing me the opportunity to attend.

Appendix

Message from the CEC General Assembly, Tallinn, June 2023

“Churches engaged in shaping the future of Europe must be imaginative and brave, confident not arrogant, listening not just speaking, trusting not anxious, hopeful not merely optimistic.” Over 300 participants of the 2023 CEC General Assembly, representing CEC Member Churches from across Europe, have come up with the following assembly message, inspiring the church fellowship.

Christians from across Europe met in Tallinn, Estonia, for the 2023 General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches with the theme: Under God’s Blessing – Shaping the Future. The assembly was reminded

that to be blessed is to be freed from anxiety about our own security or control – liberated from imprisonment within our own history or narrative. It is this notion of blessing that guides the churches of CEC in their vocation in a conflicted world.

The keynote speakers reminded the churches that theology is public, that we Christians must embrace the challenge of contributing to an increasingly secularised political discourse. Churches engaged in shaping the future of Europe must be imaginative and brave, confident not arrogant, listening not just speaking, trusting not anxious, hopeful not merely optimistic.

It is because of this vocation that churches, united in Christ and drawn by the biblical witness, are necessarily challenged about developments on European soil. This compels us to face the challenges of the climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, global migration, rising nationalism under a populist banner, challenges to human rights, broader conflicts and outright war. And all these phenomena feed into and from each other: for example, the eco-crisis damages food sustainability for populations which, as a result of conflict over diminishing access to resources, migrate to seek a better life.

In this context, the assembly recognised its obligation under God to hear the appeal of young people whose future increasingly feels to have been betrayed by those who also were young once. We recognise our corporate responsibility for contributing to the eco-crisis and climate injustice which are tied inextricably with economies that seek limitless growth. God’s creation cries out for different priorities.

This assembly has been clear about the following:

- The assembly condemns unequivocally Russia’s brutal invasion of Ukraine and the devastation of life, territory and international relationships – the violent breakdown of the post-war settlement in which the rule of law was paramount. The assembly heard powerful witness by those directly affected and a strong appeal for prayer and practical accompaniment into the future. The assembly stands alongside victims of violence in this war.
- We are concerned about the role of some churches in promoting this appalling conflict, and regret the impact of this divergence on Christian witness on the continent of Europe. While meeting in Tallinn a new chapter in potential European conflict opened up: nuclear weapons were moved into Belarus where democracy and non-violent resistance itself has been suppressed under the current regime. We deeply regret this move.
- The ongoing blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan continues to bring injustice and suffering to people who find themselves oppressed on account of their contested identity and territory.
- Freedom of religion and belief is under serious threat in some parts of Europe - for example, Christian minorities under attack, sacred sites and places of religious heritage being destroyed, and lands being occupied.
- The human cost of global migration, not least on the borders of Europe is enormous. While we met we were shocked to hear that nearly 500 people had drowned off the coast of Greece. CEC and CCME have called for a day of prayer and vigil on 25 June 2023.

Some of these issues are addressed by CEC under the framework of Pathways to Peace.

CEC was originally set up to create a space in which Europeans of diverse history, polity and ethnicity could meet together because of and despite differences of perspective and experience. That vocation continues to apply today – especially given current real and violent divisions in Europe. Christians are inevitably united in Christ, enriched by diversity, and are called to witness to that unity in expressing (in word and action) their concern for those without power, who suffer injustice at the hands of others. This also means holding to account all who inflict injustice on others.

As some of the political movements of our age continue to withdraw behind the securities of borders and narrowly-defined identity, Christian churches do not have the luxury of walking apart from each other. Our conversations, rooted in mutual love and grace, must characterize our priorities in the years to come. Churches

must heed the call of God in Jesus Christ to be agents of hope, prepared publicly to bear the scars of unjust suffering. This means holding out without fear the reconciling life of resurrection hope in Christ who calls us to take responsibility, under God’s blessing, for shaping the future.

*Niall Sloane,
June 2023*

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC: www.wcc-coe.org)

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a worldwide inter-church organization founded in 1948. Its 349 members today include the Assyrian Church of the East, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, most jurisdictions of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, the Old Catholic Church, Anglican Communion, most mainline Protestant churches (such as the Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian and Reformed) and some evangelical Protestant churches (such as the Baptist and Pentecostal).

