

COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIALOGUE REPORT 2026

MEMBERSHIP (20) – 5 meetings in 2025

A Bishop (Chairman): The Bishop of Tuam, Limerick & Killaloe (5)
WCC Representative: VACANT
ACC Representative: Rev Canon Katharine Poulton (2)
ACC Representative: Mr Glenn Moore (0)
Porvoo Contact Group Person: The Rev Canon Stephen Fielding (5)
An Hon Secretary of General Synod: Rev Canon Malcolm Kingston (1)
Hon Records Secretary: Ms Gina Coptly (5)
Hon Secretary: Very Rev Niall Sloane (5)
The Archbishop of Dublin (5)
The Bishop of Derry (2)
Rev Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum (0)
Rev Dr Christine O'Dowd Smyth (resigned June 2025) (0)
Rev Meurig Williams (appointed June 2025) (0)
Rev Suzanne Cousins (3)
Ms Cate Turner (4)
Very Rev Abigail Sines (4)
Rev Canon Kevin O'Brien (2)
Mr Femi Atoyebi (0)
Dr Bridget Nichols (4)
Rev Dr Ryan Hawk (4)
1 vacancy

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

This year's report once again details the extraordinary range of activities, conversations and initiatives overseen by the CCUD. Year after year its work might be described as the quiet cement of relationship - building, and much of what is achieved more publicly is the fruit of the expertise and resources which our Commission provides as the Church continues its pilgrim way towards that Unity which is the gift and the will of Christ.

Manifold thanks are again due to our untiring Hon Secretary, Dean Niall Sloane. Ms Gina Coptly has been a valued and committed Records Secretary, and for this we are very grateful. Much of the heavy lifting is done by the Chairs of our Working Groups. Canon Kevin O'Brien continues to lead the European Affairs Working Group...he personally is a veritable encyclopaedia concerning the many issues with which it deals, and he brings to the table his long and unique experience of ministry in the Diocese of Europe. Rev Suzanne Cousins has stepped down as Chair of the Inter - Faith Working Group, a cause to which she devoted great energy and knowledge. That Group is now being led by Very Rev Abigail Sines and she deserves our thanks and our good wishes not only for this work but for her new ministry as Dean of Clonmacnoise.

I want to make special mention to of our Anglican Affairs Working Group, which Dr Bridget Nichols continues to guide with scholarly insight and vast knowledge of global Anglicanism. A particular task of the group has been to inform the House of Bishops concerning continuing debate regarding the so- called Nairobi Cairo proposals, and to assist its members in offering a response. Many will be aware that these proposals have emerged from IASCUFO, the International Anglican Standing Commission on Unity Faith and Order. They recommend something of a recalibration of the relationship between the Instruments which (not always entirely successfully) bind the Anglican Communion together. Consequent questions are raised about how one defines membership of the Communion as its foci move much more towards the Global South and tensions inevitably arise concerning - for example - the relationship between truth, culture and revelation. In all of this, at the very time when the Chair of Augustine has changed hands, people ask ...is Anglicanism today about full communion with Canterbury, or simply about a historic connection? What will be the place of future

archbishops of Canterbury in terms of gathering and presiding over the other instruments of Communion? Can there be a hierarchy of degrees of communion between churches which call themselves Anglican? These questions will dominate the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council, meeting as it happens this summer in Belfast. It is the first meeting of the Council in Ireland in half a century and therefore offers a special opportunity for the Church of Ireland to showcase itself in terms of worship and hospitality. We are conscious of how much work, including locally, is going on at this time to prepare the agenda of the ACC and we trust its members will leave our shores with a sense both of our history and of our energy! And equally we trust that Nairobi Cairo, and so much else that has been harvested into this rich and comprehensive Report, will lead to some lively and insightful debate during the General Synod.

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 Nicholls (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

During this year, the Anglican Affairs Working Group completed its discussion of the ACC-18 Resolutions, noting actions to be referred on to other Councils of the Church of Ireland.

In the second part of the year, the Group has mainly been occupied in studying the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals produced by IASCUFO at the end of 2024, in order to produce notes towards the House of Bishops' response to the Anglican Communion Office.

Some members of the Group continue to be actively involved in planning for the meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Belfast in 2026.

Some have been part of delegations attending the Four Nations Faith and Order meeting in May 2025 and the Porvoo Theological Conference held in Wales in October 2025.

ANGLICAN AFFAIRS

FOUR NATIONS FAITH AND ORDER CONSULTATION

The Faith and Order Consultation will next meet in April 2027 when the Church of Ireland 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 102nd annual general meeting of the Irish Council of Churches took place in Centenary Methodist Church, Leeson Park, Dublin on 3 April 2025.

The following Church of Ireland delegates were in attendance: Very Rev Niall Sloane; Very Rev Kenneth Hall; Rev Canon Katharine Poulton; Rev Canon Jane Galbraith; Rev Canon Andrew McCroskrey; Rev Abigail

Sines; Rev Suzanne Cousins; Rev Philip McKinley; Rev Dr Ryan Hawk; Mrs June Butler; Ms Georgina Coptý; Dr Nicole Gallagher; Mr David Ritchie; and Mr Craig Copley Brown.

