

The Mission Councils – Report 2004

**COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND**

**AND**

**COUNCIL FOR THE CHURCH OVERSEAS**

**REPORT 2004**

*Council for Mission in Ireland*

Rt Rev Harold Miller (Chair)  
Rev Des Bain  
Mrs Felix Blennerhassett  
Rev David Brown  
Mr David Brown  
Ven Wayne Carney  
Rev Janet Catterall  
Rev Patrick Comerford  
Mr William Frizell  
Rev Peter Galbraith  
Miss Mavis Gibbons  
Captain Charles Harris C.A.  
Rev Ian Jonas  
Rev Derek Kerr  
Very Rev Stephen Lowry  
Mrs Katie McAteer  
Rev David Morrow  
Rev Canon David Moynan  
Rev Canon William Neely  
Rev Chris Pollock  
Rev Willi Stewart  
Rev Michael Wooderson

*Council for the Church Overseas*

Rt Rev Michael Mayes (Chair)  
Mrs Mary Armstrong  
Mrs Jessica Clarke  
Mr George Clarke  
Rev Dermot Dunne  
Rev Raymond Ferguson  
Mr Sam Harper  
Captain Charles Harris C.A.  
Rev Canon Patrick Harvey  
Rev Paul Hoey (Hon Secretary)  
Rev Ian Jonas  
Rev Canon Mark Lidwill  
Miss Olga Kerr  
Rev Canon John Mayes  
Mrs Bobbie Moore  
Very Rev Maurice Sirr  
Very Rev Patrick Towers  
Rev Canon Cecil Wilson  
Rev Michael Wooderson

**MEMBERSHIP**

Three members, Rosslyn Faull, Keith Dyde and Peter Trimble, resigned during the year. Appreciation goes to them for their interest and service. Patrick Comerford and Willi Stewart were welcomed as members of the Council for Mission in Ireland and Raymond Ferguson and Dermot Dunne as members of the Overseas Council. In addition, Sam Harper and Paul Hoey were elected as Synod Representatives on the Overseas Council and Stephen Lowry, Mavis Gibbons, William Frizell and Patrick Comerford were elected as Synod Representatives on the Council for Mission in Ireland. Chris Pollock was co-opted as a member of the Council for Mission in Ireland.

Ian Jonas now represents both councils. Bobbie Moore continues her membership as a co-opted member after leaving her AMS post in September.

Rev Noel Fallows and Rev Des Bain, consecutively, represented the Methodist Church.

Dean Stephen Lowry resigned his work as Honorary Secretary for the Council for Mission in Ireland. Members of both councils, CMI in particular, appreciated his work in the post and especially his careful and detailed compilation of minutes and his following through of initiatives.

#### **WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

An invitation to send representatives to WCC Conference on Healing and Reconciliation in Greece during May 2005 was received positively. Canon Kathleen Brown has kindly agreed to be the Council's nominee.

#### **IRISH CHRISTIAN HANDBOOK**

Members of both councils strongly supported the publication of another edition of the Irish Christian Handbook. A letter from the Irish Inter-Church Meeting stated that it was now happy to support the publication of such a book. Stephen Cave (Evangelical Alliance) has been following up the possibility of getting Peter Brierly to prepare the facts and figures for another edition of the Handbook.

#### **BUILDING BRIDGES OF HOPE**

Building Bridges of Hope is an ecumenical initiative for all denominations, which aims to discover the most effective ways for churches to relate to local communities in terms of mission. After a period of consultation "accompaniers" were appointed to forty different churches to observe, research, record and report on the varied models of mission deployed.

In Ireland there are three "pilots":-

- The Down and Dromore Diocesan "Think Again" initiative;
- The Methodist Connexions Process, focusing in particular on Tallaght church;
- UCD chaplains and Balally parish.

These pilots are ongoing with the aim of discovering ways in which the wider church can resource and encourage rather than hinder local initiatives.

Two members of the Councils; David Brown and David Moynan are monitoring the projects and will report on progress.

#### **SYNOD BREAKFAST**

Approximately seventy people attended the Synod Mission Breakfast talk given by Rev

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Patrick Comerford on “Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Challenges and Opportunities facing the Church in Ireland today”. Feedback was very positive.

