

**THE GENERAL SYNOD
COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

REPORT 2002

1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

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

Rt Hon David Bleakley	Rev Iain Knox
Very Rev Herbert Cassidy	Rev Canon Walter Lewis
Mr George Clarke	Ven Gregor McCamley
Rev Canon David Crooks	Mrs Roberta McKelvey
Rev Canon Ian Ellis	Dr Kenneth Milne
Very Rev Leslie Forrest	Mr Trevor Morrow
Very Rev David Godfrey	Rev Daniel Nuzum (Honorary Secretary)
Rev Robert Gray	Rev Gillian Wharton
Ms Sandra Hales	Rev Trevor Williams
Mrs Ruth Heard	Mrs Andrea Wills

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

The Relationship between the ICC and the IICM continues to grow ever closer. In the last year a protocol has been agreed between the two bodies setting out the duties and the responsibilities of staff in the Inter-Church Secretariat. The staff of the Inter-Church Secretariat service both bodies, thus the General Secretary of ICC also functions as Executive Secretary of IICM. His contract has been renewed for a further 5 years from 1 May 2002. The demise of the Inter Church Affairs Board of ICC is another sign of the closer working between ICC and IICM. Any specifically ICC matters related to the Inter Church Affairs brief is now dealt with at Executive Committee level.

A joint Finance Committee for the Inter-Church Secretariat is in the process of being set up.

The Irish Council of Churches had its Annual Meeting in September 2001 in Newry. At this meeting the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Ireland was accepted into membership. Being just a week after the terrorist attacks in the United States of America, the meeting at the outset paused and stood to pray silently for all who were suffering as a result. Those who suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the Foot and Mouth epidemic were also remembered. The Middle East, the plight of Asylum seekers, Christian Aid's Trade for Life Campaign and the Draft Covenant between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland were all discussed.

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting held a Consultation in June 2001 on the recent joint declaration from the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on Justification. The Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland each made a response to this agreement.

The Irish Inter-Church Committee has decided that rather than having a department of Theological issues that it is going to set up Working parties of people with expertise for particular projects for a limited duration. The Church of Ireland has nominated two people to serve on the first such working party which is dealing with *Spirituality in Ireland Today*.

In April 2002 the Irish Inter-Church Meeting will take place having as its theme “Pathways to Peacebuilding”. It will deal with issues arising from the work of the Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project of the Irish school of Ecumenics.

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 Bishop of Cashel is one of the five Presidents of CTBI. The Honorary Secretary (in the place of the Rev Robert Gray) attended the March 2001 Church Representatives’ Meeting in Abergavenny, Wales and it was an opportunity to learn more about the various ecumenical initiatives involving the Welsh churches. Of particular interest was the proposed new ecumenical bishop for Cardiff. There was also a report from the recent CTBI ecumenical delegation to the Middle East.

The autumn meeting took place in London Colney and was attended by the Bishop of Cork and the Rev Bob Gray. The events of September 11 2001 and the subsequent attacks on Afghanistan were discussed at length, as was the recent Foot and Mouth crisis in Britain. There was great sadness and a sense of helplessness as the political situation continues to deteriorate in Israel/Palestine. The recent ecumenical visit by representatives of CTBI was appreciated by the Christian churches in the Holy Land.

The most recent assembly of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland took place from 26 February - 1 March 2002 at Swanwick, Derbyshire, England. The theme of the assembly was “In search of Holy Ground”. The Church of Ireland was represented by 8 delegates. The keynote speakers provided very thought provoking addresses about the search for Holy Ground and how we as churches operate in our local contexts. It is good to report that one of our delegates, the Rev Sonia Gyles, was elected to the steering Committee of CTBI.

At the business meeting the ever increasing spiral of violence in Israel-Palestine was a concern to the 300 or so delegates gathered at Swanwick. Together they agreed to be the “voice of the voiceless” and to send a letter of support to Christians in the Holy Land.

The letter was signed by CTBI’s Presidents at the end of the Assembly which had set out to take an honest look at the way people today think, at the reality of the churches and at how churches can together build bridges with Christian integrity.

4. THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The most significant development in the life of the Conference of European Churches in 2001 was the signing in Strasbourg on 22 April of the *Charta Oecumenica - Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*. This document has been produced by CEC and CCEE (the Roman Catholic European Bishops' Conference).

The Reuilly Agreement between the Anglican Churches in Great Britain and Ireland and the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches was signed in Canterbury Cathedral in June 2001. The Church of Ireland was represented by the Bishop of Limerick.

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 Crete in May 2001. Amongst the various topics discussed were the following:

- the widespread loss of respect for Christian values in Europe
- bioethical questions
- issues concerning the environment
- the implications of globalisation.

An important aspect of the meeting (as at the 2000 meeting in Moscow) was the particular perspective of the Orthodox churches on many issues, as set out, for example, in the Social Teaching Document of the Russian Orthodox Church, published in 2000.

The Honorary Secretary attended the Ecumenical Officers' Meeting of the World Council of Churches in Bucharest, Romania in May 2001. This meeting happens once every eighteen months. There was a detailed report on the work of the Special Commission which is looking at the involvement of the Orthodox Churches in the WCC. There was also the opportunity to hear and share what is going on at local level in many parts of the world. The importance of the communication of ecumenical 'good news' was also highlighted.