The meeting began with a presidential address from the Rt Rev Sarah Groves, who serves as both Minister of Gracehill Moravian Church, Co. Antrim, and as a Bishop in the Moravian Church. Bishop Groves spoke of the important work of the ICC, in facilitating dialogue and collaboration among the different Christian denominations on the island of Ireland. In the course of her address, she noted three key points that faced the ICC in the coming year. The first of these was “Where are we going in the next 25-50 years”; the second “How the structures of the ICC reflect the membership of each denomination”. Bishop Groves noted that she is only the second female to hold the office of President of the ICC and hoped that more women would follow in occupying this important role. The bishop also noted that the ICC were now seeking a more permanent office to continue its work, in light of the sale of 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast. Bishop Groves expressed her thanks to Dr Damian Jackson for his service to the ICC as its General Secretary from 2022 until 2024.

Once the business of approving the ICC’s minutes, annual report, and accounts, and the appointment of its Executive, was concluded, Prof Ben Tonra from the School of Politics and International Relations at UCD, provided the keynote address, “Should the Church have a voice in the Public Square?” Prof Tonra posed some difficult, yet engaging questions to delegates, namely on whose behalf does, and should the Church speak; should the Church withdraw itself from public discussions on sensitive matters due to its connections with imperialism and genocide; and how can the Church find its place amongst the complex political landscapes that exist in our society. This was followed by a very fruitful roundtable discussion, where delegates had the opportunity to sit and discuss the topic in small groups.

An enjoyable lunch was provided to delegates, providing an opportunity for socialising and fellowship. Our thanks to the catering team who provided an impressive service to those in attendance throughout the day’s business. The agenda after lunch opened with a musical ‘Psalm Jam’ led by Rev Kiran Young Wimberley and Rev Dr Karen Campbell, using a number of psalms set to original and traditional tunes, to sing “in a time of global uncertainty.”

A reflection and table discussion on ‘A Pilgrimage to Unity’ formed the basis of the AGM’s final item. This session was chaired by Rev Dr Karen Campbell, with the panel consisting of Mr Darren Shiels and Ms Lydia Hamilton from Youth Link NI, Dr James Nelson from the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube, from the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church in Ireland, and Miss Sona Andrews from the Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Church in Ireland.

The meeting closed in prayer, with a renewed sense of common purpose and unity. We express our thanks to the organisers, especially Mr Mark Kernohan and his team for the smooth running of the day’s proceedings.

*Mr Craig Copley Brown
April 2025*

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 Most Rev Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, and Rt Rev Sarah Groves, President of the Irish Council of Churches.

The 35th Irish Inter-Church Meeting was held in Dromantine Retreat Centre, Newry in November 2025. Sixteen denominations were represented from the Irish Council of Churches alongside fellow bishops, clergy and lay leaders from the Irish Episcopal Conference. This year, the gathering reflected on the importance of 1,700 years of reciting the Nicene Creed and its importance for living faith today.

Considering the creed in a Scottish context

Rev Dr Liam Fraser, the former convener of the Theological Forum of the Church of Scotland talked about the recent decision within the Church of Scotland at its General Assembly in 2025 to incorporate the Nicene

Creed and the Apostles' Creed in a new book of confessions. These creeds will be included in the vows taken by ministers and other office holders.

This was a significant change from the sole focus on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Since 1647, this confession had been recognised as a subordinate standard but since then there has been growing ambiguity concerning what subscription means. Dr Fraser parsed out the desire within the Church to return to identifying foundational fundamental doctrines that could be wholeheartedly subscribed to.

This recent decision clarified its core identity as Catholic and Reformed. Yet, despite this intentional decision to affirm the central position of the Nicene Creed, Fraser drew a distinction between Nicene Creed and Nicene theology.

After interviewing approximately 100 leaders within his denomination, he noted that whilst 73% believed the creed was somewhat to very important to Christian unity, 88% were engaging in ecumenical activity. In analysing this difference, Dr Fraser believed it was important to draw a distinction between the creed and the theology of the creed: the latter is universal, but the former is more limited in scope tradition culture and history.

Dr Fraser commented: "If fellow denominations accept the theology of Nicaea, then some level of cooperation is not only possible because of Nicaea, but it is probably what Jesus wants. Jesus prays John 17, that all his followers would be one, so if we are not one, then the world will not only believe that Jesus was sent by the Father, but Jesus makes a close connection between unity and evangelism."

Within the inter-church group who had gathered from across Ireland, it was recognised that there were differences in how the creed was said; some used "I believe" to signify personal affirmation, others used "we believe" to highlight the communal identity and many used both. There was also the painful acknowledgment of how the introduction of the filioque clause as a later addition had caused division.

Coptic Orthodox leader shares perspective

On the second day of the conference, His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, the first Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, joined us. He gave a stirring and challenging talk on the importance of the first Nicene Council as it was a significant moment when the one holy universal apostolic Church was visible.

It was a time when there were no denominations and no fractures and it was important to remember this moment and to continue striving towards this unity. He spoke about the importance of advocating for those who were being persecuted for their religious beliefs. He commented that we may disagree on doctrine and belief but if we understand the image and likeness of God in every person, then we need to advocate for those and speak for those who are persecuted even though we disagree with them.

