

APPENDIX F

ECUMENICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Review and Evaluation

EVALUATION OF CHURCH OF IRELAND INVOLVEMENT IN ECUMENICAL BODIES

The Church of Ireland is a member of five ecumenical bodies, as well as being involved in various ways with other ecumenical initiatives such as the Irish School of Ecumenics.

This document sets out the Church of Ireland's involvement in the five ecumenical bodies of which it is a member and attempts to reflect upon this membership, its cost and its benefits to the Church of Ireland.

THE ICC AND IICM

The Church of Ireland has always played a role in Irish national ecumenism and has been a member church of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) since its inception in 1923. We have also been part of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) since it came into existence, evolving from the 'Ballymascanlon Talks' in the 1970s. The IICM is a meeting of the ICC member churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Recent attempts effectively to merge these two bodies (the ICC and the IICM) into one structure collapsed when the Presbyterian General Assembly rejected the move. The envisaged Conference of Churches in Ireland (CCI) therefore did not come into existence. However, there has been considerable restructuring of the ICC/IICM relationship and since the failed CCI initiative the Roman Catholic Church has significantly increased its financial contribution to the IICM. The main costs of ICC/IICM are staff and property maintenance, but as the ICC and the IICM share the same staff and offices, there was no real financial loss with the collapse of the CCI initiative given that the Roman Catholic Church has increased its contribution. In fact, this restructuring led to an easing of the financial burden on the Church of Ireland and other ICC member churches, as the Roman Catholic Church started to contribute more funds (cf. years 2000/2001 in table below). While the 'twin-track' structure is far from ideal in terms of ecumenical praxis, the Church of Ireland's contribution to ICC/IICM is nonetheless money well spent; we are part of a national Council of Churches for a relatively modest financial outlay. The ICC/IICM structure provides a formal basis for ecumenical relations between the Irish churches.

The ICC has recently been engaging with representatives of the 'new churches' in Ireland and with the Orthodox presence; its Board of Overseas Affairs enables the churches to co-operate in World Mission and is closely involved in the work of Christian Aid. The ICC group, Women's Link, provides an opportunity for women's church organisations in Ireland to work together. Then again, the ICC administers the Inter-Church Reconciliation Fund for Ireland and the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund. The Churches' Peace Education Programme is the body which runs the joint Peace Education

Standing Committee – Report 2005

Programme of the ICC and the Roman Catholic Church's Irish Commission for Justice and Peace.

The IICM's work is divided between Theological and Social Issues, co-ordinated by the Irish Inter-Church Committee. A working party on 'Spirituality in Ireland Today' has recently completed its work and its papers are being prepared for publication. The Department of Social Issues provides a meeting point for those involved in social responsibility work in the churches, meeting quarterly. The 18-monthly plenary Inter-Church Meeting has traditionally been organised on a thematic basis and has brought together much expertise in the Irish churches on a variety of topics.

Financial Contributions to the ICC and the IICM – in Euro

	ICC	IICM	
2000	36,571	4,625	
2001	23,429	11,428	
2002	23,429	11,428	
2003	23,429	11,428	
2004	23,429	11,428	
2005	23,429	11,428	Budget
2006	23,500	13,245	Budget

The above figures include contributions to the ICC and IICM and travelling/conference costs.

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES

1. CEC - STRUCTURE AND WORK

CEC is the only forum in Europe for relations between the 125 Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, Reformed and Protestant Churches, and with the Roman Catholic Church. On a low budget of £1.1 million p.a., and with a small staff in Geneva and Brussels, it covers a wide range of Church concerns in five main categories. They are Churches in Dialogue (ecumenical relations), Church and Society, Churches in Solidarity with Women, Immigrants in Europe, and Islam in Europe. CEC has also been involved constructively in conflict resolution in Kosovo, Georgia and Ukraine.

CEC is run by the 40-member Central Committee which is elected by the General Assembly. The Committee appoints people to the five operational Commissions which, with the General Secretariat, carry out the work of CEC. CEC General Assemblies are held every 6 years, when some 300 delegates receive Reports of work done and outline work for the future. CEC has also collaborated closely with CCEE in holding landmark European Ecumenical Assemblies in Basel (1989) and Graz (1997).

