

COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIALOGUE REPORT 2025

MEMBERSHIP (20)

A Bishop (Chairman): The Bishop of Tuam,
Limerick & Killaloe (4)
WCC Representative: VACANT
ACC Representative: Rev Canon Katharine
Poulton (3)
ACC Representative: Mr Glenn Moore (0)
Porvoo Contact Group Person:
Rev Canon Stephen Fielding (4)
An Honorary Secretary of General Synod:
Rev Canon Malcolm Kingston (4)
Hon Records Secretary: Rev David White
(resigned September 2024) (3)
Ms Gina Coptý (appointed September 2024) (4)

Hon Secretary: Very Rev Niall Sloane (5)
The Archbishop of Dublin (3)
The Bishop of Derry (4)
Rev Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum (2)
Rev Dr Christine O’Dowd Smyth (1)
Rev Suzanne Cousins (4)
Ms Cate Turner (5)
Rev Abigail Sines (2)
Rev Canon Kevin O’Brien (4)
Mr Femi Atoyebi (1)
Dr Bridget Nichols (3)
Dr Ryan Hawk (4)

INTRODUCTION

The Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue was first established by the General Synod as the Home Reunion Committee in 1905 and assumed its current name in 2007. The Commission was previously known as the Committee for Christian Unity.

Its terms of reference are:

- To promote within the Church of Ireland the vision of Church unity;
- To promote and support movements in Ireland towards co-operation among the various Christian bodies;
- To maintain Church of Ireland membership of, and participation in, national and international ecumenical bodies;
- To address, in consultation with the Standing Committee, developments within the Anglican Communion;
- To encourage and engage in inter-faith encounter and dialogue;
- To report annually to the General Synod.

The membership consists of up to 20 members elected annually by the General Synod.

The Church of Ireland has a rich network of relationships with fellow Anglican churches and other Christian traditions within Ireland and overseas. It is a member of the Anglican Communion and the following ecumenical networks:

- the Irish Council of Churches (ICC);
- the Irish Inter Church Committee;
- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI);
- the Conference of European Churches (CEC);
- the World Council of Churches (WCC);
- the Porvoo Communion (which brings together Anglican and Lutheran Churches); and
- the Reuilly Common Statement (between Anglican and French-speaking Protestant Churches).

As an observer on the Meissen Commission, the Church also has links with the Evangelical Church in Germany.

The Commission on Christian Unity and Dialogue’s three working groups focus on Anglican, European and inter-faith matters.

The **Anglican & Ecumenical Affairs Working Group** considers the Church's relations within the Anglican Communion and within the Porvoo Communion, and with the Moravian Church. More information on the Anglican Communion is available at www.anglicancommunion.org.

The **European Affairs Working Group** works closely with the ICC's European Affairs Committee and the CEC to discuss and consider common concerns for European Churches.

The **Inter-Faith Working Group** seeks to build relationships and encourage dialogue with people from other faiths who are living in Ireland.

The Church of Ireland is in full communion with the other members of the Anglican Communion and Porvoo Communion, the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches, and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Relations between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland are covered by the Covenant Council. The Commission's members attend the annual conferences of other Christian denominations in Ireland and hold regular meetings with the Roman Catholic Church and with the Presbyterian Church.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Once again, the following pages describe the extent and depth of the Church's engagement with the pursuit of that Unity which is Christ's gift and Christ's will for the church. We can dare to take a certain degree of pride in the manner in which the creative voice of the Church of Ireland is heard in so many contexts.

All this work requires the availability and skill of Commission members, and members of our working groups. Without the commitment and constant attention to detail of our secretary, Dean Niall Sloane, our work would be virtually impossible. In recent times the Rev David White, to whom our thanks are due, has stepped down from his role as our records secretary, a task now being undertaken by Ms Gina Coptý. Canon Kevin O'Brien of my own diocese is bringing a new and fresh approach to the endeavours of the European Affairs Group, which he convenes. The Rev Suzanne Cousins continues to offer commitment and imagination to the Inter-Faith working group. And in the context of the Anglican and Ecumenical Affairs group, Canon Katharine Poulton who has brought such insight to the role of convenor, not least thanks to her membership of the ACC, has been succeeded by Dr Bridget Nichols of CITI whose scholarly gifts and international connections will be of great benefit to us.

What follows is to be read, marked, learned and inwardly digested largely as a rich range of snapshots into the work, national and international, to which the Commission is committed. We do all of this not as an exercise in 'ecclesiastical joinery' (as the late Archbishop Henry McAdoo used to say) but because of our utter conviction that the pursuit of unity in truth is a Dominical imperative, so 'that the world may believe'. And we believe too in the mutually receptive essence of ecumenism ... that simply by walking together on a common pilgrimage we offer to one another strengths, gifts and insights which strengthen our witness in a manner that would not be possible were we left to ourselves. In short, and as has often been said, we need one another in order to be whole ourselves.

It is a privilege and joy to Chair this commission, and to witness the energy and vision of those who advance its work. One cannot say this of every meeting one attends ... but in the case of CCUD, whether in person or online, one never leaves a meeting without feeling that time has been well spent, with insights gained and opportunities to make a positive difference to Christian relationships enthusiastically seized.

Michael Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe
The Rt Rev MAJ Burrows,
Chair

ECUMENICAL INSTRUMENTS

Considerations of space allow for only limited coverage of the work of the ecumenical instruments to which the Church of Ireland belongs. Their respective websites (given below) should be consulted for detailed reports. Full particulars of Church of Ireland membership of ecumenical organisations and their remit may be found in the appropriate directory on the Church of Ireland website (www.ireland.anglican.org).

ANGLICAN & ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP

Membership

Dr Bridget Nichols (Convenor), Rev Julie Bell, Mr Glenn Moore, Rev Bob Cotter, Very Rev Susan Green, Rev Canon Katharine Poulton, Rev Canon Stephen Fielding and Ms Cate Turner

1. The Anglican Affairs Working Group's last major piece of work was a response to the ARCIC III document, *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church*, published in 2017/18. (<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/344839/walking-together-on-the-way-spck-2018.pdf>) The response was published in 2020).
2. Since then, the main activity has been consideration of the Resolutions of ACC 18 (2023). The final section (5) on the environment and the climate crisis remains to be discussed.
3. Rev Canon Katharine Poulton stood down as Convenor in the Summer of 2024 and has been succeeded by Dr Bridget Nichols.
4. In an initial meeting of some current members, it emerged that the climate crisis and related issues was one around which the group felt it could gather some of its future activities.
5. Members drew attention to some important recent and current projects:
 - Rev Canon Stephen Fielding reported on attending a meeting of Porvoo Churches in Sweden, where an impressive document by the Bishops of the Church of Sweden was discussed (*A Bishops' Letter About the Climate* Uppsala, 2020).
 - Ms Julie Bell outlined the shape of a major resource for the participation of children in worship which she has been engaged in producing over several years. It is hoped that this will be launched at General Synod in 2025. There is a significant emphasis on 'creation' throughout this resource.
 - Rev Canon Katharine Poulton encouraged the group to think about fostering partnerships of a practical kind, e.g. with organisations involved in renewing stocks of indigenous trees. Could tree-planting become a regular part of local celebrations, e.g. at confirmations?
 - The group talked about current Anglican Communion deliberations over the inclusion of a Feast of Creation in the calendar across the Communion. The Anglican Church of Southern Africa has recently designated 1st September or the nearest Sunday to mark this new Feast. The C of E Liturgical Commission has begun to discuss it.
 - Ms Julie Bell noted that there has been official Anglican representation at recent COP gatherings. How could that presence be mediated to the local level?
 - 'Green Anglicans' ([Green Anglicans – Anglican Church of Southern African Environmental Network](#)) an ACSA initiative, was mentioned.
6. The group recognises that all of this discussion interfaces and intersects with EcoChurches Ireland and the work of Archdeacon Andrew Orr, who represents the C of I in the Anglican Communion Environmental Network. It will be important to determine with Archdeacon Orr where useful co-operation can be developed, and how working groups might avoid duplicating work.
7. The meeting briefly reviewed the list of C of I representatives to all Anglican Communion Networks and noted that the Interfaith portfolio was not currently covered. This is an increasingly significant area and it seems important that the CCUD identify a representative.

