

**THE GENERAL SYNOD  
COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**

**REPORT 2005**

**1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

The Archbishops and Bishops (The Rt Rev PF Barrett – Chairman)

Mr George Clarke	Rev Canon Walter Lewis
Rev Patrick Comerford	Ven Gregor McCamley
Rev Canon David Crooks	Mrs Roberta McKelvey
Rev Canon Dr Ian Ellis	Dr Kenneth Milne
Very Rev Leslie Forrest	Mr Trevor Morrow
Rev Robert Gray	Rev Daniel Nuzum (Honorary Secretary)
Rev Sandra Hales	Rev Derek Sargent
Mr Sam Harper	Rev Gillian Wharton
Mrs Ruth Heard	Rev Canon Trevor Williams
Rev Iain Knox	Mrs Andrea Wills

The Church of Ireland is committed to the cause of Christian unity both locally and internationally. It is a long standing and committed member of the Irish Council of Churches, the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches. We are well represented and indeed well served by each of these bodies. In 2004, the committee conducted an ‘audit’ of the Church of Ireland’s commitment to various ecumenical instruments, not least in financial terms at the request of the Standing Committee.

At each meeting of the Committee for Christian Unity there is an opportunity to hear about local ecumenical developments and initiatives across Ireland. This is always a useful window onto the local ecumenical world and we are encouraged by the many ‘good news stories’ in so many areas and would wish to encourage them.

**2. THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES/ THE INTER-CHURCH MEETING**

Mr Michael Earle commenced work as General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches and Executive Secretary of the Irish Inter Church Meeting in 2004 and we welcome him to these important roles in the life of the ecumenical movement in Ireland.

The Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting have both been involved in the wider consultation process about the future of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

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

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

CTBI has commenced a review of the Ecumenical structures in the four nations and a wide consultation took place in 2004 with the member churches and the national instruments to look at 'ecumenical architecture' with a view to achieving the best possible infrastructural arrangement to enable ecumenical work in Ireland and Britain. At the time of writing this process is ongoing.

**4. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

The World Council of Churches has engaged on a wide ranging review of its structures and is engaging with a reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement. This process is expected to bring proposals to the next WCC Assembly which will be in Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006 at which the Church of Ireland will be represented by the Bishop of Cashel and Ms Y Naylor.

**5. THE INTER-CHURCH CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR LOCAL SCHEMES OF CO-OPERATION**

The report appears as Appendix A.

**6. INTER-FAITH PROPOSALS**

The Committee for Christian Unity submitted a response to the *Windsor Report* from an Inter Faith perspective at the invitation of the Network for Inter Faith Concerns (NIFCON) department of the Anglican Communion Office. This response appears as Appendix B to this report.

**APPENDIX A**

**EXTENDING THE REMIT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN  
UNITY TO INCLUDE ISSUES RELATED TO INTER-FAITH ENCOUNTER**

The Committee for Christian Unity wishes to fulfil its remit by further developing its work through active engagement in Inter-Faith Encounter as a response in humility and in hope to the changing and developing Ireland of the twenty-first century. Expansion of the work of the Committee for Christian Unity for the present is the recommendation being made to General Synod 2005.

The following considerations have held weight in our thinking:-

- (1) There is a strong desire on the part of those exploring how to progress with Inter-Faith Issues that the work envisaged take a Christ-centred approach. This means both that our own principles are Gospel-based and that the person of Christ informs our encounter with those of other World Faiths. It has long been the conviction of the Committee for Christian Unity that the respect for differences is vital in understanding unity as mission. We actively challenge the philosophy of exclusivity in all that we pray, think and do. In this spirit of encounter with our global neighbours at home and abroad as Disciples of Christ Jesus we encourage the development of Inter-Faith work as a natural extension of ecumenical respect and love. Love of one's neighbour (however complicated) is a genuine Gospel imperative.
- (2) There is a strong desire that the Church of Ireland, spread as it is right across Ireland, respond practically as a Christian Church to the developing presence of members of other World Faith Communities in Ireland. This will manifest itself before we know it in a whole realm of areas as Ireland, both North and South, develops its sense of community to include those who are members of our Irish community and also members of a wide range of Faith Communities. The Committee for Christian Unity has a long track record of facilitating dialogue in such a way as not to give the impression of espousing easy syncretism within the family of Christian denominations. Over many years patience and courtesy have engendered a confidence in our contributing to the national and international ecumenical scene in a whole variety of contexts, for example vis-à-vis Porvoo, the Leuenberg Agreement, ARCIC, Anglican-Oriental Orthodox Dialogue, the World Council of Churches as well as within the multi-faceted ecumenical world of Ireland itself including engagement with the Newer Churches.
- (3) There is a recognition by the Committee for Christian Unity that practicalities often precede and pressurize theory. The practicalities on the ground which we envisage during the next five years are to do with schools (for example, dress, religious festivals, prayer rooms as well as assumptions about nativity plays); hospitals (patients and staff, fasting and diet, professional shared chaplaincy); intermarriage (the couple and the extended family, sensitivities around conversion and the refusal

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to convert); rites of initiation (particularly when parents of different Faith Communities wish to have rites in common for their children) and rites of the dead.