The 12th Assembly of the World Council of Churches is due to be held in 2030.

MEISSEN (Meissen: www.europe.anglican.org/ecumenical-information-and-links/agreements-and-partners)

The Church of England’s relations with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) are based on the Meissen Agreement, signed in 1991. The Church of Ireland is an observer at meetings and is currently represented by the Rev Canon Maurice Elliott (Church of Ireland).

Meissen Commission Meeting 2023
Church Of England/Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)
Report of the Celtic Churches Observer
(Representative: Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott (Church of Ireland))

The 33rd Meeting of the Meissen Commission,
Loccum, near Hannover, 12-15 October

The Meissen Commission exists to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between the Church of England (COE) and the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (EKD), with five members representing a range of sectors from each tradition. The others who attend Commission meetings are observers on behalf of the Anglican/Episcopal Churches in Germany, the German-speaking Churches in Great Britain, and the three Celtic Anglican Provinces.

This year’s meeting was held in the historic setting of the Predigerseminar in Loccum, a short distance outside Hannover. The seminary was originally a monastery dating back to 1163 and, in what is surely an almost unique arrangement, the Lutheran bishop and Meissen Co-chair, Ralf Meister, is the Abbot. With its magnificent architectural fusing of ancient and modern, the facility at Loccum is genuinely impressive and was recently refurbished at a cost in the region of €20 million. The suite of buildings serves a variety of purposes, including formational training for ordinands on completion of their prescribed university course, a pilgrimage/retreat centre, and a diocesan training hub.

In keeping with the current focus on receptive ecumenism, a major aspect of the Meissen Commission’s work is to enable each church simply to learn more about the other. In addition to the reception of reports, the agenda typically allows the host church to invite guest speakers from range of disciplines. This year the programme began with a fascinating discourse concerning ‘Liberal Democracy and its Opponents’ by Professor Philip Manow from the University of Bremen. Dr Manow broached the issue of populism, suggesting that such movements appear increasingly to defy precise categorisation according to the normal rules of social and economic policy - in German they are what he described as ‘rinks und lechts’, a play on leaning simultaneously towards both ‘left’ and ‘right’. He noted how populist groups can be difficult to control for those in authority – governments who may be challenged by them ‘may find it hard to be responsive, yet they still have to be responsible’. The other noteworthy contribution was an address given by Dr Horst Gorski, a theologian based in Hamburg. Gorski introduced the idea that religious belief contains both ‘hot’ and ‘cold’

aspects – in other words, for faith to be real there must on the one hand be an element of ‘passionate’ individual investment, yet it is precisely because of such deeply grounded personal commitment that religious adherence carries the potential to damage both self and others. On a more upbeat note, Gorski also described the church ‘als Schule des Christentums’, ‘as a School of Christianity’. Faith must be nurtured, and the most natural place for this to occur is during the Sunday gathering. Nevertheless, whilst such nurture must include catechetical instruction, the church cannot lose sight of the fact that its teaching of the faith should always seek to be socially practical. As global Anglicanism continues to make its way through the current season of ‘intentional discipleship’, German Lutheranism is traveling in very much the same direction.

Unsurprisingly, the shared stakeholder conversations disclosed many common threads for all the churches – the climate emergency, the war in Ukraine, the consequences for church life of the dramatic rise in living costs across Europe. Of import around all the various contexts is the current reduction in the number of vocations to ordained ministry - the Church of England reported that its quota of students in training was down by approximately 40% - and there continue to be shared concerns in relation to safeguarding and the devastating impact of historical abuse cases. More specifically, the EKD noted that there had been internal tensions between churches of the former West Germany and those in the former East. The presenting issue had to do with church members in East Germany being deeply opposed to Germany’s decision to offer military support to Ukraine on account of their lived experience of Soviet times. For its part the COE voiced concern in relation to its substantial conservative constituency following the General Synod vote to proceed with ‘Living in Love and Faith’, and the EKD was keen to understand the COE’s position vis-à-vis the recent GAFCON meeting in Kigali. One final theme which generated significant discussion arose from a comment in the report of the Scottish Episcopal Church which referenced a project to explore how ‘trauma leads to polarisation’. Even a cursory appraisal of so many aspects of life for the various churches and their respective societies disclosed just how much truth there is in such an assertion.