He spoke movingly about Christians who are still being martyred in Egypt and their resilience in continuing to meet in the same place and encourage young people towards the catechism. He also spoke of the Quiet Revival of how young 25–35-year-olds are approaching him wanting to learn about the faith and are willing to engage in over 16 months of catechism.

The impact of the 21 Coptic Christians who were martyred in Libya continues to provide a strong witness of resilience in the Christian faith. These were young ordinary men who strengthened each other in Christ in the midst of dehumanisation and violence. He noted how both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England had recognised the witness of their faith and how this provided a strong witness towards unity.

Notwithstanding, His Eminence was clear that even though there is a desire for unity there are differences that need to be acknowledged most particularly in understanding of the sacrament of communion. He talked about how he had incorporated an Anglican practice of blessing into his communion liturgy as a means of showing respect for difference but in an inclusive way.

Other topics covered throughout the two days were research from Prof Gladys Ganiel and Dr Caoimhe Ní Dhónaill on how the pandemic had affected church practice; the growing presence of youth in churches; and theological discussions on the content of the Nicene Creed.

Through both these voices as well as a strong panel of theological experts, there was hope that even though it is clear there are differences in how the creed is spoken or sung within our denominations, there continues a strong, pulsing Nicene theology that keeps drawing us together. Despite our human limitations and significant personal failings, God still urges us to partner with him in being a witness in this world.

Nicene theology keeps orienting us towards the divine and human Jesus Christ who holds all things together. The theme of the deep call to union with the triune God emanating from John 17 was a persistent theme, to be able to pray as Jesus prayed, “that they may all be one as you Father are in me and I am in you.”

The final call by Archbishop Angaelos was the imperative, coming from Cyprian of Carthage: “Unity is the garment of Christ, let us not rend it”.

*Rev Karen Campbell,
November 2025*

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 AGM was held on 29 September 2025, online. CTBI Moderator, Rev Graham Sparkes, welcomed attendees and opened the AGM with prayer.

A space was provided to attendees to share any news since the last AGM in 2024.

Then followed the main business of the meeting, during which Bishop Andrew Forster was reappointed as Trustee and Director of the company.

The General Secretary (Dr Nicola Brady) presented her report which mostly dealt with the Strategic Plan of CTBI. There are five strategic priorities in the plan:

- Strengthening ecumenical engagement in Britain and Ireland;
- Working together for mission and the common good;
- Healing society’s fractures: identities, borders, and nationalities;
- Working for global peace and justice;
- Promoting ethical and inclusive leadership.

After a break there was a roundtable discussion on the topic ‘Striving for Unity’.

Unity is God’s gift to the church and an important part of our discerning of that gift are the conversations between different traditions and churches. These conversations can take many forms. The focus for this roundtable was on the role of theological dialogue and the impact of the resulting agreements, declarations or covenants between different churches on the ecumenical landscape and the wider society, reflecting on the learning from different contexts. The panellists were Bishop Sarah Groves from the Moravian Church, Rev Ainsley Griffiths from the Church in Wales and Rev John McPake from the Church of Scotland.

Following the presentations Rev Dr Peter Colwell chaired a Q&A session. Themes addressed included prayer, vocation and speaking from the heart. The goal of visible unity is an important dimension of our work that is not easily captured in strategic plans etc. but the fruits of these dialogues are very evident from this panel

discussion. It was noted that there are many other examples of these types of dialogues represented among AGM participants. GK shared from the experience of the Methodist-Anglican dialogue in the Irish context. This dialogue has now moved to examine the question of interchangeability of lay ministries with the impetus for this coming primarily from rural communities. In response to a question about whether there is any way CTBI and national ecumenical instruments might support this work, it was suggested this kind of exchange is helpful, allowing for solutions to be shared from one context to another. It is especially valuable to learn from what is happening on the ground. Cascading out information, reports and resources is another helpful way of sharing. Minority-majority dynamics are another area that might usefully be fully explored, particularly as secularisation contributes to a rapidly changing landscape in which many churches face similar challenges. AH highlighted how the Declarations signed in Scotland have resonated with local churches in Scotland and has prompted reflection on what it means to journey together as friends. It created a sense of the churches at national level giving support to what has long been happening on the ground in local communities.

The next AGM will be held on Monday 21st September 2026, 10 am to 1 pm in The New Town Church Edinburgh (in person).

*Dr Nicola Brady,
January 2026*

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.

There are no easy paths for the peace work of the European churches. At the conference “Towards a Christian Citizenship” at Nyborg Strand 15-17 September 2025, it became clear that the churches’ work for peace takes place in a field of tension that requires courage, dialogue and fundamental following in the service of one’s neighbour.

The conference was inspired by the theme of the Danish government's EU presidency - Security in Europe. The setting was the Conference of European Churches (CEC), which this year held its annual meeting for ecumenical secretaries of member churches and national councils of churches in Denmark. A side story in a Danish context is that CEC was founded at Nyborg Strand in 1959, and that this was commemorated and marked during the conference.