2. CHURCH OF IRELAND AND CEC

Over the years, the Church of Ireland has met its financial obligations to CEC and has participated fully in the Assemblies through its delegated representatives. Important issues have been dealt with, such as ‘Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation’ and ‘Healing and Reconciliation in Europe’.

3. STRENGTHS OF CEC MEMBERSHIP

- It is a forum for 125 Churches in Europe;
- It brings together the CEC member Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in Europe;
- It engages the Churches with the European Commission and Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg;
- It is an important vehicle for Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Europe;
- It protects the rights of vulnerable and disadvantaged women e.g. in raising consciousness and taking action against trafficking in human beings;
- It seeks to protect the human rights of Migrants in Europe.

4. WEAKNESSES IN CEC MEMBERSHIP

- The work of CEC is not integrated into the life of the Church of Ireland: in effect, CEC does not impact on the ongoing life of the Church in any clearly quantifiable way, and vice versa;
- There is no ‘reception mechanism’ for the work of CEC. Its impact, therefore, is limited to the enthusiasm and initiative of delegates returning from Assemblies;
- The Church of Ireland does not have representation on any of the Committees and Commissions of CEC;
- The present Irish member of the CEC Central Committee, from the Presbyterian Church, has not initiated contact with the Church of Ireland.

5. CONCLUSION

There is a deficiency in the relationship between the CEC superstructure and the Church of Ireland. With due thought, effort and positive action, this could be reversed in the following ways:

Standing Committee – Report 2005

- The Irish member of Central Committee should convene a meeting of the Irish Churches' delegates for consultation, and to enhance the relationship between CEC and the Irish Churches
- There should be a 'reception process' in the Church of Ireland to receive and process the Reports, statements, and findings of the Assemblies, Commissions, Committees and Secretariat of CEC.
- The Church of Ireland should plan strategically, and campaign more positively, for representation on CEC bodies.

6. VERDICT – BEST VALUE

The annual Church of Ireland fee to CEC is in the region of £2,500. If the further payment of delegates' expenses every 6 years are added, the overall cost of CEC membership is in the region of £3,000 pa. In view of the fact that CEC does excellent work, that payment seems reasonable. However, there is potential for the Church of Ireland to be much more integrated into the work of CEC – at very little, if any, extra cost – to the mutual benefit of CEC and the Church of Ireland.

Financial Contributions to CEC – in Euro

	CEC	
2000	3,750	
2001	4,762	
2002	4,888	
2003	4,952	
2004	5,022	
2005	5,725	Budget
2006	5,907	Budget

The above figures include contributions to CEC as well as contributions to the European Churches Fund.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

In 1990, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI, formerly known as the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland) succeeded the British Council of Churches (BCC), founded in 1942. The new title 'Churches Together in Britain and Ireland' reflects a desire for a closer relationship between the churches as well as reflecting the national ecumenical bodies in Britain. As mentioned above, the ICC and the IICM, attempted to form a similar group in Ireland to be known as the CCI – Conference of Churches in Ireland – but sadly, this proved not to be possible.

The CTBI has an assembly every two years (or so), which brings together approximately 300 delegates from all the member churches, and this assembly is organised on a

Standing Committee – Report 2005

thematic basis. The intention of the assembly is to act as a catalyst for ecumenical life across these islands.

CTBI also has a Steering Committee on which the Rev Sonia Gyles represents the Church of Ireland. The Steering Committee looks after the day-to-day running of CTBI: practical, financial matters, etc. – rather than dealing with ecumenical issues and topics.

There is also Church Representatives' Meeting twice a year which comprises of approximately 60 church and ecumenical leaders meeting together giving opportunities of contact, communication and common decision-making.

The CTBI covers a wide variety of areas of work as well as being particularly concerned with Mission, Racial Justice and Inter-Faith Relations.