8. The 2026 ACC gathering will take place in Belfast. About 18 months ago, members of the AAWG met the Archbishop of Armagh and others to talk in general terms about this meeting. Although the ACO, in co-operation with central Church of Ireland staff, will be in charge of most aspects of planning, the Primate is aware of the AAWG's willingness to offer such help as a small group can realistically contribute. Rev Canon Katharine Poulton is the ACC representative delegated by the CCUD.

Immediate next actions

1. The AAWG will convene early in 2025 to complete the response to the ACC 18 Resolutions (Cate Turner to be invited to steer this).
2. The Convenor will invite the C of I representatives to all the Anglican Communion Networks early in 2025 to join an online meeting in order to achieve a better understanding of what each network does and how better communication and, where desirable, better co-operation might be achieved.

ANGLICAN AFFAIRS

FOUR NATIONS FAITH AND ORDER CONSULTATION

The Faith and Order Consultation will next meet in May 2025 when the Church of England will be hosting.

THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (ICC: www.churchesinireland.com)

The ICC is an ecumenical Christian body and is a sister organisation of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The Church of Ireland is a founding member of the ICC, which was established in 1923.

The 101st Annual Meeting of the Irish Council of Churches was held on 11th April 2024 at Gracehill Moravian Church.

Following coffee and scones the business of the day began and after the usual preliminaries the President, The Right Rev Andrew Forster introduced a major item of business, that of the future of 48 Elmwood Avenue. A large building which is no longer easy to maintain or indeed fit for purpose, the delegates agreed to put the building on the market and in due course to purchase either a new, more suitable building or rent something on a long-term basis.

The financial report was introduced by Dr Damian Jackson. Although a deficit, larger than that budgeted for was shown, this could be accounted for by activities to celebrate the centenary of the ICC.

The annual report was recommended to delegates and accepted.

The launch of a Handbook 'From every Nation?' was an interesting and exciting aspect of the meeting. This very comprehensive book should help every congregation in this generation to engage in conversations about race, racism and the ways in which our churches may become places where everyone is welcomed, valued and included. Mr Richard Reddie from the Department of Justice and Inclusion at CTBI gave a very interesting presentation as he launched the book and commended it to all present. The inevitable small group discussions then took place.

The meeting moved from the Hall to the Moravian Church for the business of the handover of the ICC Presidency. The Rt Rev Andrew Forster spoke warmly of his time as President of the ICC and commended the staff team and the Executive for their work. The Council elected Bishop Sarah Groves of the Moravian Church as the next President and the Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen as Vice President. All were suitably thanked for their work and for agreeing to take on tasks.

Following lunch, a tour was offered of Gracehill Village and Church where the work of the day concluded with worship.

*Katharine Poulton
April 2024*

IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING (IICM: www.churchesinireland.com)

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) was established in 1973 as a forum between ICC's member churches and the Roman Catholic Church. The current Co-Chairs are the Most Rev Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, and the Rt Rev Sarah Groves, President of the Irish Council of Churches.

The thirty -fourth Irish Inter-Church Meeting was held at Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre on 12 and 13 November 2024, with the theme “Finding the Face of God in One Another” . The Conference ran from late morning on Tuesday for over 24 hours with a wide variety of speakers, discussion, worship and activity – supplemented by lots of food and fellowship.

The formal welcome was given by the Co-Chair of IICM, Bishop Brendan Leahy who set the scene for the conference, referencing it as a ‘kairos’ moment, a critical time in the life of our churches and their peoples as we need to promote reconciliation. The keynote address was given by Prof Dr Martin Leiner, a German philosopher and theologian who has focused on reconciliation studies for most of his academic career and is the founding director of the Jena Centre for Reconciliation Studies. He provided considerable detail about his ongoing work, pointing out that there had been very little academic study on reconciliation until recent years. He placed reconciliation in a biblical context, and spoke about ways to create peace and security, experiences in South Africa, and various practices within the process of reconciliation for which the ultimate outcome must be peace.

After a short break, which was intended to be taken in the scenic grounds (which we couldn’t actually see for thick fog!) we spent some time in round table discussion on ‘the dynamics of fracturing and healing in Ireland today’. This was followed by an interesting question and answer session with Prof Leiner, which covered a wide range of issues including what the word ‘reconciliation’ meant to Christians, practical reconciliation in various counties and the dimensions and phases of reconciliation. It was generally felt that reconciliation had to be a gradual process, undertaken with gravity and grace. It was also important to reconcile with people who are not Christians and acknowledge that reconciliation will mean different things to different people.

That theme continued during the evening session led by community artist Ms Carole Kane, who encouraged us to worship in a different way and be creative with bright paints on four huge blank sheets of paper. Some were initially rather surprised that this creative engagement was considered as worship, but everyone participated in painting set shapes, moving around the tables and filling the sheets with vibrant colours. There was much laughter, some debate, and great collegiality. The subsequent discussion drew out some of the practicalities of reconciliation, particularly demonstrating that while a blank canvass can be daunting, relationships can be built, everyone can move beyond their ‘comfort zone’, and that it is possible to adapt from a held position into something new and more enduring.

The second day began with morning prayer led by Rev Shona Bell. After breakfast we were informed about a programme called “Peaced Together”, a creative arts course which had achieved success in bringing together diverse groups of women across these islands. Everyone agreed it had potential to be used in a variety of ways to build relationships and bring healing to those who were broken, for example through conflict, grief, domestic abuse, mental health, chronic illness.

The main session of the final morning was a panel session led by three theologians - Rev Philip McKinley, Dr Kevin Hargaden and Dr Suzanne Mulligan who consecutively spoke about churches tackling racism, Christians needing to recognise the current biodiversity crisis and take the lead on matters of ecological change, and the need to build up and promote communities which can provide real human interaction and support as well as addressing the serious issues of inequality in our society.

After tributes were paid to Dr Damian Jackson, who is to leave ICC at the end of December having worked since 2016 as Programme Officer and latterly as General Secretary, the final session of IICM was facilitated by Ms Julieann Moran. She introduced the delegates to ‘conversations in the spirit’ a methodology by which we try to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in that moment. This involved periods of quiet

contemplation, members in each group speaking for short periods while the others listened intently to what was being shared – consideration of what God is asking us all to risk, embrace or let go as ambassadors of reconciliation. In the final short feedback session words such as brokenness, togetherness, hope and determination emerged.

In that context of promoting reconciliation in all our denominations, Bishop Sarah Groves, the Co-Chair of IICM, brought the meeting to a conclusion with a prayer and blessing. The delegates departed with much on which to ponder, not least the new ways of worship and discernment which they had experienced.

*June Butler
November 2024*

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (CTBI: www.ctbi.org.uk)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is an ecumenical organisation. The members include most of the major churches in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It was formed on 1 September 1990, as the successor to the British Council of Churches, and was formerly known as the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland.

The CTBI AGM was held on 30 September, at the Jesuit Centre in London. Rev Graham Sparkes, the Moderator, opened the meeting with a welcome to Dr Cynan Llwyd, the newly appointed head of Cutyn (Churches Together in Wales), followed by prayer. Three new bodies; National Day of Prayer and Worship, Together for the Common Good and Rural Missions were welcomed to CTBI as Bodies in Association.

Rev Sparkes then set out the five year vision for CTBI for 2023-2027 through which a new strategic plan was drawn up and is currently being implemented.