The tension between unity in Christ and national loyalty

One of the main questions of the conference was whether it is possible to stand in unity in Christ and at the same time be loyal to the nation. The background to the conference was war and increased threats of war in Europe - and that the arrangements that have stood as guarantors of security in Europe for decades are falling apart in recent years. This poses the question for the churches of what their responsibilities and tasks are in a changed Europe.

Participants from 25 nations in Europe and Canada and from all corners of the church map had registered within a short time. The organizers KEK, the Council of Danish Churches and the Inter-Church Council of the Danish Church see this as an expression of the church people's keen awareness that valuable structures and institutions are undergoing rapid and disturbing change.

Current peace work in a field of tension

The conference's panel debates and presentations with leading church people, researchers and church EU lobbyists ranged from a critical look back at the historical peace work of CEC and the churches to insight into current efforts for church peace work, internally in the churches, in church organisations and in political lobbying in Brussels.

The topics were many; from the responsibility of the churches to contribute to peace in Europe to positions on the EU, NATO, the arms industry, nationalism and armament. The same topics were repeated in the informal conversations outside the program. Many indicated that the informal conversations are important for building and maintaining relationships across denominations and nations.

The overarching question of what the responsibilities, roles and obligations of Christians are in a changing Europe was an exercise in talking about something that the churches have not needed to talk about for decades until now. And the framework is a field of tension: On the one hand, the churches want to follow Christ as peacemakers. On the other hand, a country like Ukraine now stands in need of concrete help in the form of weapons for defence and to defeat the enemy.

The critical historical retrospective

Professor Katharina Kunter, University of Helsinki, has researched the history of KEK and gave a look back at the time when KEK was founded in 1959 against the backdrop of the Cold War. KEK wanted to unite the Eastern and Western churches in one community in Christ.

- KEK must ask itself how well it succeeded - or how much influence subversive activity from the Eastern Bloc had on KEK. Eastern European dissidents say that they did not get the support they needed from KEK because it wanted to maintain dialogue with the Soviets at all costs, she said.

This led to discussions in the chamber about self-examination, possible apology, and attention to not repeating the omissions of the past today.

- Europe stands at a turning point in 2025. The Helsinki Agreement from 1975 is crumbling and after years of diplomatic success, we are in danger of losing it all. Russia is not only attacking peace and freedom in Ukraine, but throughout Europe. For Christians, the situation requires us to take a position on our role in relation to peace and freedom understood as security, the rule of law and democracy, said Katharina Kunter.

Can't survive without being European

The Ukrainian PhD and director of Dialogue in Action in Ukraine, Dr Tetiana Kalenychenko, rejected that the churches in Ukraine can stand both in unity in Christ and in loyalty to the nation, as in certain parts of the church in Ukraine there is nationalism and Russian sympathies.

"Dialogues across Ukrainian churches are welcome, but it is difficult to talk about unity. For us, reconciliation is more important than unity in Christ," she said.

Her compatriot HE Metropolitan Yevstratiy, Deputy Head of the Department for External Church Relations of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, debated with bishops from two other EU candidate countries, Armenia and Georgia, about citizenship, war and peace in Europe.

- Russia is using the churches as weapons and wants to steal our history with a narrative that Russia is the right Christian power in Ukraine. We only have Europe to turn to in the current situation. We cannot survive without being European. Our belonging to Europe is a defence of Ukraine and of the hope for freedom, he said.

To emphasize the seriousness, he recalled that shortly after the full-scale invasion, Putin spoke of the Final Solution in relation to Ukrainian identity, and that Ukraine is a false state invented by the former Austria-Hungary.

HE Metropolitan Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, warned that wolves are waiting at Europe's borders. "We Georgians know how ferocious they are," he said.

- The wolves are the geopolitical threat facing Eastern European states and Armenians, Georgians and Ukrainians are turning to Europe together for an alternative, said HE Metropolitan Yevstratiy.

Discord can be overcome

Rev Frank-Dieter Fischbach, Secretary General of CEC, emphasized at the end of the conference that the churches of Europe must talk about self-defence, which is a right and duty of nations.

-But what does this mean for the churches? We must continue the dialogue on that. In relation to the EU candidate countries Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, we must stand up for our values; for the rule of law in solidarity with the victims of violence, he said.

At the same time, he reminded that history after World War II shows that divisions can be overcome. As a German, Rev Fischbach pointed to the good neighbourliness and mutual trust that has grown between Germany and France after the war.

The next CEC Assembly is due to be held in 2028.

*CEC Communique
October 2025*

Report on the CEC Conference

Resisting Empire, Promoting Peace – Churches confront the ‘Russian world’ ideology

1st – 3rd December 2025

organised by CEC in collaboration with the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland.

The ‘Russian World’ (Russkii mir) is the concept of a divinely privileged civilization that transcends (current) political borders. It is a cultural, spiritual, and geopolitical space: ‘Holy Rus’ centred on Moscow, the ‘Third Rome’. This worldview has morphed into a political programme, characterized by imperial ideology and militarism. Especially concerning is the complicity of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

Drawing on a dualistic worldview, ‘Russian World’ ideology portrays the West—with its emphasis on human rights, democracy, liberalism, gender equality and individual autonomy—as an evil to be resisted in the so-called ‘metaphysical battle’ for the ‘traditional values’ that Russia is allegedly defending.