The Commission ended with agreement as to its future focus and with an update on plans for the next Theological Consultation in February 2024. This will again address the challenge of full interchangeability of ministries between the COE and the EKD. Having failed to make progress with re-visiting historic formularies, the impetus is now towards ‘pragmatic local solutions’. A rigid interpretation of the ‘historic episcopate’, even ‘as locally adapted’, would appear to remain an Achilles’ heel for the COE when it comes to certain ecumenical dialogues.

*Maurice Elliott,
October 2023*

*REUILLY (Reuilly: <http://strasbourginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Reuilly-Declaration.rtf>)
The Reuilly Common Statement calls for a closer relationship between the Anglican Churches of Britain & Ireland and the Elgise Réformée (a grouping of four French Protestant Churches, namely the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France and the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of Alsace and Lorraine).
(Observer: Rev Dr Christine O’Dowd-Smyth (Church of Ireland))*

The next meeting of the Reuilly contact group is due to be held in February 2024 in Leicester.

*COMMUNITY OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN EUROPE (CPCE: <https://www.leuenberg.eu/>)
The CPCE is the umbrella organisation of the protestant churches. 94 lutheran, methodist, reformed and united churches from over thirty countries in Europe and South America belong to it. With that the CPCE represents altogether around 50 million Protestants. The CPCE exists thanks to the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973*

The next General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe is due to take place in 2024

*PORVOO (www.porvoocommunion.org)
The Porvoo Communion of Churches, (with members from the Lutheran Churches in the Nordic and Baltic countries and the Anglican Churches in Britain and Ireland and on the Iberian Peninsula).*

*(Archbishop Michael Jackson, Anglican Co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group
The Rev Canon Stephen Fielding, Church of Ireland Contact Person)*

The Porvoo Communion, which unites the Anglican Churches in Great Britain, Ireland, and the Iberian Peninsula and Lutheran Churches in Nordic countries, the Baltic, and Great Britain, met in October 2023 in Madrid for its Thematic Consultation, ‘Life in the Eucharist’.

The meeting was hosted by Rt Rev Carlos López Lozano, Bishop of Madrid of the Spanish Episcopal Reformed Church, and member of the Porvoo Contact Group. Representatives from the Church of the Faroe Islands were warmly welcomed as they attended in order to initiate a process towards becoming members of the Porvoo Communion in the Church’s own right, having previously been connected through the Church of Denmark.

The consultation started with a Eucharist celebrated in the Cathedral of the Redeemer, led by Bishop López Lozano, and the preacher was the Most Rev Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Anglican co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group.

The participants were introduced to several aspects of the Spanish context in the opening session. Firstly, a paper was given explaining the history and theology behind the Mozarabic eucharistic liturgy used in the Spanish Episcopal Reformed Church, and that the participants had experienced the previous evening. Thereafter, the situation of minority churches in a majority Roman Catholic country and the resulting ecumenical landscape were described in several contributions.

Continuing themes in the first session, the effects of secularisation on the eucharistic life in the churches in Spain was discussed in the second session. Anglican and Lutheran perspectives on eucharistic life were also presented, touching on the challenge of relating this to everyday concerns of people inside and outside the church.

On the second day, the question of what it means to live a sacramental life in communion in 21st century secularised Europe was explored from different geographical contexts, with contributors from Portugal, Estonia, Scotland, and Finland, and followed by general discussion. Most member churches of Porvoo reflected that they work in secular contexts, and sharing sacramental life requires meeting our communities where they are, and therefore being open to changing our own sacramental practice. The sacramental communion within Porvoo must inspire common sacramental life and a consequent commitment to the suffering realities of the world, such as the climate crisis, social deprivation, and people living at the margins. In the afternoon, participants witnessed the celebration of the Spanish National Day as they travelled to Toledo to experience the ‘city of three religions’. The Metropolitan Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain (Roman Catholic Church), Most Reverend Monsignor Francisco Cerro Chaves, welcomed the group to Toledo Cathedral, where blessings and messages of friendship were exchanged.