### **MISSION RESOURCE PERSON REVIEW**

Rev Charles Irwin left Ireland on 3 July 2003 after almost three years service as Church of Ireland Mission Resource Person.

At a farewell celebration held in Core, Dublin, tribute was paid to his humility in exercising his many gifts. Charles had succeeded in disturbing the complacency of the Church and revealing something of its “abnormality” in terms of a lack of engagement on behalf of many members. This process of disturbing must continue.

In a final report Charles thanked all those who had made it possible for him to take up this post and had made himself and his wife Jessie so welcome. He spoke very warmly of the support given by the people of Greenisland parish and of the encouragement given by their former rector, Rev Maurice Elliott, and by the management committee. Charles also expressed appreciation for the many opportunities afforded him by Bishops, clergy and groups throughout the Church of Ireland to speak and share in the life of the church.

Charles saw some good things in the life of the church. There are many people who are spiritually hungry and looking for teaching, new ways of worship and keen to serve the community but Charles was also confronted with the reality of dwindling congregations with an aging profile, joyless worship, and church members who expressed no obvious desire for growth after confirmation. He noted, in some areas, a lack of encouragement and motivation for lay people to participate in ministry. His overall impression was that, all too often, mission is at the bottom of agenda, not just in parish life, but also for the synods and central church meetings.

The main challenge, as Charles sees it, is for urgent spiritual renewal, to move church members on from passive attendance to active participation, and for the church not just to do mission but to become a missionary people. This will need sustained teaching. The warning given to the church in Sardis in Rev 3, “Strengthen what remains and is about to die”, is one that applies with a fair degree of urgency to the Church of Ireland.

There is a need for teamwork and collaboration between clergy and laity.

Perhaps the most fruitful period of Charles’ ministry came towards the end of his stay when he spent two months in Cork diocese. Here he visited seventeen individual churches and some smaller groups and also talked individually with people.

In a review of the project conducted by the councils the following points were made among many others:-

- Charles has been underused in his time here. Is the Church of Ireland really ready and willing to learn from those outside?

- Those that benefited most from time spent with Charles were those that used him in the context of small groups and gave him permission to speak freely. Those that confined his role to the pulpit generally did not see the kind of outcome they may have looked for.
- Some parishes are already effectively releasing lay ministry. Charles suggested that these parishes could act as models within an area.
- We do not seem to have the sense of expectancy that is found in churches in other parts of the world.
- Young people feel little denominational loyalty or identification with the structures of the church. We need to learn from them the lesson that church is more about relationship than rigidity.
- Clergy ought to be more like a coach training members of a team than a manager.
- Change will require sacrifice from the church's leaders.
- The benefit, in this kind of project, of longer-term placements was recognised.
- The importance of theologizing the laity. Our aim ought to be helping our people to think theologically in every situation.
- People tend to see mission as they see the bowling club - just something the church does for those interested in that kind of thing.
- Charles commented that he is not certain what the future holds when he returns to India. He is keeping open to the leading of God and asks for the prayers of the members of the Councils.

A discussion on what might follow on from the Mission Resource Project touched on the following points:-

- Initially the need is not for another officer;
- A priority for the Church of Ireland at the present time is the training and equipping of leaders for today's church in a mission environment;
- The committee welcomes efforts being made to train ordinands to "think mission" in many areas of the curriculum. Nevertheless there is some concern that men and women embarking on parish ministry should always be equipped in the handling of the tools of mission.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

This is the first joint report of the two General Synod Councils for Mission.

In response to a suggestion made at Synod 1995 that closer links be established with the Council for Mission in Ireland a Joint Working Group was established and met regularly over the course of the next few years. This group recommended, as a first step, that members of the two councils should receive copies of the minutes of each council meeting and that they should address issues of common concern together.

A Joint Pre-Millennium Conference was arranged and took place during November 1999, at the Emmaus Centre, Swords. The purpose of the conference was to assess the state of the Church of Ireland as it faces the challenges of a new millennium and to discern priorities for the mission of the whole church in the next century.