Five priority areas were identified within the strategic plan:

1. Strengthening Ecumenical Engagement in Britain and Ireland
2. Working together for mission and the common good
3. Healing society's fractures: identities, borders and nationalities
4. Working for global peace and justice
5. Promoting ethical and inclusive leadership

CTBI has been trying to respond to the strategic plan in a joint up way based on issues identified by its member churches. The AGM, according to Sparks, was one of the means for CTBI to be accountable to its members. Following the introduction, a panel made up of Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary, Mr Peter Colwell, Deputy General Secretary and Mr Richard Reddie, Director of Justice and Inclusion, responded to questions from the delegates regarding the ongoing work. The comments centred around concerns for issues regarding community cohesion, response to the race riots, the welcoming of refugees and issues relating to the Israel/Gaza war. Dr Brady openly shared about the tension that exists in the nature of the work the organisation is engaged with. She explained that although the staff feel supported in their work, the issues they are currently dealing with are extremely heavy and some of the CTBI members are losing their sense of hope. Mr Reddie spoke of the importance of collectively making a difference. Whilst the race riots were shocking, he stated, they were not surprising, and he cited some of the language used during the Brexit discussions as foreshadowing of the racial tensions that have ensued. Mr Reddie reflected on how we need to stand together to be agents of change. Although racial justice is often based on key moments, it must be a continuous journey, he argued. Mr Colwell expressed his concern that churches have neglected their duties in relation to interfaith work. He believes that the past twelve months have been the most challenging in interfaith work since the September 11 attacks. He argued that CTBI has tremendous influence but needs to work with a collective voice in order to bring change.

The staff briefly mentioned some of the areas they are engaged in such as the 30-year anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the 75-year anniversary of Windrush, Racial Justice Sunday, the October 7 attacks and the Israeli response, and the British-Irish engagement with global ecumenical bodies. It was highlighted that

CTBI continues to be engaged in peace and reconciliation work on the islands within the three strands of the Good Friday Agreement: relationships within Northern Ireland, on the island of Ireland and between the UK and Ireland. CTBI provided space for reflections on the experience of the churches and partnered with NGOs such as Christian Aid to explore the wider international lessons at a time of increased violence and insecurity around the world. CTBI also partnered with the Irish Council of Churches and Rethinking Conflict and held workshops for ex-combatants. CTBI is contributing towards the funding of the role of Good Relations Officer for ICC.

Mr Sparkes directed the delegates to resources provided by CTBI in several areas such as the week of prayer, racial justice, support for women in the work environment, and refugees. He also informed delegates that in 2025, CTBI will be marking the 1700-year anniversary of the Nicene Creed.

The last session of the day was scheduled as a roundtable discussion on the topic of ‘Church and Global Peace and Security.’ Dr Maria Power, a Senior Research Fellow in Human Dignity at the Las Casas Institute for Social Justice at the University of Oxford, presented a paper on ‘Global Peace and Security:’ What do Christian Churches have to offer?’ Dr Power argued that along with the climate crisis, the issue of global peace and security is the most critical issue facing human society. Her research on conflict and peace seeks to understand how religious organisations should behave in conflict and post-conflict situations in order to have a positive impact. Dr Power has recently published a co-edited book entitled ‘The Church, The Far Right and the Claim to Christianity.’

Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, Primate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of United Kingdom and Ireland, was also scheduled to be on the panel. However, he sent his apologies as he had to go to Armenia unexpectedly. The Bishop sent a letter of greetings to the delegates in which he expressed his concern for some of the political developments impacting his country and highlighted some of the human rights abuses facing Armenians. He asked delegates as fellow Christians to raise their voices together and articulate the injustice impacting the Armenians.

Before concluding the meeting with a prayer, Mr Sparkes informed the delegates that he is retiring and that CTBI is in the process of searching for a new Moderator. The meeting concluded with a light lunch.

Next year’s AGM will be held on the morning of 29th of September and will be online.

Gina Copt,
October 2024

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES (CEC: www.ceceurope.org)

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) was founded in 1959 to promote reconciliation, dialogue and friendship between the churches of Europe at a time of growing Cold War political tensions and divisions.

CEC is a fellowship of some 116 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 National Council of Churches and Organisations in Partnership.

- CCUD is currently looking to nominate a representative from the Church of Ireland to CEC
- In 2024, CEC appointed a new General Secretary - Rev Frank-Dieter Fischbach from the Protestant Church in the Rhineland, who previously worked as the EKD consultant for pastors abroad, took over from Dr Jørgen Skov Sørensen in September.
- In November 2024, Dr Ken Fennelly attended the AGM of the International Association for Christian Education (IV) at which he was elected as a member of the Board of IV. IV is an Ecumenical Church fellowship in Europe.
- To intensify the cooperation between CEC and IV, a 'Memorandum of Understanding' was drawn up, which describes the mutual tasks, obligations and resources that can be used to develop the partnership further.
- The next CEC Assembly is due to be held in 2028

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC: www.wcc-coe.org)

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a worldwide inter-church organization founded in 1948. Its 349 members today include the Assyrian Church of the East, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, most jurisdictions of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, the Old Catholic Church, Anglican Communion, most mainline Protestant churches (such as the Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian and Reformed) and some evangelical Protestant churches (such as the Baptist and Pentecostal).

The 12th Assembly of the World Council of Churches is due to be held in 2030.

MEISSEN (Meissen: www.europe.anglican.org/ecumenical-information-and-links/agreements-and-partners)

The Church of England's relations with the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) are based on the Meissen Agreement, signed in 1991. The Church of Ireland is an observer at meetings and is currently represented by the Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott (Church of Ireland).

The Meissen Commission met in Rochester, England from 24-27 October. In addition to the co-chairs, Rt Rev Dr Jonathan Gibbs (Bishop of Rochester) and Rt Rev Dr Ralf Meister (Landesbischof in Hanover), the Commission was attended by four Church of England representatives; three representatives from the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland; a representative each for the network of German-speaking congregations in Great Britain (this network has recently also embraced the Lutheran Church in Dublin), the Diocese of Europe, and the three Celtic Anglican Churches; the COE Ecumenical Officer, Rev Dr Jeremy Morris; and administrative support staff. The Commission received reports from its various constituents, and, as usual, the host church arranged for a programme of presentations which on this occasion had a focus on urban mission, church renewal, and racial justice.

Common concerns and missional enterprise

The two main churches reported a mix of encouragement and challenge within their respective contexts. In each, for example, membership continues to decline, leading in turn to diminished resources, pressure on finances, and considerable issues related to clergy well-being. It was reported that most English dioceses are currently in deficit, and there has been a substantial drop in numbers of families and young people. In Germany, the most recent national survey showed as many as 56% of the population declaring as 'non-religious'. Both churches expressed grave concern regarding cases of historical sexual abuse - the COE, for instance, is anticipating publication of the long-awaited Makin Report (this has now been published), and the EKD has uncovered almost 9300 cases of abuse since WW2 involving its adherents, with an estimate that reparations against these is likely to run into millions of euros. Most of the COE's time and energy in recent months has been taken up with the 'Living in Love and Faith' process. Given that this carried a majority of only 2% in the General Synod, the church finds itself bitterly divided and can see no easy path towards an acceptable compromise. For reason of potential disputes concerning property rights, however, the COE does not anticipate that there may be large numbers who will choose to leave.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, both churches are prioritising the development of new congregations. The Diocese of Rochester has planted sixteen new churches in recent years, and one project in particular, the re-development of the church in Chatham as a worship-centre-cum-community-hub, is especially impressive. At the same time, the diocese remains committed to its ministry in areas of urban deprivation such as housing estates. In a similar vein the German Church is actively planning towards its next Kirchentag, in Hanover in 2025.

Consequences of Brexit and historical legacy issues

The departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union continues to pose immense challenges to aspects of church-life which fall under the umbrella of Meissen. For German pastors wanting to minister within the UK, for example, there is now a statutory threshold of language proficiency and personal income

which has raised an almost insurmountable bar. Conversely, for the network of Anglican chaplaincies in Continental Europe the requirement for private health insurance has the potential to render a number of those congregations unviable. In its consideration of these matters the Commission anticipates making much greater use of generically international congregations in the future. Also related to Brexit, the meeting was pleased to host a visit from the German Ambassador to the UK. His Excellency, Miguel Berger, spoke candidly about the reset in relationship which had resulted from a newly formed British Government, and he reported that the two countries are working towards a bilateral treaty, which will aim, amongst other things, to re-animate opportunities for travel and experiential learning by young people.