The consultation gave opportunity for interesting discussion and reflection about what the Eucharist means for the life of the churches in the Porvoo, both within their own contexts and together as a communion. Future major gatherings in the Porvoo Communion will include a church leaders’ consultation on environment and eschatology in Sweden in 2024, and a theological conference in Wales in 2025 marking the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed, and the Primates’ Meeting in 2026.

The Porvoo Contact Group also discussed transitivity and opportunities regarding recognition of those ministering in Lutheran and Anglican churches outside the Porvoo communion and in particular, North America. The online Spring meeting in 2024 will further discuss the possibility of extending transitivity of ordained ministries.

The Church of Ireland was represented in Madrid by:
Archbishop Michael Jackson, Anglican Co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group
The Rev Canon Stephen Fielding, Church of Ireland Contact Person

Work plan for the next three years:

October 2024: Church Leaders' Consultation in Sigtuna, Sweden.

Environment and Eschatology - Hope for Future Generations.

October 2025: Theological Conference in Wales.

The 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed (Council of Nicaea 325)

October 2026: Primates' Meeting – York, England.

The Churches in the Porvoo Communion pray for each other. Every Sunday, dioceses, their bishops, clergy and people are remembered in prayer by congregations, parishes and individuals. The prayer diary for 2024 is found online at: <https://porvoocommunion.org/porvoo-prayer-diary/>

*Stephen Fielding
January 2024*

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS WORKING-GROUP

Membership

Unconfirmed at time of going to press

In 1951, in the aftermath of World War II, six nations in Europe came together to sign the Coal and Steel Treaty, to regulate together the production of these industries (then being) chief among the materials essential for waging war. To-day's European Union has its origins in that agreement, and even the EU's strongest supporters are convinced that its considerable growth in membership (which is likely to increase) demands 'reforms', to its constitution if it is to meet satisfactorily the challenges that face Europe to-day.

Our working-group is enabled to study the need for 'reform' and the EU policies through our membership of such bodies as the Institute for International and European Affairs in Dublin and by participating in events arranged by the Brexit Institute at Dublin City University, as well as through ecumenical instruments such as the Conference of European Churches (CEC). These institutions, by their seminars and many other events and publications address the most pressing issues that face the European Union. These have implications not only for the Republic of Ireland as a member state of the EU, but also for Northern Ireland because of its special trading position whereby sharing an external border of the EU with a member state (the Republic) the Windsor Framework gives it access to the common markets of both the EU and the UK.

In the past year we were represented at a number of IIEA and Brexit Institute events, including an address by Mr Peter Burke, T.D., the Republic's Minister of State for European Affairs, who spoke at the IIEA about the possible enlargement of the European Union, pointing out that while enlargement is generally regarded as something to be welcomed, membership bringing with it commitment to democratic and other ethical values, he emphasised its budgetary implications, as many of the present applicants for membership would require considerable financial support. He also spoke of the Irish government's concern that there should continue be a strong Irish presence at official level in the various institutions of the EU.

While Brexit is no longer at the top of the EU's agenda (though the Windsor Framework and its consequences still require considerable discussion between the EU and UK) the process whereby Brexit came about is the subject of The EU response to Brexit: united and effective co-edited by Professor Brigid Laffan, formerly Director of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies in Florence. She spoke to the IIEA on how the 'withdrawal' negotiations with the United Kingdom had achieved a degree of solidarity on the part of the member states of the Union that had proved invaluable as it faced the challenges posed by the Covid 19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Migration remains a divisive issue for the member states of the Union (increasingly so it appears in Ireland) and it was the subject of a webinar event at the Brexit Institute at Dublin City University. A similar event focussed on Frontex, the European Border and Coast Agency, which includes a uniformed corps which supports in their management of the Union's external borders the Schengen-related member states that have removed their internal border controls, while also having a concern for the welfare of migrants. Migration could be a major issue at the elections for the European Parliament in 2024, when external 'interference' in