5. RELATIONS WITH OTHER IRISH CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

The Committee continues to set aside time at each meeting during the year for the discussion of local ecumenical developments. The committee has discussed many ecumenical initiatives that have taken place at local level in both jurisdictions and doubtless many more have happened in quiet ways that few are aware of. Regardless of the profile of such work the committee is keen to promote the sharing of ecumenical news. The discussion of the Draft Covenant with the Methodist Church in Ireland has provided an opportunity in many places for renewed ecumenical work with Methodist Congregations.

We welcome the development where the Russian Orthodox congregation in Dublin will shortly move into the former Church of Ireland church at Harold's Cross, Dublin.

The Committee has also started to look at how it can operate more effectively in fostering an understanding of and commitment to the work of Christian Unity throughout the Church of Ireland. To that end it has started work on a report to be published at a later date dealing with these issues.

6. INTER-FAITH ISSUES

A new development during the year has been the inclusion of time at each meeting to discuss Inter-Faith issues. The committee recognises the growing importance of this issue and initiated contact with the Boards of Education to highlight this in connection with Religious Education in Ireland.

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
CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH**

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 PROPOSED COVENANT

In accordance with the resolution taken by the General Synod and by the Conference in 2000, the revised draft Covenant was sent to all parishes and circuits in order that congregations might continue on their journey of exploration. It was accompanied by guidelines for discussion, specifically worded to encourage exploration of the implications of the Covenant at local level.

Certain important areas of confusion were clarified, as follows

- that this is but another step in a journey which started for our churches in the 1930s
- that we remain separate churches, but now in a covenanted, or special, relationship with each other
- that we have not yet reached complete agreement on certain theological issues, as has been indicated in 2.10 of the draft Covenant. Seeking such agreement is part of the onward journey.

The Joint Theological Working Party met for a full day at the Irish School of Ecumenics in mid November. The meeting was attended by the Primate of All Ireland, the Most Rev

Robin Eames, the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev Harold Good and the Secretary of the Methodist Conference, the Rev Edmund Mawhinney.

At that meeting, it was decided to send copies of the revised draft Covenant, with a letter of commendation from the Primate and the President, to each member of the General Synod and the Conference, and to all clergy and ministers, with extra copies available for those interested.

Significant discussion centred on the following matters...

- The Joint Theological Working Party is aware that, despite annual reports to Synod and Conference and regular contributions to our respective periodicals, there is considerable lack of knowledge of the process in which the two churches have been involved for many years. The journey both of self knowledge and of knowledge of the other remains a priority.
- As the remaining partners in the Tripartite process from which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland withdrew in 1988, the Joint Theological Working Party is aware of the ongoing working relationship between the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Joint ministerial training and alternating pastoral charges were unaffected in 1988, thus it is not anticipated that any ratification of the proposed Covenant would cause any problems in existing areas of cooperation.
- The Joint Theological Working Party believes that it has been faithful to the terms of reference mandated to it in 1989 and revised and strengthened in 1999. In presenting the proposed Covenant to the General Synod and to Conference, the Joint Theological Working Party believes that it has done the work assigned to it. We respectfully suggest that a new body be assembled with a wide-ranging brief to explore those matters theological and practical which arise from the new relationship between our churches. Such a body, we believe, should include some of the present membership of the Joint Theological Working Party for the sake of continuity.

OTHER WORK

The Joint Theological Working Party has been following the progress of talks in Scotland Wales and England involving our sister churches and, in particular, the developments between the Church of England /Methodist Church in Great Britain.

Anxious that developments at parish and circuit level should be facilitated, the Joint Theological Working Party continues to examine patterns of Local Ecumenical Projects in Britain.

APPENDIX B**INTER-CHURCH CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

1. The Committee met in January 2002. The members of the Committee are:

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

2. It is anticipated that the Rev S Hancock, of St Patrick's, Waterford will demit his charge on 30th June 2002. The Presbyterian Board of Mission in Ireland has invited the Methodist Church to continue to have responsibility.
3. In Galway and Ballinasloe, Rev Sahr Yamsu has replaced the Rev R Cobain who has retired. Good relationships continue with the Church of Ireland in Ballinasloe in whose building the Methodist/Presbyterian congregation worship.
4. It will not be possible for the Rev D Range to demit his charge of Christ Church, Limerick, in June 2002, due to a health problem. The Methodist Church, after consultation, has agreed to retain responsibility for one further year.
5. Presbyterian and Methodist Churches are involved in a united chaplaincy in five different colleges in the Dublin area.
6. The Rev Canon J Mayes and the Rev FL Munce reported on the United Church of Ireland/Methodist Church in Strathfoyle. The Presbyterian temporary building in Strathfoyle has been taken down. The Presbyterians are now worshipping in the Church of Ireland building and share in the conduct of worship, with just a few operational difficulties. The Church of Ireland/Methodist building was opened in 1970. Numbers have fallen throughout the period from 300 to 40 families. The building has deteriorated and is in need of improvements which will involve major expenditure.
7. Rev DR Rogers reported on the congregation of Sandymount. The United Presbyterian and Methodist congregation has been together now for 26 years under the alternating ministries scheme. A family service and a common communion liturgy have been established. While most of the congregation are senior citizens there are also business people living locally in apartments and some overseas people on short term contracts with their work. The Minister of Sandymount is also Presbyterian/Methodist chaplain in Tallaght hospital.

Church of Ireland/Methodist Church Draft Covenant

8. It was explained how the Church of Ireland/Methodist Church Draft Covenant is a declaration of intent to create an atmosphere for circuits and parishes to work together. There was some discussion on how this affected Presbyterian/Methodist relations within the alternating ministry scheme. It was agreed that copies of the draft covenant would be sent to the Inter-Church Relations Board of the Presbyterian Church.