ROC continues to provide quasi-theological and institutional support for this ideology, and the invasion of Ukraine, claiming divine sanction.

On ‘Canonical Territory’

The voices of the Orthodox churches were especially illuminating during the conference.

Within Orthodoxy, an important ecclesiological concept is ‘canonical territory’. Autonomous national or regional churches have authority in a defined territory. For example, if a Greek Orthodox Christian emigrates to Finland, they (are supposed to) recognize the Finnish Orthodox Church as the sole Orthodox Church in that territory, and not attempt to establish parallel structures such as a ‘Greek Orthodox Church in Finland’¹

ROC has disregarded this Orthodox principle of canonical territory, claiming extra-territorial authority. Subjective ‘feelings’ of ‘Russianness’ are placed above objective canonical structures and status. Any region containing Russian speakers in ex-Soviet states is deemed to belong to Ruskii Mir. Currently, Ukraine is the focus, but there is no reason why President Putin’s logic could not equally be applied to enormous swathes of Europe: the Baltics, and much of Europe that is as Central as it is Eastern.

In the analysis of multiple speakers, an influence on and tool employed by President Putin is National Romanticism. This is most often an artistic representation of a much rose-tinted past, an idyll that evokes false

¹ Brief discussion was had about the situation in the Anglican Communion: autonomous national churches like the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church in relation to the presence of the Diocese in Europe.

memory, nostalgia for what we think we once had, ‘simpler times’, ‘poor but happy’, better times that have been destroyed by some unspoken force that the artist implicitly blames.

A military slogan is ‘God is with us’, a perversion of the name Immanuel. ROC claims that wherever an Orthodox believer looks to Moscow, regardless of geography, it is the divinely appointed responsibility of Russia to protect and defend that believer. This includes military action, as is the case in Ukraine. For this reason, according to ‘Russian world’ ideology, events in Ukraine are not seen as a war against a foreign state but rather a ‘special military operation’ within the Russian orbit.

The various Orthodox Churches in Europe, other than ROC, have been working theologically and legally on this issue of territory and authority. The relationship between church and state requires theological analysis in a contemporary European context, not only in former Soviet states but across Europe.

On Dualism

The war in Ukraine is projected as a cosmic spiritual war. To oppose the war is therefore seen as opposition to God and his appointed people responsible for safeguarding the world against liberal politico-spiritual forces.

Eschatological and especially apocalyptic language is being used in Russia to paint a dualist picture of world history. That Russia is ‘on the right side’ is unquestioned as authoritative church teaching. Being on God’s side is allegedly down to one’s pertaining to the Russian world or supporting it.

The church requires preachers and hermeneuts to correct this distortion and abuse of Christian scriptures and doctrine.

On Imperialism

In the current European context, there is a need for theological work on post-colonialism, legacies of empire, and perceived national exceptionalisms. Care must be taken in our use of biblical language, such as building the ‘Kingdom of God’ and ‘going into all the world’, lest these be co-opted with pernicious motives. We noted that, even on the most sanguine reading, ‘empire’ in the Bible is ambivalent at best, is continuously relativized, and stands under God’s judgment even if in some way used as a ‘vehicle’ for his purposes. Despite the canonical status of difficult texts (ethnic-religious wars, conquest, chosen status) the people of God are never encouraged to imperial expansion: if anything, the expansion of Israel under Solomon leads to its fragility.

On Language of Sanctity and Sacrifice concerning War

Language of ‘holy war’ has replaced any concept of ‘just war’ in Russian discourse. ‘Holy war’ is preferable to a profane peace, according to this worldview. It is alarming to see weapons ‘blessed’ by clergy; to hear priests and bishops declare that sins relating to the perpetration of war crimes have been pre-emptively absolved and remitted; and to hear. Language of ‘sacrifice’ is blended with the unique sacrifice of Christ, and language of ‘sanctity’ applied to unconscionable acts.

Concerns for Spread of Ideology – In Europe, imperial ideologies are not unique to Russia. Churches must be alert to similar ideologies taking effect elsewhere. Of particular concern are reports of Russian interference overseas, and exploitation of social media to generate and spread ‘fake news’, to exacerbate extremism, nationalism and polarization, and to foment unrest and instability in European states.

Like anyone in Ireland on social media, members of the Church of Ireland are exposed to Russian World ideology and cognate ideologies in sympathy with it. This happens through unsolicited posts generated by bots to a degree that few of us are aware. It benefits the Russian regime if Europe becomes weary of the war in Ukraine, and if democratic institutions and national solidarity are destabilized.

The Statement

The statement agreed at the most recent gathering of CEC Churches Confront the ‘Russian World’ Ideology can be found at:

<https://ceceurope.org/conference-statement-shares-how-churches-can-confront-russian-world-ideology>

A Personal Note

I was very privileged to represent the Church of Ireland at this conference. I come away with a sense that we in our marginal North-West European location are geographically distant from Ukraine and Russia in some regards, and probably quite culturally distant and lacking understanding of the worldview and the heretical theological justification behind it.