the elections in the individual states is particularly anticipated by misuse of the processes of AI which itself was the subject of two events: a webinar under IIEA auspices led by Professor Michael Woodridge, Professor of Computer Science at Oxford, and a webinar by Zoom at the European Parliament in Brussels, held under the provision of Article 17 of the Lisbon Treaty whereby the EU is committed to regular and meaningful contact with elements of civil society, including the churches. The focus of these occasions was on the vast resources at the disposal of forces, sometimes hostile to democratic values, and for which international regulation is badly needed. The EU ‘Group on Ethics’ has already made a statement on the matter and continues to study how this may best be achieved. Notable was the conviction that AI was here to stay, with considerable possibilities for good, and that the use of robots (which is a very controversial aspect of AI) could be of benefit to humanity. But it had to be borne in mind that robots had no capacity for ‘empathy’.

Never far from discussion at many of the events outlined above was an awareness of what was termed ‘slippage’ on the part of some member states where commitment to EU values was a concern. While the European Union has a legal method of imposing sanctions by removing voting rights from member states that are deemed to be ‘slipping’ this procedure has never been invoked, and the suggestion has been aired that a more appropriate way of dealing with the situation where, for instance, democratic values are perceived to be under threat, would be a more extensive use of ‘Qualified Majority Voting’ to a wider area of decision-making so that ‘unanimity’ would no longer be mandated in some areas in which it still obtained.

*Ken Milne,
December 2023*

INTER FAITH WORKING GROUP

Membership

Mr Femi Atoyebi, Rev Suzanne Cousins (convenor), Rev Alistair Doyle, Mr David Reynolds, Rev Abigail Sines, Rev Dr Stephen Skuce (Methodist Church in Ireland)

The work of the committee over the past year, with key points of interest

The Interfaith Working Group (‘IFWG’) continues the practice begun early in the Covid pandemic, of meeting by Zoom and reporting in person or remotely to the subsequent meeting of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue. The Group is pleased to report that it had a productive year since the 2023 General Synod.

First, the updating of the text of the Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue and Events (2007) booklet was completed and approved by the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue and the House of Bishops. The booklet has been redrafted to encourage Church of Ireland parishes and people to view and use positively the everyday dialogue and many opportunities which arise to engage with people of other faiths, as religious demographics in Ireland change. The IFWG expresses gratitude to a number of people who have contributed, advised and proofread the text. The revision includes, amongst other additions, reference to interfaith-related considerations in the contexts of hospital and school chaplaincy work. The working group commends the revised Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue and Events booklet as a fresh and accessible read for anyone in the parishes and dioceses of the Church of Ireland, and the intent is that the booklet is useful also to other churches and denominations. It is hoped also (at the time of writing his report) that the revised booklet will be in print and available on time for the 2024 Interfaith Conference, in May (see below) and General Synod 2024.

Second, the 2023 ‘Dialogue of Friendship’ conference, held in May 2023 in the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin, drew a good attendance from a wide range of churches, communities and interest groups. The conference was organised by the IFWG in pleasant and positive partnership with the faith stream of Places of Sanctuary, Ireland. This partnership is important, not least on account of the IFWG with CCUD, having been entrusted, as referred to in last year’s report, with the task of being the Church of Ireland’s voice for Refugees. An introduction to the day was delivered by the Archbishop of Dublin, the Most Rev Dr Michael Jackson, who set a reflective tone and framework for the keynote speaker, the Rev Dr Stephen Skuce (Methodist Church in Ireland). Dr Skuce’s engaging contribution was followed by a Q&A session, and this along with follow-up discussions to the addresses of secondary contributors, helped ensure that a conference was delivered which was lively and stimulating, and that had both theological and spiritual depth and a

practical and humanitarian focus. The latter focus was enabled by the presentation of several moving and gripping case studies from community and church-based projects showcasing the experience, concerns, gifts and skills of refugees and asylum seekers and those who support them (e.g., the Tullamore Presbyterian Church Welcome project).

All-in-all, ‘The Dialogue of Friendship’ conference was felt by members of the working group to have been a worthwhile and enjoyable event and a good foundation on which to build. This year’s conference, due to take place on Saturday 25th May in Wesley House Dublin, is being planned along similar lines, with the (provisional) title, ‘The Dialogue of Friendship: Countering voices of enmity’. The keynote speaker is the Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills (Episcopal Church of Scotland) who was honoured in the 2022 Lambeth Awards for her longstanding dedication to the building of interfaith relationships.

