

**THE GENERAL SYNOD
COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

REPORT 2001

1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

The Archbishops and Bishops (Rt Rev JRW Neill, Bishop of Cashel – Chairman)

Ms J Barcroft (resigned November 2000)	Rev IJE Knox
Rt Hon DW Bleakley	Rev Canon WA Lewis
Very Rev H Cassidy	Ven GA McCamley
Mr G Clarke	Mrs R McKelvey
Rev Canon DWT Crooks	Dr K Milne
Rev Canon IM Ellis	Mr WT Morrow
Very Rev LDA Forrest	Rev DR Nuzum (Honorary Secretary)
Very Rev DSG Godfrey	Rev GV Wharton
Rev RJ Gray	Rev TR Williams
Ms S Hales (from November 2000)	Mrs AJ Wills
Mrs R Heard	

In January 2001, the Rev Robert Gray resigned as Honorary Secretary of the Committee after serving for three years. At the same meeting, the Rev Daniel Nuzum was elected as the new Honorary Secretary.

2. THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES/THE INTER-CHURCH MEETING

During the year, the re-organisation of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) continued. Whilst being unable to proceed with the establishment of the proposed *Conference of Churches in Ireland*, these developments represent a significant change. Administration has been streamlined and a substantial increase in funding from the Roman Catholic Church has reduced the contribution requested from the Church of Ireland by almost £5,000. The Board of Inter-Church Affairs of the ICC is to be stood down, as there is a large overlap with ICC Executive and Inter-Church Committee business. The Executive of the ICC and the Inter-Church Committee will liaise more closely in future, allowing the ICC Executive to be more prompt and flexible in its responses. Meanwhile, the IICM has increased the participation of the smaller churches on the Inter-Church Committee and is committed to undertaking more project work and the organisation of occasional seminars, such as those held during the past year on *One Bread One Body* and *Dominus Iesus*. A full IICM meeting took place in November and two ICC gatherings took place in the spring and the autumn.

The death of the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Jack Shearer, was noted with deep regret by the Committee. Among his many achievements as Dean was the establishment of the Two Cathedrals Project, between St Anne's and St Peter's, a potent symbol of ecumenical progress and reconciliation in the heart of Belfast. This year an inter-church service was held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in St Peter's Cathedral, where the preacher was the new Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

A copy of the ICC Annual Report will be available at the General Synod.

3. CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

The Bishop of Cork and the Rev Robert Gray are currently the Church of Ireland's delegates to the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Church Representatives Meeting. The April 2000 meeting took place in Glasgow and it was an opportunity to learn more about the Scottish Churches Initiative on Union (SCIFU) - an ongoing process involving the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church. The underlying principle is that a uniting church would be a missionary church in continuity with the past, but adaptable to changing circumstances - a unity with diversity. The decision would be taken between 2002-2004, with an aim for a date for union by the end of 2010, the centenary of the 1910 Missionary Conference in Edinburgh.

The autumn meeting took place in Berkshire and was characterised by a sense of learning from the past and looking to the future. Much was said about the history of what was the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland as this meeting marked the tenth anniversary of the founding of CCBI. The way forward was also a major theme, with the re-structuring of CTBI almost complete. Concerns were expressed regarding the difficulties faced by black majority churches and the challenges posed to ecumenism by *Dominus Iesus*. It was felt that there was a need to re-capture the excitement and enthusiasm of former times, as there is a tendency for such meetings to become totally immersed in obstacles yet to be overcome rather than a celebration of what is actually being achieved.

4. THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES

Dr Kenneth Milne attends meetings of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) Church and Society Commission as an observer on behalf of the Irish Council of Churches. A meeting was held in Moscow in May 2000 and appropriately enough it focused on the role of the Orthodox Churches in the ecumenical movement. They are experiencing difficulty with the influx of new members into the World Council of Churches (WCC), which is diluting their influence. In addition to this, proselytism by western churches, liberal theology and the ordination of women are causing them deep concern. The CEC/CCEE document for good ecumenical practice, the *Charta Ecumenica*, and the EU Charter of Ecumenical Rights were also discussed.