In both England and Germany there is heightened anxiety about the rise of far-right political agendas. In relation to this perhaps the most impressive contribution to this year's Commission came from a vicar from Beckenham in south-east London. Citing numerous incidences of global inequality, Canon Jeremy Blunden spoke about the need for churches to stand together in the cause of racial justice, and he suggested that this is not simply about the pursuit of diversity but stems ultimately from a true sense of Christian identity. During the Covid pandemic, for example, Blunden noted that the virus was much less impactful across Africa by comparison with the Western world simply because there are so many fewer older people as a proportion of the overall population. And, with reference to a current conversation in the COE concerning a colonial past and the legacy of the slave trade, it was his observation that Britain needs to do much more in terms of how it tells its story and could usefully learn from Germany in this regard.

Interchangeability of ministry

Whereas the central aspiration of the Meissen Agreement is towards full visible unity, the most significant challenge against this remains interchangeability of ministry and a fully agreed understanding of episcopacy. The EKD continues to have a non-episcopal Reformed constituency, and, not surprisingly, the COE expressed its concern that there are areas, such as in Hamburg, where what effectively amounts to lay celebration of the Eucharist is permitted. Nevertheless, there have also been some encouraging developments. In the Diocese of Hereford an EKD pastor was licenced to serve under the COE ecumenical canons, and by similar provision it was a genuine delight that at the end of this year's meeting Bishop Ralf Mesiter was given permission to preside at the Eucharist in Rochester Cathedral. The theological sub-group of the Commission continues to grapple with the complex matter of full interchangeability, and it is hoped to convene a further symposium to build on existing work in the near future.

*Maurice Elliott
November 2024*

*REUILLY (Reuilly: <http://strasbourginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Reuilly-Declaration.rtf>)
The Reuilly Common Statement calls for a closer relationship between the Anglican Churches of Britain & Ireland and the Elgise Réformée (a grouping of four French Protestant Churches, namely the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France and the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of Alsace and Lorraine).
(Observer: Rev Dr Christine O'Dowd-Smyth (Church of Ireland))*

The Reuilly Agreement Contact Group met in Leicester, UK, 8-10 February 2024

*Minutes taken by & circulated in French by Ulrich Rusen Weinhold, March 2024
Translated by Rev Dr C O'Dowd-Smyth*

Present at the meeting were: Pastor Pierre BLANZAT, Archdeacon Peter HOOPER, Bishop Robert INNES, Moderator Pastor Esther LENZ, Revd John McLACKIE, Pastor Ulrich RUSEN WEINHOLD (international relations secretary for l'EPuDF/The Union of United Protestant Churches of France.)

Invited: Administrative Support Fiona Brant, Revd Andy BUCKLER Pastor Anne-Laure DANET (responsable pour les relations Director of International Relations of the French Federation of Protestant Churches/FPF), Bishop Christopher HILL, Revd Israel SELVANAYAGAM, Bishop Martin SNOW, Bishop Saju.

To do list/Schedule

*The 25th Anniversary Célébration of the Signing of the Reuilly Agreement.

-Booking the dates & venue for Canterbury 2026 : Robert Innes, Peter Hooper

-Putting together the Conference organisation team

- o to contact the following groups: Meissen, Porvoo, reps from the EPEC/CEPE, the Methodist Churches in the UK

Agenda for our 2025 meeting in Paris 2025 –objective : to discuss & prepare the celebrations for the 25th anniversary in Canterbury ; -Ulrich Rusen Weinhold et Fiona Brant

*The creation of a «Reuilly Liturgy» to celebrate all the different churches together. Pierre Blanzat to coordinate all existing material.

- connecting internet links to all vers les sites Internet to our respective liturgies.

*To discuss: a common further training programme for 2026 – in Leicester?

*Connect with CEPF/FPEC for possible collaborations with French speaking church congregations locally with and Anglican chaplaincies in Europe for example Berlin)

- July 2024 Lyon & the ordination of the RevdGreg Taylor of Trinity Church Lyon will be the occasion of a significant ecumenical gathering & the invitation of significant regional dignitaries such as the président of the région Centre-Alpes-Rhône.

Celebration of the 25 the anniversary of the signing of the Reuilly Agreement

- Organisation of à Symposium in 2026 on this occasion where the representatives of Meissen [Jonathan Gibbs (anglican) - Ralf Meister] and Porvoo will be invited, along with the representatives of CEPE the Council of the Protestant Churches in Europe. Also mentioned: Jérémy Morris, ecumenical officer of the C of E, Angeline Jung ; Anne-Laure Danet , Christian Baccuet and wider ecumenical guests.

- To invite: the former presidents of the Reuilly Group : F.Claveroly, C. Krieger ; as well as the former Co-Presidents from the Anglican side

- Venue Canterbury (where there is a French speaking community) & a city of symbolic significance. Robert Innes to contact Jérémy re the organisation of a symposium à Canterbury

2027: Meeting of the Reuilly contact group in Ireland?

Overview of the history of the Reuilly Agreement and theological questions on the nature of Episcopacy

1) Presentation of a paper by Anne-Laure Danet

- le plus difficile dans le dialogue est de comprendre la manière de penser de l'autre (« son logiciel qui l'anime ») - the most difficult issue in our dialogue is to understand the way of thinking of the other and what motivates them

- the protestant ministry is « recognised» by Anglicans but not reconciled (not in full communion?)

- Agreement in the US between Episcopal-Church & the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of America An agreement of full communion, 1999 ; Appelés à la mission commune,/Called to a Common Mission 2001)] allows for full communion.

- The Déclaration de Waterloo (2001 : « Called to Full Communion »), signed by the Anglican Church of Canada and the Lutheran Church of Canada

- to explore the notion of receptive/reciprocal ecumenism (notion furthered by the theologian Paul Murray : <https://www.durham.ac.uk/staff/paul-murray/>)

- to understand episcopacy in the context of a ministry of communion but not in the context of authority.

2) Presentation by Christopher Hill

- un regard dans l'histoire montre que la doctrine n'est jamais installée purement - A historical overview on the notion that doctrine has never been purely and entirely set up

- Porvoo (1996): the different churches do not have a unanimous understanding of episcopacy

- Art.19 of the document « Gods Reign and our Unity » cites the Confession Augustana art. 7 ; Calvin (in : Institution chrétienne) adds « the power of the keys » signifie« épiscopal » mais pas « épiscopacy.
- « densité ecclésiale » Birmele)

A look at history shows that in the past there was a pact between the French Reformers and the Church of England

- Also the Reuilly Agreement is based on previous meetings and reflections.
- Important Documents (as context): Meissen (29 Janvier 1999) ; Provoo (1992) ; God's reign and our unity (international commission anglicans and Reformed 1984)
- Calvin's theory brings us further on than that of Luther) : a part from the definition of a church (as the equivalent of the confession d'Augsbourg art.7), it sees the necessity to be episcopal, but not an episcopacy.
- "densité ecclésiale" (expression orale d'André Birmelé)
- Question of the visibility of catholicity in Protestant churches
- Exchanges on the understanding of what does a Bishop mean?

Meeting with Bishop Martyn Snow

How to build an intercultural church? How to be church in a multiethnic city?

Questions

- Can the recognition of a ministry (with a prayer of commission or bidding prayer) be a model? We do not envisage a new United church.
- How do we deal with our relationships with the churches in our former colonies and it's citizens who live in our countries?

Exchange of Information

(1) The application for membership of the Anglican Diocese of Europe by the French Protestant Federation is well advanced. The aim of the AGM of the Federation of Protestant Churches in France will be to discuss and vote on membership.

(2) Further education & training: The last common training session was in 2016 in Leicester (on Fresh-Expressions). The next one to be in 2026. it is also envisaged to organise other types of training and FE for example placement in a local church in the other country.

(3) Local collaborative projects in shared ministry

- a) Strasbourg - There's a possibility of half time Anglican chaplaincy with half time Pastor in local protestant church
- b) Lyon - La convention between Epudf-Rive gauche (LRG) et Trinity Church (TCL) à Lyon will finish up in June.

(4) Questions de la coordination du travail des francophones sur les Îles: Discussion on possible collaboration with French speaking churches abroad et Anglican Diocese in Europe

(5) The Youth

There will be in 2025 a big Assembly Le Grand KIFF (<http://legrandkiff.org>), organised by l'EPUDF. It is certainly an occasion to invite young people from the Anglican churches to participate.