The IFWG, also in 2023, organised an online Scriptural Reasoning event in collaboration with the Cork 3 Faiths Forum on the theme of ‘Creativity’. The group plans to hold a similar event, in 2024, not least as a means to meaningful engagement with our Jewish friends and colleagues who are unable to attend Saturday events and the Dialogue of Friendship conference.

Other

Last year’s report referred to the intention of creating a wider COI Interfaith Forum consisting of a network of diocesan representatives which would meet once or twice per year and would help equip parishes to develop pastoral and theological responses to interfaith challenges, issues and dilemmas arising in an increasingly multi-cultural Ireland. While the envisaged forum is still very much in formation, members of the IFWG, with CCUD, are grateful that the net has been cast by the bishops and that progress is being made.

Historically, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation Programme (IRDC) which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2022, has been significant in helping this group assist the Commission in keeping abreast and engaging with developments in inter faith matters beyond these islands. More recently, due to administrative changes within its office, coupled with the after effects of the pandemic, the flow of initiatives and exchange in communications has waned. We are hopeful that there will be a renewal in this regard in the year ahead.

More positively, we wish to pay tribute to the editorial team of Search Journal which continues to source and supply excellent voices and insightful articles addressing current interfaith and interreligious matters. Independent of but supported by the working group, it is good to be able to report that the Church of Ireland was able to mark and express publicly its support for Holocaust Memorial Day in 2023, with the assistance of the Armagh Diocesan Communications Officer Mr Jonathan Hull, in recording a conversation between the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, Most Rev John McDowell, and HMD Trust Northern Ireland representative, Mrs Shirley Lennon. This took place in St Patrick’s Cathedral, Armagh, and was followed by the symbolic action of lighting of the Holocaust Memorial Day candle, representing the will to keep alive the memory of those who lost their lives in the Holocaust and in other genocides. The theme was ‘Ordinary People’. This year a similar project and conversation was undertaken in Belfast Synagogue, with Rabbi David Kale hosting the party. The theme ‘The Fragility of Freedom’ was addressed and video recordings made, to be published online ahead of the Day (27th January).

*Suzanne Cousins,
December 2023*

Appendix 1 ~ Annual Church Meetings

Yearly Meeting of Quakers Ireland, the Religious Society of Friends

The Ireland Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) took place in the Dominican Retreat Centre, Tallaght, Dublin, from 13th to 16th April with Special Interest Groups meeting online from 9th to 12th April. The theme was: ‘Building Community Together’ drawing on ‘... let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.’ (Hebrews 10:24-25) It was a hybrid meeting.

The Meeting was chaired by Denise C Gabuzda, Clerk along with Assistant Clerks Pleasaunce M Perry and Hugh O’Farrell Walsh. Other churches represented were the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

A few highlights:

War and Peace:

Promoting and preparing for peace is still a crucially important topic for Quakers, especially as the war in Ukraine and other global conflicts continue. Several speakers discussed peace-building carried out by various Quaker and other organisations. As Quakers, they are faced with the dilemma that they hold a variety of views of their Peace Testimony, and pacifism and prayer alone will not stop war.

Quaker Council for European Affairs:

Tracey Martin from this office which is based in Brussels gave a presentation, ‘Working for Justice and Peace in a Time of Climate Crisis’. She contended that the Quakers can work across issue boundaries, that they are values driven with a non-confrontational approach, are independent in that they are not funded by the EU and can be a convener of challenging conversations. The kind of change which they focus on comes under the umbrella of peace. The particular issues are climate crisis, migration, and dialogues for transformation. Their approach is that complex problems can only be solved if people with differing views are able to listen to each other. QCEA, it was claimed, is one of the few organizations in Brussels that can do this kind of work.

Food:

A discussion group with the theme ‘Food for Thought – a Conversation about Food and the Food System’ was facilitated by South Belfast EcoQuakers. Our food system contributes hugely to the planetary climatic and ecological emergencies. We took a journey of learning and discernment, guided by Quaker commitments to simplicity, stewardship, and sustainability.