The Committee responded to the draft of the *Charta Ecumenica* and this was forwarded to CEC for consideration. The text should be finalised within the next year.

5. THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches met for ten days at the end of January in Potsdam in the former East Germany. The Bishop of Cashel was a participant. Two major themes dominated this meeting.

The first was the launch of the Decade for the Overcoming of Violence. This launch took place with worship and rich symbolism in the semi-ruined and bombed but rebuilt

Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin (linked in witness to Coventry Cathedral) and at the Brandenburg gate symbolising the great crises of the last century related to Fascism and the Cold War. But there was also long and deep debate as to how much churches can justify war and violence in any form. This discussion reached into the difficult areas of armed intervention for humanitarian causes and violence as a last resort. It is vital that this debate continues in all our churches.

The second major theme of the meeting was a focus on Europe. The context of the meeting led to a concentration on issues of the East/West divide within Europe. This led to serious addressing of the difference between Orthodox and Western Churches on many issues. Here some real progress had been made by the Special Commission on Orthodox concerns. But that particular issue will be dealt with more fully next year. Issues of how we deal with the memories of different attitudes displayed by church leaders during times of oppression were painful for everybody, but not without relevance to the wider issue of the healing of memory. Deep concerns were expressed as to whether Europe was lessening its concern for the developing world.

The Central Committee always has a very broad and demanding agenda, but the highlighting of one or two major concerns is very informative and challenging for all the member churches.

6. RELATIONS WITH OTHER IRISH CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

An innovation at Committee meetings during the year has been a time set apart for the discussion of local ecumenical developments. In every part of Ireland, north and south, new initiatives are being developed and relationships forged between the Church of Ireland and all other churches. Some of these have been high profile, such as the very successful FIS conference held in the west and the course in ecumenism in the diocese of Ferns, while others have taken place quietly with little fuss in politically sensitive areas of Northern Ireland.

Against this background of increasingly warm and respectful relations, the publication of *Dominus Iesus* and the accompanying Note on the use of the phrase “sister churches” came as a severe disappointment, particularly so soon after the publication in these islands of *One Bread One Body*. It is felt that the tone of these documents does not reflect the situation at local level. The Committee studied the document and its response was received by the Standing Committee, published in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* and presented to the IICM consultation, held in December 2000. It appears as an appendix to the Standing Committee report.

7. THE CHURCH OF IRELAND/METHODIST CHURCH JOINT THEOLOGICAL WORKING PARTY

The report appears as *Appendix A*.

8. THE INTER-CHURCH CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR LOCAL SCHEMES OF CO-OPERATION

The report appears as *Appendix B*.

APPENDIX A**METHODIST / CHURCH OF IRELAND
JOINT THEOLOGICAL WORKING PARTY****REPORT TO THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE
CHURCH OF IRELAND AND TO THE
METHODIST CONFERENCE****MEMBERSHIP*****Church of Ireland***

Rt Rev Harold Miller, Bishop of Down and Dromore (Co-Chair)
Very Rev Peter Barrett
Rev Canon Virginia Kennerley
Rev Canon William Marshall
Rev John Rutter
Very Rev Robert Townley

Methodist Church in Ireland

Rev Dudley Levistone Cooney (Co-Chair)
Rev Ian Henderson
Rev Donald Ker
Ms Gillian Kingston (Secretary)
Rev John Stephens
Rev Kenneth Thompson

The draft Covenant document, received at the General Synod of the Church of Ireland and the Conference of the Methodist Church in 2000, and sent down to the parishes and circuits, was the result of a long process of dialogue and discussion. This phase of our relationship goes back, in one form or another, to the 1930s. The process gained impetus at the Synod and the Conference in 1999, when the Joint Theological Working Party, set up in 1989, was urged to '*hasten forward with its work*'. The draft covenant, based in large measure on an already existing agreement between the Churches of England and Ireland and the Moravian Church, was drawn up at a residential meeting early in 2000. Present at that meeting were the Primate of All Ireland, the Most Rev Dr Robin Eames and the then President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev Dr Kenneth Wilson.