One of the positives of our involvement with CTBI is the close working relationship we have with the Methodist Church in Ireland as fellow-members of CTBI; agreed representation, support of each other's candidates for office, etc.

The Irish component of CTBI is small and has to be constantly re-asserted as it can be easily overlooked.

Financial Contributions to CTBI – in Euro

	CTBI	
2000	21,371	
2001	22,013	
2002	22,673	
2003	23,353	
2004	24,953	
2005	34,959	Budget – includes travel costs for delegates to assembly
2006	31,608	Budget – includes travel costs for Church Representatives' Meeting

Evaluation of Church of Ireland Involvement in Ecumenical Bodies

The Church of Ireland is a member of five ecumenical bodies, as well as being involved in various ways with other ecumenical initiatives such as the Irish School of Ecumenics.

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WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The World Council of Churches promotes world-wide Christian unity through its programmes of sharing, support and advocacy, through its studies and publications, and through its assemblies and conferences where a rich diversity of Christians gather and where common worship, prayer and bible study from the spiritual environment for

Standing Committee – Report 2005

consultation on critical contemporary issues in church and society. The Church of Ireland is entitled to send two delegates to each assembly.

Initially, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches were not represented at the WCC, but since 1961, the Orthodox Churches have been fully represented and the Roman Catholic Church has sent official observers since the general assembly of 1968. The work of the WCC is overseen in between assemblies – which happen approximately every seven years – by its Central and Executive Committees, and is carried out by a General Secretariat covering four key areas:-

- Unity and Renewal
- Mission: Health, Education and Witness
- Justice, Peace and Creation
- Sharing and Service

The significance of the World Council of Churches is that it is the only body bringing together all the strands of the Christian world within its membership apart from the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Churches. Close contact with the Pentecostal churches and new churches is now established and there is ongoing official partnership with the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church is a full member of the Faith and Order Commission. The World Council of Churches relates to the United Nations and its agencies in a manner in which no confessional body could do, other than the Roman Catholic Church.

The Church of Ireland has been a member of the World Council since its inception in 1948 and, though Anglican ecumenical leadership is less to the fore nowadays as Anglican structures seem to absorb most of our energy, the Anglican presence is greatly valued. Anglicans within the World Council of Churches frequently provide the interpretation between what might be called the Protestant Reformed world scene and that of Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

The Church of Ireland has been represented on the Central Committee for a very long period, first by Canon Eric Elliott, then by Bishop Brian Hannon and for the last two terms by Archbishop John Neill.

Financial Contributions to the WCC – in Euro

	WCC	
2000	2,286	
2001	2,857	
2002	3,000	
2003	5,186	
2004	9,046	Includes provision for assembly of 2006
2005	7,940	Budget – includes travel costs for Central Committee
2006	11,055	Budget – includes travel costs for delegates attending the assembly

OVERALL REFLECTION

The fact that the Church of Ireland is a member of the various ecumenical bodies is positive and is most desirable. Being part of such bodies exposes us to a richness of diversity in worship, ministry, witness and affects the type of leadership provided in the Church of Ireland. It gives us the opportunity to contribute to as well as benefit from the world-wide Christian Church as members of the WCC, or to help shape a new emerging Europe through CEC, and to consign our past to history as we seek to move forward on this island through the work of the ICC and IICM.

While we are aware of our contribution – particularly in financial terms – we are not sure of what we are ‘getting out of it’ and this leads to questioning our membership and involvement in such organisations. From the information provided above, it is clear that the Church of Ireland benefits in many ways from its ecumenical involvement in these organisations, but our communication of this could be much more effective. Those who have participated in the various ecumenical events and initiatives have reported back to the Church of Ireland and these reports have been published in the Church of Ireland Gazette. Over the years, and increasingly in recent times, the Gazette has consistently given excellent coverage to ecumenical and inter-faith issues and gatherings, but there is still a ‘gap’ in communication that needs to be addressed. Reports which are taken as ‘read’ at Standing Committee without any discussion may also go unnoticed, and thereby, the full benefit to, and contribution of, the Church of Ireland at such ecumenical gatherings not be fully recognised and appreciated.