Ukrainian delegates expressed their thanks to churches like ours who have welcomed refugees in various ways, and who continue to pray for that country. I was pleased to be able to share examples of this support at national Church of Ireland as well as parish level.

Ukrainians, and delegates from other states on the periphery of the so-called ‘Russian World’, are also fearful that a peace deal may be brokered that serves to appease President Putin for a time and even serves to legitimate the war he considers ‘holy’.

I come away aware that in this modern era Ruskii Mir like any other pathological ideology is not in fact a distant irrelevancy but only a click away. Closer to home, there are other groups with dangerous visions for the ‘canonical territory’, if I may appropriate the term, to which the Church of Ireland ministers. These may not share Putin’s agenda in the sphere of influence he believes to correspond to his presidency, but they may find inspiration in his use of subjectivist identity, national Romanticism and the co-option of ‘state religion’.

I note the upcoming far-right ‘carol service’ being organised in central London by Mr Tommy Robinson, a ‘Christian nationalist’ co-option of the Good News of the Incarnation. This is being billed by Unite the Kingdom as “a new Christian revival in the UK – a moment to reclaim and celebrate our heritage, culture and Christian identity”. However, I note also the Church of England’s swift and unambiguous response, and the ‘rapid response’ resources of the Joint Public Issues Team, a partnership between the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. This is the kind of role, speaking the faith in the public square, that Russia and its national church censor.

In light of my attendance at the CEC conference, I encourage all of us to stand against the heresy of ‘Russian World’ ideology, to stand with our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and all places experiencing its consequences, and to consider how in the Church of Ireland we deal with similar ideologies that subvert the Gospel that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ.

I wish to thank Standing Committee and CCUD for the opportunity to attend.

*Rev Chris MacBruithin
December 2025*

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 WCC central committee met in Johannesburg, South Africa from 18 to 24 June 2025. The central committee, which meets every two years, is responsible for the policies and strategies to fulfil the mandate of the 11th Assembly held in 2022. The central committee was hosted by our member churches in Southern Africa together with the South African Council of Churches. It brought together over 300 members, presidents, advisors, guests, stewards and participants from around the world.

The reports, statements, and livestream recordings of prayers and plenaries are available on the WCC website. In addition to its business, the central committee discussed important issues affecting the life and witness of the churches in their ongoing pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity. With this letter, I am writing to inform member churches and ecumenical partners about some of the main outcomes of the central committee. The meeting was first and foremost a **pilgrimage encounter** with the churches in Southern Africa. It was an opportunity to experience the extraordinary legacy of the churches' courageous witness in overcoming apartheid and the continued commitment of churches everywhere to overcome racism in all its forms.

The central committee celebrated 1700 years of common Apostolic Faith professed in the Nicæan-Constantinopolitan Creed as a strong sign of the churches' visible unity in Christ. The central committee took stock of the climate crisis and the need for churches to amplify their efforts for climate justice. It also celebrated the rich ecumenical heritage of promoting gender justice, including the 'Thursdays in Black' campaign 'for a world without rape or violence'.

I am delighted to report that the WCC fellowship is growing. In South Africa, we welcomed four **new member churches**. We are now a fellowship of 356 churches representing over 600 million Christians. After prayerful preparation, the central committee welcomed the following churches:

- Apostolic Pentecostal Church International [Liberia], a Pentecostal church with 52,000 members
- Church of Central Africa Presbyterian [Malawi], a Reformed church with 3.2 million members
- Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, a Lutheran church with 2.2 million members
- Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany, a Baptist church with 80,000 members.

The central committee also received the application of the Eternal Sacred Order of the Cherubim and Seraphim, an African independent church with over one million members in Nigeria, for an "interim period of participation in the work of the WCC and for interaction with the local fellowship of member churches". With this letter, I am informing the member churches with every hope that in the next two years, a consensus will develop and the central committee will complete the process in 2027.

The central committee launched an **ecumenical decade of climate justice action** in a bold and prayerful response to the growing climate emergency. The decade is an invitation for churches to deepen their engagement for climate justice, leading by example, promoting policy change, empowering resilient communities, and developing an economy of life. The decade calls for more than change, it calls for deep spiritual transformation – *metanoia* – a radical turning of hearts, minds, and practices.

Consequently, I want to encourage our member churches and ecumenical partners to remain steadfast in their work for climate justice. The churches have been at the forefront of the movement for ecological and economic justice. Our work and action for climate justice are more important than ever.

The central committee adopted a number of statements and minutes on **international concerns** for peace and justice. In response to the escalating crisis in Gaza, the central committee adopted a statement calling for an end to apartheid, occupation, and impunity in Israel and Palestine.

"We recognize a clear distinction between the Jewish people, our siblings in faith, and the acts of the Government of Israel, and we reaffirm that the WCC stands firm against any kind of racism, including antisemitism, anti-Arab racism, and islamophobia. However, the unbearable suffering inflicted on the people of Gaza, and the escalating violence and oppression in the West Bank and in Jerusalem compel the global fellowship of churches to speak with clarity, urgency, and commitment to the principles of justice under international law and ethics".

