

**THE GENERAL SYNOD  
COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

**REPORT 2003**

**1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

The Archbishops and Bishops (Most Rev JRW Neill, Archbishop of Dublin – 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. IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES/IRISH/INTER-CHURCH MEETING**

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

**3. CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

The Church of Ireland representation at the Church Representatives Meeting of CTBI changed during the year. The representatives are the Bishop of Clogher and the Rev Robert Gray and the Dean of Derry and the Rev Daniel Nuzum as alternates. The Rev Sonia Gyles was elected to the Steering Committee of CTBI at the Assembly in 2002.

**4. INTER-FAITH ISSUES**

The Committee continues to allocate time at each meeting to discuss inter-faith issues. At the January meeting there was a very interesting presentation to the Committee on Inter-Faith Issues in both jurisdictions from the Rev Canon Desmond Sinnamon (Taney) and Mr Des McCabe of the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum.

**5. VISION FOR UNITY**

As reported to the General Synod of 2002, the Committee for Christian Unity has been working on a discussion document which makes up the bulk of its report this year. It is our hope that it will be a catalyst for a lively debate at General Synod.

## **UNDERSTANDING OF UNITY**

### **Unity - gift and calling**

1. The unity of the church belongs to its very nature, baptism itself being a sacramental bond of unity. The Body of Christ is one and consequently there is a fundamental communion shared among all who are “in Christ”: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (I Cor.10:16f) In the world we do experience divisions, however, but these are institutional divisions. Nonetheless, they cause immense hurt and are a serious hindrance to the mission of the church.
2. Our task is by God's grace to enable the visible expression of all Christians' fundamental ecclesial communion. That is why it is so vital that the church should retain the objective of visible communion. To be visibly one is to be true to the essential nature of the church. So, the unity of the church is both *gift* and *calling*. It is already there, given by God, but we are called to express that fundamental communion in a visible way.

### **Church as institution**

3. Although the church's divisions are institutional in nature only, one cannot regard the institutional form of the church as unimportant, although it must be alert to the dangers of institutionalism and be ready to welcome constructive criticism. The church, just as any body of people, will always be an institution of one kind or another. Christianity cannot be anything other than a religion and the church cannot be anything other than an institution. The question is what kind of religion, what kind of institution. What we have to address is how the whole church can be renewed so that it can witness more effectively in our world and be a place where people, who are less and less concerned with denominationalism, want to be and where denominationalism as a narrowing of reality of church is challenged from within each denomination.
4. It is significant to note that the new churches in Ireland, which are currently reaching out to our ecumenical structures, are finding that after approximately thirty years in existence they are now seeking precisely an institutional identity, in order that they may be able to express themselves more effectively as a part of society.

### **Diversity-in-order**

5. The visibly united church will be an institution, but the ecumenical process is not to be envisaged as some kind of corporate merger. The different denominations each express a way of being church and through our ecumenical experience we have come to appreciate positively various aspects of other churches' lives. Our vision must be of a visibly united but essentially diverse church. There is no doubt that the

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New Testament church was marked by considerable diversity, but found its unity in confessing the Lordship of Christ. Diversity, however, must be ordered, in the same way that the diverse life of the world, as indeed the life of God as trinity, is an ordered diversity. Without order in creation, there would be chaos. Creation is the work of the diverse but one, triune God and points to God, whose image is reflected in the divine creation. We certainly can see in scripture how the New Testament church understood the importance of order.

6. Other faiths represent genuine spiritual strivings and the world situation today especially demands real and purposeful inter-faith dialogue. In his address to the Muslim-Christian Seminar at Lambeth Palace on 17th January, 2002, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Carey, said that the events of 11th September, 2001 in the United States gave “fresh impetus and focus” in particular to the work of Christian-Muslim dialogue, as well as highlighting the importance of deepening that process not only for the sake of both faith communities but also for the safety and well-being of the world. At that same seminar, Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, in a paper entitled *The Civilising Power of Faith*, usefully remarked: “The history of Christian-Muslim dialogue shows us that progress is made when representatives of both concentrate upon areas of agreement, particularly moral values and ethical principles.” Progress can be made in inter-faith dialogue when shared beliefs and values are made the basis of deeper reflection, but ideally inter-faith dialogue should be conducted ecumenically rather than by individual churches with representatives of other faiths, recognising the immense diversity that exists not only within Christianity but also in other faiths.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Dialogue, action and renewal**

7. It is clear that such questions as these, however, are often at a far remove from the concerns of churchgoing people in general and indeed from the concerns of many clergy. We therefore cannot allow ourselves to be drawn into an ecumenism that concentrates solely on faith and order issues. We must promote an action-orientated ecumenism in which the churches actually do things together both locally and nationally. Dialogue and action must go together.
8. We also need to find creative ways of helping towards ecumenical prayer. Christians, when they think and act together are inevitably driven to pray together. It is as we listen to scripture together, as we reflect together, as we act together, that we find an inner renewal that itself impels us towards deeper communion and further towards the goal of visible unity, for unity is, in the end, about being true to ourselves as church.

#### **Episcopé and primacy**

9. Personal episcopé has a special role to play in our vision of diversity-in-order, as indeed has a form of universal primacy. The Archbishop of Canterbury has a

universal primacy of honour and Anglicans benefit enormously from that ministry. The Roman Catholic model of the papacy involves a universal and immediate jurisdiction and to that extent in our opinion it is an over-developed form of universal primacy. In *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II appealed for ecumenical reflection on the role of the papacy, and in responding to that generous invitation Anglicans have very important things to say.