Following the General Synod and the Conference in 2000, copies of the draft covenant document were sent to all ordained ministers in each church. The document was accompanied by a letter of commendation from the co-Chairs, the Right Rev Harold Miller, Bishop of Down and Dromore, and the Rev Dudley Levistone Cooney. The letter briefly outlined the process by which the Working Party had produced the draft, and asked for response.

The Working Party has been reflecting on the responses received. These have come from parishes, circuits, diocesan and district bodies and from joint meetings of Church of Ireland and Methodist people. (As the Methodist Conference may *direct* the circuits to

take a course of action, while the Church of Ireland General Synod may only *request* parishes to do so, there have been many more responses from circuits than from parishes.) The responses have covered a wide range of situations and attitudes. Particularly encouraging, however, have been the responses from joint church schemes and from places where Methodist and Church of Ireland people came together to discuss the document.

Believing that it has followed the direction given by both the General Synod and the Conference in 1999 and having considered the responses, the Working Party has

- sought to clarify wording which has proved problematic
- responded through the *Methodist Newsletter* and *Church of Ireland Gazette* to certain questions raised by the parishes and circuits
- considered the next steps on the journey together.

Believing that it would be premature to place a final text of the covenant before the General Synod and the Methodist Conference in 2001, the Working Party recommends

- that our Churches continue on the journey of exploration together on the basis of the revised draft of the covenant appended to this report
- that opportunities be created at local and other levels which will enable members of each denomination to listen to and understand the practices and beliefs of the other
- that congregations avail of every opportunity to work and worship together.

To these ends, the Working Party presents for the consideration of the General Synod and the Conference a new draft of the covenant document to be sent for study to the parishes and circuits.

It would be our intention to present a final text of the Covenant to the General Synod and Conference of 2002.

The Joint Theological Working Party has spent some time studying the British experience of Local Ecumenical Projects (LEPs), with a view to drawing up possible guidelines and models for use in the Irish context.

Contact has been maintained with Anglican/Methodist conversations in Britain, in particular with the talks between the Church of England and the British Methodist Church. The British Methodist report on *Episcope and Episcopacy* has been noted.

APPENDIX ONE**COVENANT BETWEEN
THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND AND
THE CHURCH OF IRELAND**

- 1 We acknowledge one another's churches as belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and as truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.
- 2 We acknowledge that in each of our churches the Word of God is authentically preached and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion authentically administered according to the command of Christ.
- 3 We acknowledge that both our churches share in a common faith set forth in the scriptures and summarised in the historic creeds.
- 4 We acknowledge our common inheritance in traditions of spirituality and liturgy. We rejoice in our diversity from which we may mutually benefit as we continue to develop varied forms of worship as appropriate to different situations.
- 5 We acknowledge each other's ordained ministries as given by God and as instruments of his grace by which our churches are served and built up. As pilgrims together, we look forward to the time when our ministries can be fully interchangeable and our churches visibly united.
- 6 We acknowledge that personal, collegial and communal oversight is embodied and practised in both churches, as each seeks to express continuity of apostolic life, mission and ministry.

Therefore:

We believe that God is calling our two churches to a fuller relationship in which we commit ourselves

- to share a common life and mission.
- to grow together so that unity may be visibly realized.