(6) Work on a common liturgy Working Group

Anne-Laure Danet, Pierre Blanzat, John McLuckie, Christine O'Dowd-Smyth

Material

C of E [<https://www.europe.anglican.org/>] :

<https://www.europe.anglican.org/resources/services-french>

Côté luthéro-réformés en France :

EPUDF : <https://acteurs.epudf.org/liturgies-reformees/>

UEPAL : <https://acteurs.uepal.fr/culte/>

The next meeting of the Reuilly contact group is due to be held in February 2025 in Paris.

*Christine O'Dowd Smyth
January 2025*

COMMUNITY OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES IN EUROPE (CPCE: <https://www.leuenberg.eu/>)

The CPCE is the umbrella organisation of the protestant churches. 94 lutheran, methodist, reformed and united churches from over thirty countries in Europe and South America belong to it. With that the CPCE represents altogether around 50 million Protestants. The CPCE exists thanks to the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973

More than 200 delegates, experts, guests and staff from 70 member churches came together for the 9th General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), which took place from 27 August to 2 September 2024 in Sibiu, Romania.

The international and multilingual meeting took place in the Lutheran parish church in Sibiu (Romania) and was held under the theme 'In the light of Christ – called to hope'.

The hosts were the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Romania, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania, the United Methodist Church in Romania and the Unitarian Church in Romania.

The CPCE General Assembly meets every six years to assess the work of the past six years and to define the working basis for the next six years for the church community, which includes 96 churches in around thirty different countries.

The CPCE strategy

The new strategy, 'Being Church Together in the Light of Hope', which was unanimously adopted, is based on the following four points. The CPCE is:

A communion in worship

A communion of witness and service

A communion of learning and teaching

A communion that shapes its structures.

A newly elected 13-member council will lead the work of the CPCE between the General Assemblies in 2024 and 2030. Detailed information about the new council can be found in appendix two of the final report of the CPCE General Assembly.

Priorities for the next six years and the past six years

Proposals for the further work of the CPCE were developed in five future workshops, whereby the new CPCE Council is tasked, among other things, with finding new ways of communicating and networking, taking the younger generation into account when proclaiming the faith, dealing with the question of the image of man in the AI age, and continuing the ecumenical dialogues, the work on the topic of church and democracy and migration.

The documents developed over the past six years on 'Christian Speech about God', 'Practice and Theology of the Lord's Supper', 'Church and Democracy' and 'Gender, Sexuality, Marriage, Family' were adopted and will be published in the coming months.

Four statements on democracy, migration, interreligious dialogue and minority churches adopted.

The General Assembly also discussed and adopted four statements, which are summarised below:

Democracy: The churches want to set an example of democratic forms of participation in which respectful and constructive debates can take place, even if there is not always agreement (e.g. on ethical issues).

Migration: Migration is ‘a form of human and social life’ that has a major impact on family life and church parishes. It is important to support families who are torn apart by migration and to be there for the people in the new destination countries. In recent years the CPCE has supported the ‘Euro-orphans’ project for children whose parents work abroad, by arranging contact with relatives and other forms of support.

Interreligious relations in the context of the war in the Middle East: the CPCE calls on the member churches to remain in dialogue with people of other religions, because in this way ignorance, fear and prejudice can be overcome.

Churches as minorities: The CPCE recommends that its member churches, which are minority churches in many European countries, should engage with their own treatment of minorities, stand up for the rights of minorities and openly reflect on their minority experiences.

All appendices can be found in the final report of the CPCE General Assembly, which is available in the documents area.

For more information visit - <https://cpce-assembly.eu/>

The next General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe is due to take place in 2030

PORVOO (www.porvoocommunion.org)

The Porvoo Communion of Churches, (with members from the Lutheran Churches in the Nordic and Baltic countries and the Anglican Churches in Britain and Ireland and on the Iberian Peninsula).

(Archbishop Michael Jackson, Anglican Co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group

The Rev Canon Stephen Fielding, Church of Ireland Contact Person)

The Porvoo Communion of Churches is one of 15 Anglican and Evangelical Lutheran churches in Europe. The communion was established in 1992 by a theological agreement entitled the Porvoo Common Statement which establishes full communion between and among these churches. https://porvoocommunion.org/porvoo_communion/statement/the-statement-in-english/

The Porvoo Communion of churches met in October 2024 at the Sigtuna foundation, Sigtuna, Sweden as guests of the Church of Sweden.

The Church Leaders Consultation took place on 8 October. The theme was God’s world – Proclaiming hope for future generations in the midst of the environmental crisis. It was preceded by a meeting of the Porvoo Contact Group which coordinates joint engagement with areas of common concern amongst the Porvoo churches.

The Consultation began with a greeting from the Most Rev Martin Modéus, Archbishop of Uppsala, who held out the prospect of the Church as the messenger of faith, hope and love.

In the second session on ‘The added value of church involvement in the discussion on climate, and how to offer hope’, the Very Rev Christina Rygaard Kristiansen, Dean of Tønder, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, called for the churches to be contemplative, subversive (unafraid to argue from the edge and to resist easy solutions), and apocalyptic (open to the heavenly vision of a new earth).

The third session was on ‘How do we avoid moralising and increasing the burden on people, hindering a constructive approach?’ Ms Joanna Slama and the Rev Aino Vihonen, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, gave a joint presentation exploring our continuity with nature and our dependence on it, considering how we can begin to turn our climate anxiety into hope which issues in practical action.

The Rt Rev Martin Gainsborough, of the Church of England, began the fourth session, on ‘What are the practical challenges for the churches and possible ways of working with these challenges’. He pointed out that the climate crisis is actually more like a civilisational crisis, a ‘metacrisis’ (the term of Jonathan Rosen) which pinions on a deficit in our theological anthropology; the Church needs to listen to voices beyond its own walls, and to reconceive how we can live sustainably a genuinely human life.

In a fifth session on ‘Reflecting with young people and the concerns they have’, Ven Andrew Orr, of the Church of Ireland, described the involvement of school pupils in climate issues with related projects. He identified six aspects young people are looking for in the present situation: thanksgiving, lament, a prophetic voice, joy in enough, justice with love, hope which gives resilience.

The sixth session was on ‘Hope for future generations’. It was led by Canon Ian Loynd of the Church in Wales, who spoke about the healing of the deaf man by Jesus in Mark 7, with Jesus’s deep sigh as a sign of hope which could inspire us towards action; Christian hope is fortified with faith and love in a time of environmental crisis.

On the afternoon of 9 October, we visited Gamla Uppsala (Old Uppsala) and, during a short climate pilgrimage, learned about the huge environmental challenges faced by the human race, as well as possible solutions. For the full Communique please see <https://porvoocommunion.org/church-leaders-consultation-porvoo-communion-of-churches-sigtuna-sweden-8-10-october-2024-communique/>

The Consultation brought together many different experiences and perspectives from our member churches. In a context of worship in the Foundation’s chapel, reflection and hospitality there was a tangible sense of different Christian traditions coming together to confront the challenges presented to us by the climate crisis.

We are very grateful to the Church of Sweden for generously hosting and facilitating this exchange.
Porvoo Work Plan 2025-2027

2025 – Theological Conference in Cardiff, Wales.

Theme: Christology and Ecumenism - The 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed (Council of Nicaea 325).

Dates: 7-9 Oct. 2025 (PCG 6-9 Oct. 2025)

2026 – Primates’ Meeting Dates: 6-8 Oct. 2026 (PCG 5-8 Oct. 2026) Location: York

2027 – Thematic conference Dates: 12-14 Oct. 2027 (PCG 11-14 Oct. 2027) Location: Iceland

The Church of Ireland was represented in Sigtuna, Sweden by: Archbishop Michael Jackson, Anglican Co-chair of the Porvoo Contact Group, The Rev Canon Stephen Fielding, Church of Ireland Contact Person, The Ven Andrew Orr, Church of Ireland delegate.