The crisis was discussed in a special hearing, in standing committees, and again in plenaries. The statement names and denounces the "system of apartheid imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people, in violation of international law and moral conscience". The statement has received support and critique, helping to embolden

the churches' deep commitment to justice and peace. With this letter, I want to encourage the churches to continue praying and working for peace and end to war, conflict, and occupation.

The central committee launched preparations for the **WCC 12th Assembly** in 2030, electing planning committees and initiating the search for a host venue. In 2027, the central committee will select the venue and allocate seats and issue invitations to nominate delegates.

I would like to encourage member churches in every region to consider hosting the next WCC assembly. The ideal venue will accommodate between 2000 and 4000 people in one location, have dedicated spaces for worship, a plenary hall for up to 1500 people, and break-out spaces for committees, workshops and fellowship. The churches offering to host the assembly should exhibit strong ecumenical cooperation. They should be able to offer logistical and financial support and ensure that both the preparations and the event are accompanied by prayer. Guidelines for hosting the assembly are attached.

The central committee meeting in Johannesburg was a significant pilgrimage encounter. Below are more highlights and outcomes. I remain grateful for the commitment of our member churches and ecumenical partners to the life and work of the WCC.

Let us together strengthen our Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity.

*Rev Dr Prof Jerry Pillay
General Secretary of WCC*

*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 shares observer status at meetings with the other Anglican Celtic churches and is currently represented by the Church in Wales.*

The 35th meeting of the Meissen Commission was held on 16-19 October in the Hamburg Missionsakademie, a postgraduate research centre supported by the German Church and associated with the University of Hamburg. The Meissen Agreement exists primarily between the Church of England (COE) and the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (EKD), with the three Celtic Anglican Churches holding one 'Observer' position (this runs for a five-year term and is about to be passed from Ireland to Wales). One of the questions posed to the Celtic Churches this year was whether they might wish to consider becoming full members of the Meissen process through formal adoption of the Agreement itself, and I would suggest that this is a matter which might usefully be brought before the respective provincial Commissions for Christian Unity and Dialogue.

Given the name of the venue, 'Missionsakademie', it was somewhat ironic to hear how uncomfortable the EKD feels about the word 'mission' itself. There would appear to be complex resonances for the German Church of what 'mission' has represented in the past, including an association with colonialism, and this demurring from it also involves a clear shying-away from anything that could be perceived as evangelism. By contrast, it was striking that for the English Church 'mission' is emphasised as being 'front and centre' of virtually everything that it intends to prioritise over the next number of years. The COE, for example, voiced its warm welcome of the recent Bible Society Report documenting the so-called 'Quiet Revival', and in tabling to the Commission its most recent Report of the Archbishops' Council, it named multiple missional goals such as, 'a doubling of numbers of children and young people by 2030'; '10000 new Christian communities across the four areas of home, work/education, social and digital'; and the making of 'missionary disciples' living 'missional lives throughout the week'. Church responses to the ongoing situation in the Middle East generated some animated debate, with the clear indication that this continues to be a sensitive subject in Germany. Likewise, all present voiced concern about the rise of populism and right-wing extremism in their respective contexts – in Germany this is manifested through the rise of the 'Alternativ für Deutschland' political party; in Great Britain by the advance of 'Reform UK'; and in Ireland through the various groupings which now protest regularly outside centres for asylum-seekers – and there was a substantial conversation about the

proliferation of flags being erected on lampposts, with the representative of the German-speaking churches in Britain describing how these had become ‘intimidating’ for her congregants.

Not surprisingly the COE felt it necessary to inform the Commission about its process of appointment for a new Archbishop of Canterbury, with the lengthy delay in realising this explained as having allowed the timeline to remain aligned with +Justin Welby’s anticipated retirement date in January 2026 even after his much earlier resignation. The Bishop of Rochester, +Jonathan Gibbs, also spoke at length about the decision of the English bench not to proceed with either liturgical revision of marriage rites or further provision for clergy who are same sex attracted. Having taken extensive theological and legal advice, the bishops were persuaded that any such changes would have to be enacted by synodical process, and, given that this in turn would require a two-thirds majority, they foresaw both the impossibility of achieving this, and the inevitability of a full church split if that were even attempted.

This year’s Meissen meeting took as its primary theme, ‘The Church in the Public Square’, and the Commission was pleased to receive two excellent presentations from visiting speakers. Bishop Tilman Jeremias, from the Nord Landeskirche, provided a fascinating historical overview which suggested that many of the ongoing internal tensions experienced by both the EKD and broader German society derive from how Germany had to manage the coming together of East and West following the collapse of the former Communist regime. Despite the EKD’s ability to attract people to cultural events, such as concerts and community vigils, Jeremias suggested that most Germans today feel deeply distanced from religious questions, and yet, adopting some words of Wolhart Pannenberg, he insisted that ‘religion remains a universal anthropological need’. Building on this, Professor Florian Höhne, from the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Erlangen-Nürnberg, developed a more theological perspective concerning ‘The Church in the Public Square’, noting that it warrants willingness on the part of churches to address key sociological questions and, above all, to articulate hope. ‘The Church’, he said, should act as ‘a school of public virtue’.