As the next steps towards that goal, we agree:

- 1 to pray for and with one another and to avail of every opportunity to worship together;
- 2 to welcome one another's members to receive Holy Communion and other ministries as appropriate;
- 3 to share resources in order to strengthen the mission of the Church;

- 4 to help our members to appreciate and draw out the gifts which each of our traditions has to offer the whole people of God;
- 5 to encourage the invitation of authorised persons of each church to minister in the other church, as far as the current disciplines of both churches permit;
- 6 (a) to encourage united Methodist/Church of Ireland congregations
 - (i) where there are joint church schemes,
 - (ii) where new churches are to be planted,
 - (iii) where local congregations wish to move in this direction;
- (b) to encourage united Methodist / Church of Ireland chaplaincy work;
- 7 to enable a measure of joint training of candidates for ordained and lay ministries of our churches where possible and appropriate and to encourage mutual understanding at all levels in our churches;
- 8 to establish appropriate forms of consultation on matters of faith and order, mission and service;
- 9 to participate as observers by invitation in each other's forms of governance at every possible level;
- 10 to learn more about the practice of oversight in each other's churches in order to achieve a fuller sharing of ministries at a later stage of our relationship.

RESOLUTION TO THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND

- 1 The Synod receives the Report of the Joint Theological Working Party.
- 2 The Synod resolves that our Churches continue on the journey of exploration together on the basis of the revised draft of the Covenant appended to the report.
- 3 The Synod urges
 - that opportunities be created at local and other levels which will enable members of each denomination to listen to and understand the practices and beliefs of the other
 - that congregations avail of every opportunity to work and worship together.
- 4 The Synod requests that the Joint Theological Working Party continue with its work and that the revised Covenant document be sent to the parishes.

APPENDIX B**INTER-CHURCH CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

1. The Committee met in January, 2001. The members of the Committee are:

Church of Ireland	Methodist	Presbyterian
Rev W Ritchie	Rev DC Bain (Chairman)	Rev AD Davidson
Rev IJE Knox	Rev TM Kingston	Rev R Herron
Ven GA McCamley	Rev ETI Mawhinney	Mrs E Cobain
Canon J Mayes	Mrs H O'Neill	Rev RFS Poots OBE

2. The Rev DC Bain was elected Chairman for three years in succession to the Rt Rev EF Darling who has retired.
3. The Committee considered the Methodist/Presbyterian Scheme at St Columba's and decided to request the Lisburn Methodist Circuit and the Dromore Presbytery to consider the continuing usefulness of the Scheme and to present an agreed report to the appropriate Committee of each denomination.

Brownlow, Lurgan

4. A Church Army Officer had been appointed to St Saviour's, Brownlow and the Church of Ireland and Methodist Congregations are exploring the use of St Saviour's by both denominations and a sharing of worship as well as buildings.

Galway and Ballinasloe

5. The Galway congregation, while nominally Presbyterian/Methodist, is made up of different religious groupings and has become a "user friendly" congregation which can comfortably embrace a considerable number of visitors and temporary members from other parts of the world who join with a weekly core attendance of thirty. The worship style mingles the old with the new. The ministry seeks to reach into the community through contact with members of the Corporation and a university chaplaincy.
6. There is potential for ministry to young people who congregate in the city centre, a short distance from the church building. A practical ministry to refugees and asylum seekers has been developed and the mothers-and-toddlers group is thriving. Financial resources tend to fluctuate in relation to the number of temporary members.
7. Relationships between all the major Churches is very good.
8. Attendance at the Bible study group in Ballinasloe has waned but a small number meet in St John's, Church of Ireland, whose rector, Rev Trevor Sullivan, has made them most welcome and has sought to involve the Presbyterian minister in community affairs.

9. The Presbyterian and Methodist Churches need to assess and define their aims for Ballinasloe where it might be possible to see development, especially in joint youth work with the Church of Ireland, if a worker was placed in the community.
10. It was noted that people in the area relate better to Christian work in a Church building rather than in an hotel.

Church of Ireland/Methodist Church Draft Covenant (2000)

11. The Committee considered the Draft Covenant produced by a joint Church of Ireland and Methodist Theological Working Party which was established following the winding up of the Tripartite Consultation.
12. The respective governing bodies committed both Churches to “a special relationship with each other” whose terms were expressed in the Covenant.
13. The Committee decided that it would be inappropriate to make specific comments at this stage but recognised that developments towards “visible unity” between the two Churches and to “fully interchangeable ministries” could impact on the Methodist/Presbyterian Alternating Ministries Scheme.