- (4) There is a realization that none of this will be taken seriously without a sustained development of education. This will take the form of the dissemination of knowledge in general and of specialists who can equip people to deal respectfully with situations as they arise. All training for ministry – lay and ordained – will need to incorporate preparation for ministering in the Christian and Anglican tradition in a multi-Faith Ireland.
- (5) The Christian tradition has long claimed that it is all-encompassing in terms of divine revelation and that within the Christian tradition are contained all things necessary unto salvation. This truth claim is already understood by many Mission Agencies as needing to be very sensitive to what constitutes the context of daily living with God for those who are partners in mission. Much theology of mission includes an ecumenical perspective. The quest for Christian Unity is vital in informing the search for courteous and informed Inter-Faith Encounter because the ecumenical endeavour has enabled different Churches to respect distinctions as well as identifying common aspirations and collaborative projects. Such is part of the philosophy of Christian Unity. It is the opinion of the Committee for Christian Unity that its natural extension is into the realm of Inter-Faith Encounter because it has a head start in handling disagreement with respect, creativity, compassion and great patience.
- (6) Increasingly it is coming home to all Christian Churches that a divided witness is alienating those who might otherwise be inquisitive and involved adherents of the Church. The ever more pressing and pertinent challenge of welcoming new neighbours and combating racism (sometimes seen as the companion and successor of sectarianism) will be the stronger for being understood and undertaken in the spirit of contemporary Christian Unity.

The Guidelines for Inter-Faith Encounter in the Churches of the Porvoo Communion agreed in Oslo in December 2003 are a very good place to begin consideration of the whole Inter-Faith area from a confident, generous Christian perspective. They may be accessed via the Porvoo Website: [www.porvoochurches.org](http://www.porvoochurches.org)

**APPENDIX B**

**THE WINDSOR REPORT**

**A response from the Inter-Faith Section of the Committee for Christian Unity of the Church of Ireland**

**PREFACE**

The document *The Guidelines for Inter-Faith Encounter in the Churches of the Porvoo Communion*, as agreed at The Porvoo Communion Consultation in Oslo in November/December 2003, has been instrumental in the development of Inter-Faith thinking in the Church of Ireland. These Guidelines not only express principles which are valuable in themselves but also represent an important aspect of the outreach of our common Anglican-Lutheran witness within the Porvoo Churches. Their focus is properly theological. They are realistic about and rightly critical of our differing cultural contexts. They stress the centrality of reading Scripture together. They say something important to the church about mission. Finally they explore twelve issues for Christians in Inter-Faith Encounter – hard situations, hard sayings. These are unashamed in their perception of difficulties but also unremitting in their expectation of graciousness in dialogue. They form something of the backdrop to this Response to The Windsor Report from the specific interests of the Inter-Faith Section of the Committee for Christian Unity.

**RESPONSE**

**QUESTION 1**

The Preamble and Declaration of 1870 states: ‘The Church of Ireland will maintain communion with the sister Church of England, and with all other Christian Churches agreeing in the principles of this Declaration; and will set forward, as far as in it lieth, quietness, peace, and love, among all Christian people.’ This is the primary statement of our Irish Anglican understanding of communion – in communion with the Church of England and with other churches who bear witness to the principles enshrined in the Declaration.

Therefore the sustained attempt to ‘put flesh on’ the word ‘communion’ in The Windsor Report is something which we welcome as valuable, informative and creative. To grapple with definitions of the Body of Christ as organic and active invites the institution of the church to be experimental and proactive towards others rather than sprawling and protective of itself. This is but a way of expressing the old cliché that the church exists for those outside it every bit as much as for those inside it. In this sense the challenge still laid at the door of the Communion is the motto: ‘truth shall set you free’ and not simply the lesser and occasionally attractive cliché: ‘compromise shall keep us together.’ Dealing in truth is vital as a ground-rule of Inter-Faith Encounter and also of Anglican Communion inter-dependence.