The Porvoo Declaration commits the churches which have signed it ‘to share a common life’ and ‘to pray for and with one another’. An important way of doing this is to pray through the year for the Porvoo churches and their Dioceses. The prayer diary for 2025 is found online at <https://porvoocommunion.org/porvoo-prayer-diary/>

*Stephen Fielding
January 2025*

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS WORKING-GROUP

Membership

Canon Kevin O'Brien (Convenor), Prof Ben Tonra, George Woodman, Rev Canon Adrian Empey

We should first note the retirement of the previous co-ordinator of the EWG, Canon Dr Kenneth Milne, to whom grateful thanks are most certainly due for his long and faithful service, and his passion for the topic. We are delighted that he retains an interest in the working of the group, although he is no longer expected to be a working member.

A meeting was held in Sept 2024 at CITI in order to revisit the operation, purview, membership and 'audience' of the working group, given the following concerns:

- How to broaden the expertise contributing to the group's activities?
- What is the desired focus and function of the working group?
- Whom is it serving, to whom is it reporting, what practical utility is/could be derived from its reports?
- The possibility that more focused subject reports throughout the year were seen by only a very few members of CCUD, and solely the generalised General Synod report was seen by many.
- Had the working group therefore been producing reports that few saw, and fewer acted upon?
- Could the reporting of the working group combine shorter, more focused reports with a wider readership – in real-time?
- If the working group was to dedicate time to its work, they needed to be assured that it would result in tangible benefits to others.

The group considered the following 'audiences':

- Members of the General Synod involved in passing legislation;
- Other committees of the General Synod involved in drafting Legislation and administering policy;
- The House of Bishops;
- Clergy who may require information about European issues when formulating teaching and preaching;
- Members of the Church of Ireland who might wish to be informed about developments affecting their lives, businesses, farms, schools etc.

The group intends to work in the following way for the next two years for a 'proof of concept' period:

- Employ a 'blog' format (<http://ewgbulletin.blogspot.com/>);
- The blog can either be open to all readers ie a link on the Church of Ireland website – or restricted to General Synod members.
- All General Synod members to be invited to subscribe;
- All committee members and RCB staff to be invited to subscribe;
- There will be an 'editorial team' of up to six, comprising the existing members, plus two to be invited for their additional expertise – to operate as a collective – all of whom can post content
- Each of the 'editors' may recruit 'occasional contributors' on a subject-by-subject basis who would submit their content to an 'editor' for approval and subsequent posting.
- Posts cover the following topics and be drawn from a variety of named sources:
 - Rural affairs/EU agricultural policy
 - Legislation affecting church buildings
 - Employment issues
 - Cultural affairs
 - Social policy
 - Reaction to conflicts esp local
 - Refugee-migrant policy
 - Green issues
 - EU Parliament
 - Ukraine
 - Brexit
 - Academic papers - news of seminars/lectures
 - Conflict/security

- European church culture and ecumenical matters
- Posts includes material from:
 - The ‘editors’ own content e.g. reports on conferences/meetings attended and commentary on specific issues;
 - Secondary source material from the press, TV and other media Commission/Parliament/Council of Europe websites and bulletins;
 - Original content from ‘occasional correspondents’ with particular expertise;
 - Reports from the Church of Ireland CEC, Reuilly, Porvoo reps.
- Feedback from readers will be invited via messaging to the blog e.g. requests for further information and/or additional topics to be included.
- Reports will be made to CCUD and General Synod as before but also posted on the ‘blog’.
- It should be noted that the EWG blog does not represent the views of the EWG (unless specifically stated) but is instead a digest of material drawn together from various sources and standpoints to inform readers of a variety of views.

The reports of the EWG will rarely, if ever, be of a confidential or sensitive nature, however, we require guidance concerning management of the readership, the options are as follows:

- The EWG Bulletin is listed on the Church of Ireland website with unrestricted access for all: Members of General Synod, the wider Church of Ireland, and the general public.
- Readership is restricted, for example, to Synod members and committees with their email addresses supplied to the EWG for automatic inclusion as invited readers – shared under GDPR as ‘reasonable and proportionate’ (for Synod business).
- Synod members, committees and other interested parties are invited to personally apply to the EWG for subscription – note this would substantially increase admin and greatly decrease occasional readership.
- It should be noted that the desire of the EWG group is to be of the greatest help to the greatest number.

*Kevin O’Brien
December 2024*

INTER FAITH WORKING GROUP

Membership

Mr Femi Atoyebi, Rev Suzanne Cousins (convenor), Rev Alistair Doyle, Mr David Reynolds, Rev Abigail Sines, Rev Dr Stephen Skuce (Methodist Church in Ireland)

Expression of thanks and key points of interest

The Interfaith Working Group (‘IFWG’) has had another productive year. Sincere thanks are extended to the many people – Church of Ireland and other – who continue to support the endeavours of the Interfaith Working Group, and to each of the group members (listed above) for their commitment and faithful work. We are grateful for the expressions of collegiality and solidarity of friends from a number of forums, including and in particular, Dublin City Interfaith Forum, Galway Interfaith Forum, Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum, and Cork Three Faiths Forum.

The Working Group continues to meet online and to report regularly to the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue. The aims continue to be, in sum, the supporting of the Commission in: (1), the equipping, education and encouragement of Church of Ireland people and parishes in the pursuit of positive, informed and peaceable relations with people of other faiths; and, (2), the support and enabling of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue in being a voice within the Church of Ireland for refugees. The biblical principle of faithful and loving Christian witness undergirds all our efforts, in line with The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion:

“The Five Marks of Mission: The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ”

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

The first Mark of Mission, identified with personal evangelism at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984 (ACC-6) is a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus’ own summary of his mission. This should be the key statement about everything we do in mission.”

(See: The Five Marks of Mission: <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-ofmission.aspx>.)

There is recognition that the work to promote and support positive inter faith dialogue and engagement is increasingly relevant and important in everyday living in Ireland, not least as demographics continue to change and society (both in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) becomes more mixed in its racial and religious make up, and with evidence of an increase in racist hate speech and anti-immigration narrative. There are avenues of peace to be pursued and violence to be challenged, with the help of the Holy Spirit. In this regard it has been encouraging, for example, to see growth in our relationship with such bodies as Schools of Sanctuary (‘SOS’) and their work of building a welcoming and inclusive society; this through, (1), the participation in the annual COI Interfaith conference, of Sanctuary Ambassadors with Schools of Sanctuary connections, and, (2), the invitation in November 2024 to IFWG members to participate on site and in person in the SOS monitoring process in the first Co. Mayo school (Sancta Maria College, Louisburgh) to be awarded Sanctuary status.

2024 Interfaith Conference

The 2024 Interfaith Conference, as in 2023, was organised in pleasant and positive partnership between the Church of Ireland and the Faith Stream of Places of Sanctuary, Ireland (see <https://ireland.cityofsanctuary.org/sanctuary-in-faith>). This partnership continues to be mutually beneficial as an expression of solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers, and a means to an applied and nuanced theological approach to the wider issues of inter faith relations. These issues include relations between Islamic and Jewish communities which globally are perhaps more severely challenged and strained than ever in light of the deterioration of Israeli-Palestinian relations following the events of October 7, 2023. These and the subsequent escalation of violence and the massive fallout of suffering requires that COI Christians continue to take seriously the calls of our own leaders to pray without ceasing for a lasting ceasefire and an enduring peace in the Land called Holy.

The 2024 Interfaith conference, which took place on 25th May in Wesley House Dublin, under the title, ‘The Dialogue of Friendship: Countering voices of enmity’, drew fresh interest and a good attendance from a wide range of churches, communities and groups. The keynote speaker was the Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills (Episcopal Church of Scotland) who was honoured in the 2022 Lambeth Awards for her longstanding dedication to the building of interfaith relationships. Her contribution to the day helped ensure that the conference was marked by a theological and spiritual depth and had a practical, compassionate and humanitarian focus. On the topic of countering hate and responding with humanity, the contributions and insights provided by members of Schools of Sanctuary and Hope and Courage Collective were timely and pertinent. Feedback on the event was on the whole very positive, while at the same time note is taken of the need to increase in island-wide participation.