Another joint conference was held in October 2002 in Bellinter House, Navan Co Meath. Rev George Lings spoke on new models of church and how they might apply to the Church of Ireland.

A joint meeting in May 2002 explored models of co-operation. Rev Charles Irwin, Mission Resource Person, and Mrs Gillian Kingston acted as facilitators. At this meeting a proposal was put forward that *“both councils should be asked to make a formal commitment, to take whatever steps are necessary to form a Council for Mission for the Church of Ireland replacing the existing GSCCO and GSCMI”*.

In order to address concerns, such as the risk of one council’s concerns being dominant over the other, the working group recommended that the Mission Councils should conduct their meetings together for a period of two years, each group sharing fully in the work and business of the other, and that at the end of this period the two councils independently should determine the value of formalising arrangements or of returning to separate council meetings. If suitable a resolution agreed by both councils separately could be placed before Synod in 2004.

In order to preserve the ability of the two councils to operate independently it was agreed that any member of either council might request a separate meeting of their council, with members of that council only to attend. It was also agreed that where binding votes need to take place, it was possible to do this separately.

By June 2003 it could be recorded in the joint minutes that “all were agreed that the relationship was working well.” By the end on the trial period in January 2004 no request for separate meetings had been received. A resolution was agreed unanimously by each Council, separately and together, that “the General Synod Council for Mission in Ireland and the General Synod Council for the Church Overseas be dissolved and that a new Council for Mission be constituted according to the proposed Constitution attached at appendix A”.

## **PRESENCE AND PROPHECY – A HEART FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

Members of the two councils received copies of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland publication “Presence and Prophecy” and several sessions were devoted to study and reflection.

Theological education helps and empowers individuals to stand up to contemporary challenges to faith. The title of the book describes the calling of the whole Church to read the signs of the times in the light of the gospel. Education for ministry is about the ability to reflect theologically on the issues facing that church and broadening the concept of mission. A common misconception is that mission is just for ordained people. Theological education will help the Church to use a new, non-religious, liberating language to communicate with the world. Charles regretted that the discussion is not involving members of the Theological College.

The report reflects the desire of the book’s authors to foster hearts for mission and the importance of developing a missionary theology as distinct from a theology of mission. The process of theological education ought to include many other groups in the wider life of the Church outside the Theological College. The report challenges many of our assumptions and insists that theological education is a lifelong journey not a three-year experience. It is about empowering people. The report is not prescriptive. It sees mission as the mother of theology and urges finding ways of underlying all our theological with missiological assumptions.

The Council would draw the attention of the Synod to the following points:

- Pastoral care must have a missionary emphasis.
- Theological education ought to foster an engagement with contemporary culture.
- The need to get this report into the hands of key people such as Theological College staff and Council members, and continuing educators in the dioceses.
- Our understanding of ordained ministry is not matching our mission (by way of illustration it was stated that leaders serving elsewhere can find it difficult to return to Ireland because they perceive it as a frustrating field in which to minister in a mission context).
- Many young people have tasted mission in short-term mission experiences. But what can they do with this experience in their own church?
- The Church wants to win the next generation. But what are we doing to make this happen?
- A fragmented church means that there is no focus on mission.

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- Theological education is a lifelong process for the whole people of God rooted in the local church.
- Is the Church ready for all this? Many members just want maintenance.

Copies of the introductions to the discussion along with a summary of the above points were forwarded to CTBI.

Approaches have been made to the Commission on Ministry to consider how the groups might work together on addressing the issues raised.

### **MISSION EXCHANGE**

Many parishes and dioceses continue to be involved in mission exchange visits with churches in other parts of the world, to their mutual benefit. It was suggested that the mission councils might have some role in coordinating funding to assist members of the Church at every level to take part in mission experience visits to churches that are alive in mission so that they might catch a vision which they can share with the home church.

### **METHODIST LINKS**

In the spirit of the Covenant between the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland the members of the mission councils were delighted to have representatives from the Methodist Church sharing in the meetings. Many of the issues addressed are of common concern and interest.

The Methodist Church in Ireland has initiated an ongoing programme, Connexions, to help the church to be better geared for mission. It encourages time for reflection on spirituality and on how to be church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will also address the need for changed structures.