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The Anglican method of discernment of the will of God as an impetus towards doing the work of God – Scripture, Tradition and Reason – carried out within the markers of The Lambeth Quadrilateral needs to be spelled out clearly in further work generated by the Report. The current Report is in many ways an exercise in internal Anglican ecumenism. That is a wonderful maturing of our perception of ourselves as ecumenical. At the same time this achievement and aspiration cannot in today's understanding of the church world-wide be an end in itself. It must be a springboard to our being the eschatological Kingdom of God, however inchoate, now. It can be inspired and informed by using in a contemporary context the time-honoured methodologies of Anglicanism to contribute to the fruition of the work of the Body of Christ within the divine expression of God's Kingdom. This work propels us into engagement with those of other Faiths.

One of the aspects of 'the truth that sets us free' is that the Body of Christ is already radically holy by being itself what and who it is by the operation of God the Trinity and, further, that it is not made up of the sum of our individual or institutional perfectionisms or impeccabilities. The inter-relation of grace and salvation is vital in understanding the priority of the divine gift of forgiveness in all God's dealings with us. Righteousness is of God, self-righteousness is a potion of our own concoction. Such arguments point us once more to the proper provisionality of the church and to the imperative to live holy lives with and for others. Communion itself demands of us a relational model of being the Body with and for others. In the Inter-Faith context our service of our neighbour cannot presuppose our subsuming that neighbour into compliance with the expressions of our own pattern of belief. This is also a valuable general principle of respect of others.

The proper emphasis on the authority of the triune God exercised through Scripture is important in that it asserts the Trinity of God as fundamental to communion as such, underwrites the importance of Scripture in the life of the church and articulates the conviction that the unfettered presence of God in the world stands alongside a lived Bible in the witness of self-conscious Anglicans to God with and for others. Scripture, the Report suggests, is not self-interpreting from its own text. Neither is it so comprehensively culturally circumscribed in its current ecclesiastical contexts as to be incapable of liberating peoples from an economically, philosophically or politically oppressive setting and system. Its own freedoms come from its being a series of historical documents inspired by God and which are to be applied critically in local situations. This is an important tool in the application of Scripture in Inter-Faith Encounter.

The relationship between *Illness: The surface symptoms* and *Illness: The deeper symptoms* is uneasy as the leap of application between the two is not always clear. This was, however, bound to be the case. The Report is responsive rather than prescriptive. The Report, by its silence on the issues which prompted its composition, is, as Oslo 2003 recognizes in its different subject matter, crying out for further presentations in readily accessible form of the contexts of contemporary Anglicanism from historical, sociological and economic perspectives at the very least. This would give the tools of understanding which would make the (rightly) much vaunted expectation of listening possible and fruitful. In this work Inter-Faith understanding has a strong role to play.

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In relation to mission in particular an emerging anxiety felt by many is that the boomerang may be swinging towards a Southern Hemisphere evangelization of the Northern Hemisphere which could prove to be no more than colonialism in reverse. If such an initiative were to become an established pattern within Anglicanism and base itself too heavily or indeed exclusively on a missology of conversion, it would play havoc with Inter-Faith Encounter. It is also mission although not always recognized as such. Important in Inter-Faith Encounter is the freedom to explore theology together across the divide as well as manifesting a respect in personal and institutional dealings. The discussion of *Adiaphora* and *Subsidiarity* can be expanded in the facilitation of such Encounter as an expression of Christian conviction and outreach in such a way as to be locally elastic but still bound by a common obedience to God rather than being seen as a selling out on principles.

### QUESTION 2

‘The Instruments of Unity’ as outlined in The Windsor Report are not currently as tidy as they look. They in fact belie their essential origins in the codification of successive ad hoc provisions of fora for information, discussion and debate across the Anglican Communion, with the exception of the archbishopric of Canterbury, of course. All of this might have ticked along nicely were it not for the ways in which *The Surface Symptoms* have done the rounds of the three gatherings mentioned, with individuals and groups of individuals seeking either acceptance or denunciation of developments within specific, individual dioceses. This lobbying has been both unedifying and debilitating. It has caused alarm bells to ring across the ecumenical world and the same can be said about the Inter-Faith-Encounter world. We are presented with a caricatured Islamic monolith, for example, in much political rhetoric and tabloid journalism along with the perception of internal chaos within and across the Anglican Communion. The danger is that these fora may already have become quasi-curial. Take, for example, the way in which what technically is a partial reading of ‘Lambeth 1.10’ has acquired a semi-creedal standing as ‘the mind of the vast majority of Anglicans world-wide.’