The plan for the 2025 conference is to partner for a third year with the Faith Stream of Places of Sanctuary. This conference is due to take place on Saturday 17th May 2025 in Dundrum Methodist Centre, Dublin (venue tbc). The keynote speaker is Dr Ebum Joseph, lecturer, author, consultant, and founder and coordinator of the first Black Studies module in Ireland at University College Dublin. Dr Joseph lectures on social policy, equality, migration and race, is director of the Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies, and a career-development specialist with the Royal College of Surgeons.

Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue and Events

The updated booklet *Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue and Events* booklet, having been approved by the Commission and the House of Bishops, was launched at General Synod in May 2024. The IFWG continues to commend the booklet as an accessible read for anyone in the parishes and dioceses of the Church of Ireland, and the intent is that the booklet is a useful resource also to other churches and denominations. The Methodist Church in Ireland has, with COI approval, adapted the revised Guidelines and provisionally adopted the booklet it for its own use. The (COI) booklet is available from the COI bookstore. Some copies may be available through the Diocesan Secretaries. It has also recently been uploaded to the online bookstore which is linked to the COI website): <https://store.ireland.anglican.org/store/product/186/guidelines-for-interfaith-events-and-dialogue>.

Scriptural Reasoning

Another online Scriptural Reasoning event was held on Tuesday 5 November 2024, with the theme of Compassion, under the title ‘Deepening our Faith and Compassion.’ The speakers were from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions. The Jewish contributor was Rabbi Jonathan Romain, author, Convenor of the Reform Beit Din, Chaplain to the Jewish Police Association and President of the Accord Coalition. The Muslim speaker was Dr Mudafar Al Tawash, a founding member of Dublin City Interfaith Forum and a retired doctor in Agriculture. The Christian contributor was Rev Dr Stephen Skuce, Northwestern District Superintendent for the Methodist Church in Ireland and a member of the IFWG. Rev Dr Skuce previously served as a mission partner in Sri Lanka and worked with the British Methodist Church in roles including Director of Research and Director of Global Relationships, and as Academic Dean at Cliff College. The 2024 Scriptural Reasoning event proved for most participants to have been both engaging and enlightening. Resources and personnel allowing, the IFWG would like to offer these ‘SR’ events on a more regular basis. A personal response to the event by one participant can be found in the article below, which was published in the December 2024 issue of the Church of Ireland Gazette.

Scriptural Reasoning: Deepening our Faith and Compassion
by Mr Kenn McLaughlin, Castlebar Parish, United Diocese of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe

I believe I am what is called a “blow in” I am an American-born newly-minted Irish Citizen recently joining the foreign-born registry and moving to County Mayo, the home from which my ancestors emigrated decades ago. As I continue to build relationships here, I have been working to connect my life-long spiritual journey to the practices of Ireland and find the ways in which God seeks to use me here in my new home.

I recently attended an online event titled *Scriptural Reasoning: Deepening our Faith and Compassion* (5 November 2024) which was sponsored by the Church of Ireland Interfaith Working Group with Dublin City Interfaith Forum. I was deeply moved by the time in communion with the group assembled.

I was especially engaged through the core question of the event: What does a call to be compassionate sound like in varied faith traditions? Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain MBE used a compelling story which followed Rabbi Judah the Prince on his journey to a compassionate life, and included kidney stones, a calf and kittens. The Islamic tradition of beginning each and every action with a centring call to align with mercy and compassion was shared by Dr Mudafar Al Tawash, and Mark’s Gospel story about Jesus’ compassionate response to two blind men was offered from Methodist Minister Rev Dr Stephen Skuce. Each of these spiritual leaders provided historical and cultural contexts for their choices of material and then our large group was split into two breakout sessions, where rigorous conversation began. In my small group, the interconnected layers of the material, and the varied responses to each reading made for a deep reflection on the nature of human compassion and our capacity to both employ compassion and to miss the opportunity to do so.

Taken as a whole, the event allowed for a widening of perspective regarding an issue central to human life – our power to offer compassion to others, especially those in most need of it. Interfaith practice allows for myriad faiths to be seen in both affinity and relief, confluence and contrast. The result, to my mind, is a deepening of my spiritual walk and a more meaningful connection to the community around me; a community

made up of people who think and pray like I do, and those who meet and engage with God in ways very new to me. I look forward to more events like this one and encourage everyone to give such interfaith explorations a worthy try. God made a magnificent, diverse world. How much more of it will we see when we look for it with fresh eyes? asked the ‘Blow-in’ to whom all things look wonderful and new in Ireland.

For a better future: Holocaust Memorial Day 2025

As this report is being written we are anticipating attending this year’s major HMD Trust Northern Ireland event in Belfast, on 23 January, with the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, and a visit to the Belfast Islamic Centre on the same date. The HMD 2025 theme is ‘For a better future’.

Network for Inter Faith Concerns in Europe, North America and Canada (NIFENAC)

We note that the Revd Suzanne Cousins is now a member of NIFENAC which, by happy coincidence, is chaired by our own Archbishop of Dublin.

*Suzanne Cousins,
December 2024*

Appendix 1 ~ Annual Church Meetings

Quakers in Ireland

Religious Society of Friends Ireland Yearly Meeting 2024

The Ven Andrew Orr and the Rev Meghan Farr represented the Church of Ireland at the Ireland Yearly Meeting of the Quakers held in Cork from 17th to 21st July, 2024.

The theme for this year’s meeting was ‘The Spirit of Ubuntu’ emphasising the interdependence of all, encapsulated in the concept of ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’.

Rev Meghan Farr attended the opening session on Wednesday with introductions followed by a reception for visiting ecumenical guests. The evening session included a talk on ecumenical/ interfaith activities. This was an opportunity to learn from each other and hear of challenges and opportunities in the spirit of receptive ecumenism. In addition to the C of I, ecumenical and interfaith representatives included the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Presbyterian Church and the Cork Jewish Community as well as visitors and representatives from other Yearly Meetings around the world.

Common themes from all the speakers included the challenge of violent conflict, not just in other countries but in our own society as well, the challenge of the after- effects of the pandemic and people not returning to church, the challenge of climate change, the challenge of sexuality and the challenge of reaching out into the public square.

One fascinating feature of the Yearly Meeting is that it is preceded by a number of ‘special interest groups’ held online. These allow more in-depth discussion of topics, which then allow people to come to the Yearly Meeting having thought about some of the issues that are raised. Topics this year included the West Bank, The Life of George Fox and the crime of Ecocide.

As well as the routine business of elections and accounts, the meeting receives ‘epistles’: a summary of the work and life of each meeting. It is striking how often Quakers can be found working with those on the edge of society: in prison, in Palestine, experiencing food poverty, and with International Protection Applicants.

The theme of Ubuntu was explored by various speakers: working and walking together and exploring co-operation around the world. A particularly challenging workshop looked at our own personal responses to conflict and how we deal with conflict on a local scale. Ubuntu was also the heart of the public lecture

delivered by Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, a former South African MP and Director of the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva.

This was a fascinating experience, and the way in which all members of the Meeting are encouraged to participate through the use of small groups might give our own Synod much to think about!

The Methodist Church in Ireland Annual Conference Report 2024

Mr Steve Addis

Most Rev Pat Storey

We were delighted to attend the Methodist conference on behalf of the Church of Ireland. As reps who had never been to this conference before it certainly had a different flavour from General Synod. There was a lot more time and space for worship, singing and prayer and lots of periods of silence. There was significant time set aside each morning for Bible study which were magnificently led by our own Rev Danielle McCullagh, chaplain to Queen's University Belfast. The conference began in a very informal manner and proceeded to be more agenda-driven as the days progressed. There were many reports that had little or no engagement, and no applause was permitted after podium speeches, which proved exemplary during the difficult debate on human sexuality.

It is certainly true to say that the Methodist church and its congregations face the same issues as the we do in the Church of Ireland – smaller congregations, some decline, less money than before Covid, and an emphasis on pioneering. Much of the conference time in the afternoons were given over to the debate and Resolution on human sexuality. Similar to the work of the Church of Ireland, there has been a Working Group on Human Sexuality and the Faith and Order report followed. There was an introduction on biblical scholarship and many viewpoints were expressed. At one point there were seventeen people waiting to speak and everyone's views were heard. There were only three minutes allotted to each speaker, and this was adhered to rigidly. A lack of progress was feared from those who wished the Resolution to progress, and a fear of division was expressed by those who would be voting against it. After long and heartfelt debate, the vote was taken and the Resolution (with the amendment quoted below) was overwhelmingly passed by 162 to 27 votes. The debate was conducted in a profoundly dignified, respectful and pastoral manner.