Mr William Frizell represented the councils at a meeting of the Methodist Home Mission Department. Its General Committee meets three times per year. The eight district committees meet more frequently. Among the questions each district is asked to address are:-

- Have any churches set specific aims and objectives for mission?
- Which churches in the district could co-operate in working towards achieving these aims?
- Are there practical steps that could be taken in cooperation with the Church of Ireland?

A recently set up resource centre, No 9 Edgehill, Belfast, has proved to be of great value to many leaders from various denominations.

Throughout the meeting the President emphasized the importance of doing mission rather than just talking about it.

#### **YOUTH MISSION**

The councils commended the excellent work done through Street Reach, a follow up to Summer Madness, in which several hundred young people were involved in improving the environment in a community deprivation area. This was followed up by a similar programme in Dromore, Co. Down and there are plans for programmes in five areas in 2004. Capt Neville Willerton CA co-ordinates the programme.

**APPENDIX A**

**Constitution for the proposed General Synod Council for Mission**

**THE CHURCH OF IRELAND COUNCIL FOR MISSION**

**CONSTITUTION**

**Title**

The Church of Ireland Council for Mission.

**Object**

The Church of Ireland Council for Mission shall be the official body of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland concerned with the mission of the Church.

**Functions**

- To stimulate within the Church of Ireland a sense of the priority and urgency of mission;
- To advocate the equality and complementary nature of mission at home and throughout the world;
- To maintain close relationships with other bodies concerned with mission and in particular with Diocesan Boards of Mission, the Association of Mission Societies and mission and overseas development agencies;
- To promote effective models of mission and evangelism;
- To encourage programmes of renewal;
- To initiate and encourage enterprises which will further the mission of the church;
- To allocate funds from St Patrick's Memorial Fund and other funds at its disposal;
- To foster interest in members of the Church of Ireland serving in other parts of the world;
- To facilitate mission interchange visits to and from Ireland;
- To encourage reflection on the theology of mission.

### **Membership**

The Church of Ireland Council for Mission, to be elected triennially, shall consist of:-

- Up to 2 Archbishops or Bishops nominated by the House of Bishops;
- 6 members elected by General Synod in 2004 and triennially thereafter;
- Up to 6 members co-opted by the Council;
- 4 members nominated by the Association of Missionary Societies (2 representing agencies primarily concerned with mission in Ireland and 2 primarily concerned with world mission);
- 1 members nominated by the Church of Ireland Youth Department;
- 1 member and 1 alternate from each diocese (elected by the Diocesan Council for Mission or its equivalent or appointed by the Bishop);
- 1 member nominated by Mothers' Union (Ireland);
- 1 member nominated by the World Development - Bishops' Appeal Advisory Committee;
- 1 member nominated by the Home Mission Board of the Methodist Church in Ireland;
- No member shall serve more than three consecutive terms.

### **Structure**

The Church of Ireland Council for Mission shall meet not less than three times per annum. It shall have power to appoint:-

- a. an executive committee;
- b. any sub-committee as it may at any time deem to be necessary.

The Chairperson, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer shall be elected by the Council from among its members.

The Church of Ireland Council for Mission shall report annually to General Synod.

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**APPENDIX B**

**MISSIONARY SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE  
CHURCH OF IRELAND 2003**

Where there are blanks no figure was returned.

<b>Society</b>	<b>Donations</b>	
	<b>£Stg</b>	<b>€</b>
Bible Society (NI)	13,415	
Church Army	50,343	
CMSI	626,363	316,823
Church's Ministry among the Jewish People	27,409	
Church Pastoral Aid Society	27,881	
Crosslinks	213,682	35,002
Dublin University Far Eastern Mission		
Dublin University Mission to Chota Nagpur		
Feed the Minds, Ireland		
ICS	23,398	
Interserve		
Jerusalem and Middle East Church		
Leprosy Mission	34,017	52,000
Mission to Seafarers	10,711	
Mothers' Union	115,000	
National Bible Society		11,313
Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge	6,489	7,726
South American Missionary Society	127,625	14,662
United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel	70,153	
Tearfund	77,453	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,423,939</b>	<b>537,526</b>