A genuine weakness in the conduct of the debate around *The Surface Symptoms* is that, despite the long period of media coverage, we have not located the issues firmly in the pastoral realm. This is a severe limitation and has resulted in the near-calcification of opposing ecclesiologies and orthodoxies depending on whether your preference is for secular relativism or Biblical literalism. The existing Instruments of Unity need radically to be re-configured if they are to remain fresh and to fulfil their consultative role in the projected Council of Advice. This should be done as a matter of urgency and before any further thought is given to *A Council of Advice* for the Archbishop of Canterbury. This Council should avoid becoming yet another Standing Committee in The Anglican Cycle of Consultation because the issues at stake in the life of the Anglican Communion will be changing all the time. It needs to have a membership which can be asked to step down as appropriate without any insult being either intended or taken in order to make room for those whose involvement is pertinent to new specific issues. Its membership also needs to have a working instinct for the creative complexities of Inter-Faith Encounter which is,

increasingly, the context in which the principles of Anglicanism will be lived in faith in Jesus Christ across the Churches of the Communion.

The enhancement of the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury presents the possibility of huge changes in the understanding of this person and the role which he (or she) fulfils in the workings and in the psychology of the Anglican Communion. In a real sense it will necessitate a trenchant examination of the viability of the Establishment which is peculiar to English Anglicanism in the Communion. The rest of us are de facto Disestablishments. Will it eventually lead to an election of the Archbishop of Canterbury from among any bishops validly ordained across the Communion? If so will it be an 'appointment' for a fixed term and will it be more edifying as elections go than any other contemporary election?

The exploration of a communion-wide Canon Law relating to inter-Anglican relations will take time to effect – and rightly. It is important that, in the spirit of The Windsor Report, it paint with a broad brush in relation to the creative mixture of autonomy, mutuality of respect, subsidiarity and adiaphora. Much of the law is an enshrinement in statute of practicalities and precedents. It is also the fruit of a philosophical exercise of jurisprudence. This is an exciting development which has all the potential to offer cohesion as a dividend of trust, something strongly underwritten in Section A of The Windsor Report.

### **QUESTION 3**

The recommendations and proposals would impact as follows:

- A reassessment of the relationship between autonomy and inter-dependence among provinces which is timely.
- An ability to address together Holy Scripture as revealing the dynamic presence of the Triune God in history and in contemporary life.
- A recognition of the dangers of the 'Russian Roulette' theologically and practically played out by stretching the bonds of affection, which exist within the Body of Christ as lived in the Communion, to breaking point. There have already taken place actions which cannot be 'received' with any degree of affirmative ease across the Communion. There have already been unauthorized interventions by bishops from outside a particular diocese or indeed province who have no jurisdiction there which have set people at variance with their local bishop. Such apostolic ministry exercised locally is undermined by the insistence on compliance with particular positions on a variety of issues and provision of answers to particular questions which lie beyond the vows of the ordination of that local bishop.
- A mutuality of respect for diversity within a covenanted relationship, remembering always that the covenant in the Old Testament is a recognition and beginning of new creation.

#### QUESTION 4

The draft Covenant marks a substantial attempt to systematize parts of Communion life which have been in loose association with one another and until now have not needed to be defined with precision and explicit inter-relation. The Covenant is an expression of the trust to which the Report rightly draws our attention in the following terms: 'Ideally, the Communion puts its trust in each province to exercise its autonomy appropriately within our mutual fellowship... This commits each church to a fiduciary duty to honour, and not to breach, that trust.' (page 32)

From an Inter-Faith Encounter perspective the Covenant does nothing to undermine or impede the engagement in trust and in the name of Jesus Christ with those of other faiths which is the character of that Encounter. Its main thrust is to offer voluntary cohesion in terms of principles in order to avoid fragmentation of relationship in practice within the Anglican Communion. The Covenant provides the framework for Anglicans world-wide to understand communion as an ecclesiology with a mission. It is our conviction that ecumenism and Inter-Faith relations are integral to the mission of a Communion which wishes, as indeed the signs suggest, to avoid internal implosion by too assiduous a quest for consensus and also to avoid internal explosion by unilateral subsidiarity. The Covenant refreshingly avoids the use of the word *orthodoxy* as an aspiration of consensus because we must never forget that orthodoxy has, in church tradition, needed to be radical and conservatism in doctrine has often been defined as heterodox.

The Right Reverend Michael Jackson, bishop of Clogher, chairperson of the Inter-Faith Sub-Group of the Committee for Church Unity of the Church of Ireland in consultation with members of the Sub-Group.

The Committee for Christian Unity is chaired by the bishop of Cashel and Ossory, the Right Reverend Peter Barrett. Its Honorary Secretary is the Reverend Daniel Nuzum, rector of Templebreedy Group of Parishes, Diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross.

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