Public Lecture:

The public lecture was given by Harvey Gillman who reflected on communion and community in a lecture entitled ‘Hospitality and the Pilgrim’. Harvey’s various descriptions of himself as a restless nomad, a poet, a seeker, a finder and a linguist made for an entertaining exploration of the topic. Exiled from his childhood Jewish community in England, he eventually found his way to a Quaker meeting almost forty-five years ago and felt at home. Hospitality for Harvey is a form of testimony, an outward sign of an inward grace, where you offer the home, you have found and welcome others in. Spiritual hospitality is an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. Our lives and that of the earth are fragile, and we must love and nurture each other.

Other Presentations included:

‘Quaker Connections’ (work in Northern Ireland prisons) by Shane Whelehan, ‘Our Church Communities in the Aftermath of the Pandemic’ by Ruth Garvey–Williams (Vox magazine), ‘Fostering Community through Inter-Church and Inter-faith Encounter’ by James Nelson and ‘The Community of Early Friends’ by Stuart Masters (Woodbrooke).

Some Workshops included:

Art Workshop with John O’Flynn, Reflective Poetry Reading with Colm Heffernon, Life Reflections workshop with Dan Flynn and International folk dancing with Denise Gabuzda.

*David White
April 2023*

Report on the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church 2023

The General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church took place between 8 and 10 June this year, the dates deliberately chosen to coincide with St Columba's Day. The venue again was St Paul's and St George's Church (popularly known as P's and G's) on York Place in Edinburgh. The General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church has approximately 140 members and so is considerably smaller than our General Synod. While most members attended in person this year, the option of attending online was also availed of by some.

The first day began with an opening Eucharist which was concelebrated by the bishops. The Primus preached, setting the tone for the business of synod, and avoiding the necessity of a presidential address. After the service, the bishops joined the members at round tables and contributed to the discussions in that context. The seating was allocated and at my table for the three days were three lay people, a priest and the Bishop of Edinburgh. This style of seating allowed you to get to know those at your table and it encouraged input from each when we were asked to consider specific items on the agenda in small groups and feed back our responses to the full synod. While the three houses of laity, clergy and bishops vote separately, they sit together throughout the meeting. The results of votes were available almost immediately as members present, and those participating remotely, were asked to register a device which they would then use for all votes. This greatly aided efficiency.

On the first day, some routine administrative matters and elections were dealt with promptly. The report of the investment committee was presented, and it was noted that some shrewd investments in communications companies in the immediate precovid period had yielded generous returns. Some of this income was being allocated towards environmental policy. A motion was passed which stated, 'that this Synod request the Standing Committee to approve the provision of such funding as the Committee considers appropriate, in consultation with the Provincial Environment Group, to support implementation of the Net Zero Action Plan (2023-2030) for the Scottish Episcopal Church.' Day one also included a presentation by the College of Bishops called 'God's Church for Scotland?' The members in their groups were asked to feed back their considered responses to what they had heard, using open ended questions around the Five Marks of Mission. Having considered these overnight, the bishops gave their initial responses the next day and undertook to examine them further as they set their priorities going forward.

Day two started with the report of the Mission Board. Then for the first time, normal business was suspended to allow for an address by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, who is currently the Rt Revd Sally Foster-Fulton. This is reflective of the greater degree of cooperation, dialogue and fellowship between both churches in recent years. It was interesting to note that the method of electing bishops is under review. While the proposed changes were accepted, the Scottish Episcopal Church still holds to a model of election by each diocesan synod for their bishop, rather than by an electoral college made up of representatives from the vacant diocese and the wider church. Of particular interest to me was the final part of the day which considered the work of the Liturgy Committee. Sensitivity to the issue of antisemitism in the way scripture passages are handled during Holy Week was referred to at one point, as was the need to be inclusive of and sensitive to the needs of neurodivergent parishioners.

Diocesan commitments at home meant that I could not stay for the full final day of the Synod on the Saturday. However, the first session concerned the important work of the Safeguarding Committee. Like us in the Church of Ireland, the size of the synod is under discussion. A motion was presented and carried, delaying the next review of the formula for diocesan representation and the number of members of the General Synod until the communicant membership statistics are available in 2025. The day concluded with elections to the various committees and boards.