**Using instruments already in existence**

10. In promoting action we must look to our ecumenical instruments in Ireland. We have suffered a set-back because of the failure of plans for a Conference of Churches, and since then there has, perhaps understandably, been considerable disillusionment. Now, however, we must redouble our commitment to the ecumenical instruments of which we are already members and work in a more committed fashion within them both in their various concerns and, despite recent experience, for their renewal.

**Further possible initiatives**

- 11.1 *Supporting ecumenical models.* As a church we must identify more closely with ecumenical communities and local ecumenical initiatives.
- 11.2 We could conduct an annual *ecumenical audit*, assessing in a more systematic manner than heretofore just where we are ecumenically throughout Ireland. As a result of such an audit, we would be able to identify areas that particularly need further encouragement, not least in relation to countering sectarian attitudes.
- 11.3 We could *involve ecumenical partners* more closely in our planning and general church business. By doing so we could help foster a wider ecumenical awareness within the Church of Ireland.
- 11.4 In the area of inter-faith relations, it is important that the Irish churches should together engage in *dialogue with other faiths in Ireland*, especially in the light of the growth of other faith communities through immigration, not least of refugees and asylum seekers.
- 11.5 The Church of Ireland should encourage *ecumenical ministry*, particularly in new housing areas. At a basic level this could involve, for example, ecumenical pastoral visiting as the churches reach out to new families in a given area.

**APPENDIX A**

**METHODIST / CHURCH OF IRELAND  
JOINT THEOLOGICAL WORKING PARTY 2002-2003**

**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)  
Rt Rev Peter Barrett, Bishop of Cashel and Ossory  
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

Believing that it has been faithful to the task appointed to it in 1989 and to the mandate 'to hasten forward with its work' in 1999, the Joint Theological Working Party of the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland presents its final Report to the General Synod and to the Conference.

The Working Party was greatly encouraged by the endorsement of the Covenant at the General Synod in May 2002 and at the Conference in June 2002. The official signing of the Covenant document by the Primate of All Ireland, the Most Rev Robin Eames, and the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev Winston Graham, took place at Chrome Hill, Lambeg, on Thursday, 26 September 2002. The Working Party records its grateful thanks to Mr Robert and Mrs Cherith McKinstry for their gracious hospitality on that memorable occasion.

In November 2002, a residential meeting at the Orlagh Centre in Rathfarnham, Dublin was attended by the Primate, the President and the Secretary of Conference.

Initial thinking was given to the establishment of a body to facilitate implementation of the Covenant. The Primate and the President proposed that St Patrick's-tide 2003, be the time for a special focus on and celebration of the new relationship. And, to this end,

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copies of the Covenant document and a suggested worship service were sent to every minister and clergyperson in the two churches.

The Working Party has already been pleased to hear of the variety of ways in which the Covenant has been recognized in different parts of the country. We would urge those who have not yet taken any initiatives in this respect to explore possibilities with their counterparts in the sister church.

Despite the annual reports of the Working Party to the General Synod and to the Conference since its establishment in 1989, the sending of draft material to the congregations and the high level of publicity through the various organs of the two churches, there remains considerable lack of knowledge of the Covenant process. Some are unaware of their own history, others of the story of the sister church, and still others that the two churches have been in dialogue for many years. It is clear that an on-going process of education is needed in order to facilitate that working together which is God's will in Jesus Christ for his people 'that the world may believe'.

The Working Party's last task was to draw up Terms of Reference for the Covenant Council. These are included in Appendix A of the report of the Standing Committee to the General Synod.

We are grateful to God for what has been accomplished and pray for God's richest blessing on those who will carry forward the task.

**APPENDIX B**

**INTER-CHURCH CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE**

The Committee met in January 2003. The members of the Committee are:

<b>Church of Ireland</b>	<b>Methodist</b>	<b>Presbyterian</b>
Rev W Ritchie	Rev Dr ETI Mawhinney	Rev Dr DJ Watts
Rev IJE Knox	Rev DC Bain	Rev AD Davidson
Rev Canon J Mayes	Rev TM Kingston	Rev AV Martin
Ven GA McCamley	Mrs H O'Neill	Mrs E Cobain

**RECENT CHANGES**

The Committee reviewed some of the arrangements for ministry in joint charges. A Methodist/Church of Ireland Working Party is looking at Strathfoyle, where some Presbyterians also worship. The Rev John Parkin and his family have settled well in St Patrick's, Waterford, and it was noted that the Revs David and C J Range had returned to the USA from Limerick and Shannon. Appreciation was expressed of their ministry.

**GALWAY AND BALLINASLOE**

The Rev Sahr Yamsu gave an encouraging report on the joint Presbyterian/Methodist charge in Galway and Ballinasloe, especially in reaching out to immigrants. A French speaking congregation meets on Sunday afternoons. Ballinasloe has a small but loyal membership.

**MONKSTOWN**

The Rev Alan Lorimer brought an enthusiastic report from the Methodist and Church of Ireland congregations at Monkstown who are working very closely together. The scheme may be a prototype for the new Covenant between the Church of Ireland and Methodist churches.

**FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS**

It was agreed that the Inter-Church Consultative Committee and the Alternating Ministries Committee (Presbyterian/Methodist) should attempt to work more closely together. Initially they will be called at the same time.