

The Report of the Committee for Christian Unity – pages 311-319
Proposed by the Rt Rev Michael Jackson

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

The Committee for Christian Unity in reporting once again to the Members of General Synod this year, as in other years, is fulfilling one of the five terms of reference granted it by General Synod 1995. The other four are:

- the promotion and sustaining of the vision of Christian Unity within the Church of Ireland;
- the promotion and support of movements within Ireland towards co-operation among the various Christian bodies;
- to maintain Church of Ireland membership of and participation in international ecumenical bodies;
- to encourage the development of inter-faith dialogue in Ireland elsewhere.

This year's Report sees the Committee active on all of these fronts. A vital part of each Meeting is the gathering from among Members information about local ecumenical events and initiatives across Ireland. North, south, east and west are represented in these findings which offer much encouragement and are a barometer of the strength of commitment and charity expressed in and across denominations in Ireland today. The vision of Christian Unity within the Church of Ireland is sustained and fed by this local expression of togetherness in Christ in a way which is human and tangible.

It is with great pleasure that we received the news that the chairperson of the Committee, the bishop of Cashel and Ossory, has also been invited to take the chair of The Irish Council of Churches. This, combined with his forthcoming participation in the World Council of Churches Assembly in Brazil in 2006, means that the Church of Ireland is strongly and faithfully represented nationally and internationally through the work of the Committee. We offer him our congratulations and good wishes.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, once known as the British Council of Churches, is going through a period of re-structuring and the Irish Members have been very much part of this process. The structural particularities and problems of Irish ecumenical endeavour are widely known. Less widely known, however, may be the overwhelming expression by Members of the CTBI Assembly held in Swanwick in February 2005 of the desire to facilitate Ireland in whatever way possible to keep going, to keep praying and working as churches together. Support and encouragement for all that we do was widespread and as a Church of Ireland we ought to be much heartened by those who journey with us. The shape of the new 'ecumenical architecture' is becoming clearer. There will be a greater role for the local ecumenical instruments and, as with so much in the contemporary world, the new arrangements will be as good as what we and others put into them and make of them. Both onus and opportunity are ours.

Involvement in and contribution to international ecumenical work remains vital, in the opinion of the Committee, to the self-understanding and development of the Church of Ireland. First because we have more than shown that we have a significant contribution to make. The Irish experience of ecumenical difficulties adds both a realism and an urgency to international fora. Secondly because insularity and individualism can lead us into obscurity, deep into preoccupation with ourselves alone and away from mutuality of commitment. It is this sort of mutual commitment which contributes so significantly to the big picture of what it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ in today's world.

2005 has already revealed itself as the Year of the two Popes. The Committee expressed both its sympathy to the clergy and people of the Roman Catholic people in Ireland at the death of John Paul II and its recognition of the historic nature of the election of Benedict XVI. John Paul II's visit to Ireland in 1979 brought with it an appeal for an end to violence and for a renewed commitment to peace and reconciliation. All of this agenda is still on the table, unresolved in any active sense. Both of our expressions underlined ARCIC dialogue as the continuing context in which we in the Church of Ireland see our encounter with the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical pilgrimage.

The commitment to the encouragement of inter-faith dialogue in Ireland and elsewhere made by General Synod in 1995 has proved to be in many ways prophetic. Members of the Anglican Communion in these islands came together with members of the Porvoo Communion of Churches in 2003 and agreed for dissemination and implementation in our churches a number of Guidelines for Inter-Faith Encounter. The beginning of work on this process in the Church of Ireland is referred to in Appendix A. The Committee intends to continue such work in practical and reflective ways. NIFCON, the Network for Inter-Faith Concerns in the Anglican Communion, was established by Lambeth 1998 in recognition of the fact that many Anglicans world-wide live alongside and among people of other faith communities. I myself look forward very much to accompanying the Archbishop of Canterbury to Pakistan later in the year as part of this on-going pilgrimage of faithfulness and encounter between Anglicans and those of other world faiths. NIFCON sought responses to The Windsor Report from every Province of the Anglican Communion. The Committee for Christian Unity's response is contained in Appendix B.

Finally I wish to commend to the prayers and the work of all Members of Synod continuing engagement locally with those of other denominations and faiths in a Christ-like spirit of courtesy, respect and hope. The future is Christ's and we are Christ's.