

The Committee for Christian Unity

Report Seconded by Andrea Wills, Diocese of Tuam, Killala & Achonry

Embargoed until delivery

Your Grace, members of Synod,

As Bishop Barrett has mentioned in his report, the changing nature of inter-cultural and inter-racial Ireland has been to the forefront of discussions within the Committee. The last Irish Inter-Church Meeting organised by Dr. David Stevens, the outgoing executive secretary had as its title “The Implications of the New Immigrant Presence in Ireland”. Integration of refugees is a two way street and inclusive of both communities, host and guest. Intercultural learning goes two ways. If host and guest are more informed about each other’s cultures, perhaps real integration and not assimilation can begin. We must learn about Christianity and what it means to those who are ethnically different to ourselves. An overview of Christ’s Church in Ireland today shows that 25% of the congregation coming from outside Ireland are multi-cultural. A vision of racial harmony is needed. It is suggested that where there is an ethnically mixed congregation, having prayers in different languages can be a welcoming way forward. The very recent enlargement of the European Union by the 10 new member states will bring more Eastern Europeans to our shores. Many are so enthusiastic about their faith having suffered religious suppression previously. Churches there are overflowing. There will be even more scope for welcoming policies in our churches. Where all accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, we should experience a real community with cultural diversity.

The 12th Assembly of the Conference of European Church took place in Norway last summer with the theme “Jesus Christ heals and reconciles – our Witness in Europe”. The challenge was to reflect on the various ways in which Jesus brings healing and reconciliation – to individuals, immigrants and asylum seekers, churches which have been divided The report can be found on page 219. Following one of the “hearings” at the Conference the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe and Caritas Europa launched a new brochure “Action and networking against Trafficking in Women” at the European Parliament in Brussels. This is one of the most dramatic human rights violations. Young women in Eastern European countries are being tricked by promises of better lifestyles in countries like Sweden and Germany where they end up with no identities and being used as prostitutes. Discussion on the ethical challenges posed by recent developments in the biomedical sciences is continuing under the auspices of the Church and Society Commission of the CEC covering genetic testing, prenatal and pre-implantation diagnosis, regenerative medicine (with stem cells) and the respect of the human embryo.

At meetings of the committee for Christian Unity there is always an item on the Agenda entitled “Local ecumenical developments”. This is always most interesting and lively. People speak from the heart and as Bishop Barrett mentions, the membership list covers a wide spectrum of experience and involvement across the dioceses, thus highlighting the many different deeply felt ecumenical experiences that are happening day after day, often unsung, throughout this island. Long many they continue!

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