Some closing comments on my experience of the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church might be helpful. I was struck by how social the experience was. This is in many ways a reflection of a smaller gathering and a smaller church. At the end of the first day, it is traditional that a dinner is arranged for all members who wish to avail of it. This year we filled the dining room of the Royal Scots Club. The hospitality was generous

and the atmosphere convivial. Some retired bishops were there including the former Primus Bishop David Chillingworth and his wife Alison, who are known to many of us in the Church of Ireland. The importance of such social events to make new connections and renew friendships, cannot be underestimated. When you hear speakers at the rostrum declare their place of residence as Orkney or one of the Western Isles, where congregations are small and scattered, the opportunity to meet other committed Anglicans over several days must be a great source of encouragement. One member commented favourably that the Diocesan Map in the Book of Reports placed Orkney in its correct geographical position, rather than where it can often be found in a box a few miles off the coast north of Aberdeen! Secondly, seating in banquet style around tables rather than in rows facing forward in auditorium style, results in a very different synod experience. While it will not be possible to adapt such an approach given the size of our General Synod, we should not lose sight of the benefits of such seating for smaller meetings of synods and other committees. The overlapping of some of their concerns and agenda items with the work of our General Synod was no surprise. However, the particular emphasis on and importance of environmental policy in their church was palpable at the synod. We have much to learn from them in this area. The rich deposit of work emanating from their Liturgy Committee was also impressive. In conversation over coffee during one of the breaks, I was delighted to meet a member of this committee who had recently been in Belfast engaging with members of our Liturgical Advisory Committee. As I contemplated the links between Ireland and Scotland on St Columba's Day, I gave thanks for the deep roots of connection which we both still treasure to this day.

+Adrian Wilkinson

PCI General Assembly

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland took place at the Assembly Buildings, Belfast, from Wednesday 21st – Saturday 24th June 2023. On the Wednesday evening the Rt Rev. John Kirkpatrick, the outgoing Moderator gave a brief address on his reflections of his year in office. He talked about the expanding church in Syria and Lebanon. Other memorable occasions included his attendance at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth and the coronation of King Charles.

The new Moderator the Rev Dr Samuel Mawhinney of Adelaide Road, Dublin was elected and installed as the new Moderator. He then introduced his theme for the year 'Confident in Christ' using the quote from Jeremiah 'Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord'. It was decided that, in future, the incoming Moderator will not be installed at the opening meeting. This is to provide them a more specific insight into the work of each council before they take over the Chair of the General Assembly.

For the next 2 days, the business part of the Assembly took place with reports from a number of Councils, questions asked and debates taking place as necessary before the resolutions are passed. Visitors were invited to contribute if they so wished.

There were a number of common issues highlighted that are faced by all churches today, for example; Difficulty for Christians getting Visas from the UK government as they are considered a threat; Changes in society from a Christian culture after the war to a negative culture since 2014; Current shortage of ministers; Churches closing; Churches amalgamating; Cuts to Education Budgets.

Bishop Andrew Forster spoke as chair of ICC, which is in its 100th year. He explained that the ICC was formed because of the uncertainty at the time of partition of Ireland. While wishing the assembly every blessing he said that 'The Joy of the Lord is our Strength' as the Churches work together.

Looking outside of Ireland there were also speakers from the Global Church:

- ❖ Malawi- the Church is expanding. Issues they have had to face such as the aftermath of a Cyclone, planting indigenous trees, devaluation of their currency and doubling of prices.
- ❖ Syria and Lebanon – Speaker spoke of the value of partnerships and forward planning.
- ❖ Iran – the speaker gave an insight to what it was like for a Christian from a Muslim background.

The Presbyterian Church in 2022 to 2023 raised £1.5 million to aid their mission partners.

It was a privilege for myself and Archdeacon Elizabeth Cairns to represent the Church of Ireland at the Presbyterian Assembly and we would like to offer our sincere thanks for the warm welcome and the hospitality we received.

Vivian Sutor
June 2023