The Resolution signified that whilst doctrine would absolutely not change on marriage ie Methodist Belief 2003: 'marriage is a relationship, intended as permanent, between one man and one woman within which sexual intercourse establishes a unique intimacy. A loving marriage relationship is seen as the only appropriate relationship within which sexual intercourse may take place', decisions around the *service* of those in relationships other than heterosexual marriage could be deferred to individual Church Councils. Please find below a selection of phrases from the Resolution:

2.2 'We recognise that Scripture on human sexuality is read and understood in different ways. As a Methodist people we differ as to the validity of those different readings.

4.2 'We recognise the complexity of this discernment for local Societies in which many factors, including the Church's teaching on human sexuality, are considered. Our practice remains that it is the responsibility of the Church Council to discern how people may serve in the life of the local Church and that discernment about service and leadership beyond the local Society is the responsibility of the relevant Circuits and MCI teams.' Towards the end of the debate an amendment was added which reads:

4.3 We affirm that adherence to MCI teaching on marriage requires faithfulness in marriage and celibacy outside of it; this is a goal of discipleship and a standard for spiritual leadership and teaching roles. In their discernment processes church councils, circuit executives and MCI teams are accountable for maintaining these principles in a compassionate way for the spiritual edification of the Church.

The Amendment was overwhelmingly passed. It is fair to say that the whole Faith and Order report would need to be read in full context in order to understand the journey of the Methodist church in this regard.

In conclusion, it was an enjoyable conference where we felt very much welcomed and included as those with whom they were in a covenant relationship.

The General Synod of the Church of England Report 2024

I attended the General Synod of the Church of England which met at York University from Fri 5 July- Tue 9 July 2024. It was very interesting to see how another member of the Anglican Communion conducts itself at synod and how much there is of common concern.

The welcome and Presidential Address was given by the Archbishop of York on the day after the UK general election and the smooth transfer of power was acknowledged by all. *Given the role of the Lords Spiritual the Archbishop of Canterbury and some other bishops were required to miss the Tuesday session of synod to attend Westminster for the initial swearing of MPs.*

The Archbishop of Finland - Tapio Luoma – spoke about the Porvoo agreement 1994 - 95 as an ecumenical milestone. This was followed by a presentation on ‘Confirmation Summer Camp’ by Bishop Matti Repo - Finnish Confirmation Training Programme – a joint venture with the Diocese of Manchester since 2004, where 25 confirmands per year have attended joint camps aimed at young people to help strengthen their faith in God and to equip them for life as a Christian.

One of the main items of business was the report on ‘Trust,’ produced by the Wisdom of Trust Working Group chaired by Professor Veronica Hope Hailey, which highlighted a Clergy bias and a lack of trust between the House of Bishops and the Laity. Concerns were raised over accountability, trust and a lack of trust in the Living in Love and Faith (LLF) process. A wide range of questions and discussion followed to take this ‘preliminary’ report further. Later that afternoon the first of the 221 questions were tabled and discussed.

Saturday morning was dominated by Legislative Business including Chancel Repair Liability and the Archbishops Council Budget, which reported on the growing deficit in diocese budgets and the rising number of vacancies. It was also reported that £17.4m had been allocated for ministry training and £6.4m for clergy retirement housing. In 2025 the Archbishop Council has an operating budget of £38m. Concerns were raised for retired priests falling into debt and wide ranging debate over stipend; pensions and rental properties for retired clergy, including those who sold property to fund ministerial training years ago - at that time it was felt inappropriate for clergy to have a mortgage and/or a ‘retirement’ home. The financial problem is a ‘Missional Crisis’ said the Chair of the Archbishops Council.

The Synod remain consumed with matters to do with LLF, Safeguarding and a strong desire to move forward as One Church. Some fault lines continue to deepen and attempts to build trust are finding it difficult to gain traction on either side. Following the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse there was a recommendation to replace the Clergy Discipline Measure (2003) and to include the latest safeguarding advice. It was however felt that Safeguarding is not a burden but a witness and response to the gospel. There was deep concern about any delay in the appointment of a new Independent safeguarding scrutiny body. The Archbishop of Canterbury highlighted the challenge of dealing with very powerful leaders – There is a ‘slight gap in the way we look at things as to how we deal with very powerful leaders. You don’t want to quench them, but you do want to make sure that they don’t go bonkers . . . and are not irresponsible in their actions’.

The Synod debate on *Human Dignity of Disabled Children* presented by Archdeacon Pete Spiers. Pete, born in 1961 with disabilities resulting from thalidomide, set out a motion that challenges the common assumption that bringing a disabled child into the world is a tragedy to be avoided. Intrinsic human value and dignity was at the forefront of this debate which was very powerful and deeply emotional debate for an hour. – While synod at times showcase on this item there was unanimity.

On Monday was a debate about foodbanks and the inadequacy of social security, informed by direct experience. A motion was introduced which called on the House of Bishops urgently to engage with the new Government to review the adequacy of current social-security provision. Mass dependence on food emergency parcels was ‘a moral scar on our society’, was said by the proposer and other speakers agreed -many of whom were involved in church-run foodbanks.

On the final day, Tuesday, the Synod endorsed a day of prayer and action for the persecuted Church, after a debate filled with stories about how, around the world, believers continued to suffer for their faith.

The last item of business was a presentation from pupils from Archbishop Holgate School, in York, and the Archway Learning Trust, in Nottingham. It was a reminder to the Synod that young people were the future of mission and ministry.

As an observation the ecumenical guests and representatives seem a very cohesive group and well looked after and respected at Synod.

*Mike Johnston
July 2024*

Reflections from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2024

Prepared for the General Synod of the Church of Ireland Book of Reports

Delegates from the Church of Ireland to the General Assembly: Ms Judith Cairns and Archdeacon Paul Thompson

The 2024 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was held from 20th-22nd June in Belfast. There were several key aspects of the Assembly's structure and proceedings, as well as the main issues addressed.

STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE:

The General Assembly functions as the supreme court of the Presbyterian Church, representing the whole Church and acting as its highest legislative, administrative, and judicial authority. This differs from the Church of Ireland's parliamentary model of synodical government. This means the procedure by which bills are passed and business is conducted is very different in the General Assembly when compared with the General Synod of the Church of Ireland.

Voting members are limited to ministers and elders present on the ground floor of the assembly hall. This felt quite different to the Church of Ireland's representation of and participation by clergy and laity in its synodical structure.

KEY ISSUES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND:

Declining Numbers: The Assembly addressed the challenge of fewer ministers and increasing vacant charges, focusing on reconfiguring ministry and mission.

Financial Pressures: Significant financial challenges were discussed, particularly concerning the Council for Social Witness and the Council for Training in Ministry.

How to disagree: There was considerable debate and a vote about how individuals might disagree with established denominational policies. The view of the Assembly was that while individuals might so disagree, they should not try to stop such policies being implemented.

Safeguarding: Developing robust child and adult safeguarding policies across the denomination was emphasised as a key priority.

POSITIVE INITIATIVES:

The **"Present" Initiative:** A denomination-wide programme encouraging congregations to be present to God, each other, and their communities.

Partnerships: The Assembly highlighted the value of local and global partnerships with churches, institutions, and agencies. There were presentations from several Presbyterian groups outside of Ireland.

Chaplaincy Ministries: The work of chaplains in various sectors, including farming, was celebrated as an important frontline ministry.

Special Focus - West Belfast Special Ministry: Led by the Rev David Moore, this ministry has made notable progress: establishment of a core team and weekly Bible study, community engagement through exhibitions and book launches, appointment of a part-time worker focusing on refugee outreach, development of occasional worship services with plans for more regular gatherings and growing local financial support, now covering almost 50% of the ministry's costs

This report provides an overview of the key aspects of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's General Assembly, highlighting both the challenges faced and the positive initiatives undertaken.