

## REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Proposer : The Chairperson.

The Rt Rev'd Peter F. Barrett : Bishop Of Cashel & Ossory.

### EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

Your Grace,

it gives me pleasure to propose the Report of the Christian Unity Committee. I wish to begin by combining the gratitude of the members of the Committee with the gratitude of the Church, for the dedication of my predecessor, the archbishop of Dublin, as Chairperson of this Committee over the past 8 years.

#### A

Archbishop John Neill is an ecumenist of international standing whose service to the gospel imperative of unity in Christ amongst christians and between the Churches is recognised far beyond these shores. He has recently stepped down as one of the Presidents of Churches Together in Britain & Ireland alongside his Co-Chairpersonship of the Porvoo Contact Group. In 2006, he will have served for two terms on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Thank you, your Grace, for such commitment which is greatly respected at home and abroad.

#### B

It is worth drawing the attention of members of General Synod to the membership list at the opening of the Report. It is drawn from a wide spectrum of experience and involvement across the dioceses of the Church. However, I draw your attention to one particular constituency : that of the archbishops and bishops of the Church *in toto*. I do so not to further elevate or isolate the House of Bishops. Rather, I wish to make a point of ecclesiological importance, which is this - the presence of the bishops is an indication not only of their concern for and commitment to the unity pilgrimage. It is also a sign of the depth of engagement of the Church of Ireland to this pilgrimage. Any future review of membership should not underestimate the significance of such presence.

#### C

The witness to deepening our togetherness in Christ across the 'Traditions of Faithfulness' continues apace in Ireland, not least in relation to Anglican/Methodist dialogue. We await with much

interest the ongoing deliberations of the Covenant Council on matters of faith and order, as it continues to chart a course towards a new appraisal of divergent moorings. It is also to be hoped that reflection with the Presbyterian Church on matters of mutual concern will be refreshed in the near future. Equally, we acknowledge the significance of the pontificate of Pope John Paul 11, which has become the third longest in recorded papal history and also take this opportunity to wish archbishop Diarmuid Martin well in his onerous responsibilities in Dublin as we wish Cardinal Desmond Connell well in his retirement.

#### D

I wish briefly to refer also to some changes in personnel in global and national ecumenical bodies, which are not without relevance for the Church of Ireland. We welcome the appointment of The Revd Dr Samuel Kobia, A Kenyan Methodist, as the new General Secretary of the World Council of Churches in succession to Dr Conrad Raiser and pay warm tribute to Dr Raiser's 'helmsmanship' over 11 years as General Secretary. With reference to our Irish Council of Churches, I had the privilege on behalf of the Church of wishing Dr David Stevens every blessing for his future work as Leader of the Corrymeela Community following his retirement as the General Secretary of the ICC. Dr Stevens is an astute commentator of the Irish ecumenical and political scenes and an excellent encourager of ecumenical witness in its broadest spheres. We express our sincere gratitude to God for his quiet but most attentive leadership. We look forward to welcoming his successor, Mr Michael Earle, an anglican from New Zealand and to supporting him in his important work, alongside the recently elected President of the ICC, Major Rik Pears, Irish Divisional Commander of the Salvation Army.

#### E

Two concluding points to which I draw your attention. First, Inter-Faith issues. Such issues have, perhaps surprisingly for some, been the preserve of this Christian Unity Committee in past years. However, the changing nature of inter-cultural and inter-racial Ireland may force a rethink on the advisability of such a provenance. To assist us in this immediate and important reflection, a sub-committee has been formed to reflect on matters of inter-faith concern and to make recommendations to the

Committee for consideration at next year's General Synod. In short, watch this space, though a break in this link will not be undertaken without good reason.. However, the seriousness with which we view such reflection is strengthened by the fact that we invited Canon Michael Ipgrave, Inter Faith Advisor to the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England to address us. His comments were further supplemented by a Report from the Bishop of Clogher following his attendance at an Anglican/Porvoo Consultation on Inter Faith Affairs held last year in Oslo. The european dimension is of no little significance in such national deliberation.

#### F

Secondly and finally, following a request from Standing Committee relating to the costing of our Church's various ecumenical commitments, another sub committee has been formed to not only outline such expenditure, but more importantly to provide a theological rationale behind such national and international involvement. This Report should be available for next month's meeting of Standing Committee. Fiscal accountability is of course necessary and prudent. However, the gospel imperative is a constraining accountability, which urges us further and deeper into the mystery of God's loving and unitive purposes for his household, the Church, in service to the world he so loves in Kingdom shapes.

This cannot and must not be done in isolation. The long standing and most important involvement of members of this committee in european and indeed international dialogues is clearly evident in for example, the Appendices relating to the Geiranger Declaration and the Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission's Report. Long may such involvement continue to nourish and challenge our perceptions of mission and unity.

Your Grace, I am pleased to propose the adoption of the Report of the Christian Unity Committee.