With regard to wider ecumenical relationships, the Commission deliberated at length over the implications for Meissen of the recently signed ‘Augsburg Agreement’ between The Episcopal Church of the USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, itself a constituent member of the EKD. Unlike Meissen, which has yet to realise interchangeability of ministries, the Augsburg text begins from having already reached such a consensus. The Commission was conscious of how this new development presents both an opportunity and a challenge, not least insofar as it raises a fundamental question about the nature of the EKD itself – is it a single church, or is it in fact a federation of different churches? There was also appreciative mention of the work of the Council of Protestant Churches in Europe, which brings together signatories to the Leuenberg Agreement. Of note, it would appear that the COE may be considering the possibility of associate member status to this body, and this is again perhaps something which the Celtic Churches might also wish to explore.

*Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott
October 2025*

*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 Meurig Williams (Church of Ireland))*

The group met in Paris in February 2025.

Amongst issues discussed were:

- Reports from member churches;
- Plans to celebrate the 25 years of Reuilly;

- A lengthy time was given to sharing and discussion of ordination rites within member churches;
- Discussion on interchangeability and understandings of authority;
- A final session was devoted to exchanges on local projects and material;
- A visit to à la Communauté de Reuilly was greatly appreciated.

The group hopes to meet next in Canterbury in October 2026.

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

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

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/

Every year, the Porvoo Communion arranges a conference in October for the member churches around a particular theme. In 2025, in celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the Communion held its triennial theological conference in Cardiff on the theme: Theological Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Journey: Learning from the Council of Nicaea, generously hosted by the Church in Wales.

At the Opening Eucharist, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Faroe Islands signed the Porvoo Declaration and was welcomed with great joy as a new member of the Porvoo Communion. This was a significant highlight of this year's conference and was attended by the Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales alongside the participants from the Porvoo churches attending the Conference. The Bishops also hosted a special reception with invited guests from denominations and organisations involved in Welsh ecumenical life, where Welsh culture was celebrated with music from a traditional 'plygain²' service.

During the Conference, the participants worshipped together and visited several places of interest in Cardiff and experiencing some of the Welsh context. The importance of the bilingual environment was highlighted by a visit to the Senedd (parliament) where a copy of Bishop Morgan's 1588 Welsh Bible was on display, widely credited with helping to preserve the Welsh language by making Scripture accessible to Welsh speakers. The strength of diversity was underpinned by taking part in Ecumenical Vespers in the Roman Catholic Cathedral on the eve of the Feast of St John Henry Newman, where Rt Rev Dr Rowan Williams was invited to give the Reflection, and by meeting in a venue operated by the Roman Catholic Church.

Professor Catrin Haf Williams and Bishop Rowan Williams delivered the two keynote addresses entitled 'Investigating the Origins and Shape of Early Divine Christology' and 'Nicaea, the New Creation, and the Body of Christ', respectively.

² Before day-break service on Christmas morning, where members of the congregation sing Welsh carols, which also include verses on the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Shorter presentations were given by various participants during the three conference and discussion sessions which examined historical and contemporary perspectives on the Council and its Creed:

- The Council of Nicaea: Inscribing the bounds of Christological Orthodoxy;
- Beyond Nicaea: The Christ of the Councils as the guarantor of Christian Unity?
- The Nicene Legacy: How does the Council of Nicaea shape our ecumenical and interreligious commitments 1700 years later?

The Nicene Creed is common to all the churches of the Porvoo Communion and therefore is a strong foundation for our unity. Across a wide-ranging set of contributions, the Conference explored the tension between the Nicene Creed as a static formulation of belief and a lived expression of faith in worship.

The annual meeting of the Porvoo Communion reaffirms our desire to work together in the mission of the Church as Lutherans and Anglicans in Europe, learning from each other as churches. This will continue in 2026, when the Primates and Presiding Bishops of the Porvoo Communion will meet in England.

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

Porvoo Work Plan 2026-2027

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 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 2026 is found online at <https://porvoocommunion.org/porvoo-prayer-diary/>

*Rev Canon Stephen Fielding
October 2025*

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS WORKING-GROUP

Membership

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

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 the 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 concluded, that in order to increase access to information concerning Europe it would, for an initial two-year trial period, employ a ‘blog’ format published at: ewg.blogspot.com

- The blog is now open to all readers via this link: ewg.blogspot.com.
- As of December 2025, the blog had over 1000 posts.
- All General Synod members are invited to subscribe.
- All committee members and RCB staff are invited to subscribe.
- We hope to recruit an ‘editorial team’ of up to eight, comprising the existing members, plus an additional four 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 especially 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 include 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 is 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.

To widen access, the EWG will not publish information of a confidential or sensitive nature, so we request that members of General Synod share the EWG bulletin link with those who may be interested in developments across the European scene. It is intended to also provide a link from the CofI website, and other church websites are invited to include the link if they feel the bulletin may be of use to their readers. It should be noted that the desire of the EWG group is to be of the greatest help to the greatest number.

*Rev Canon Kevin O'Brien
December 2025*

INTER FAITH WORKING GROUP

Membership

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

The Interfaith Working Group (IFWG) saw a transition this year, with Rev Suzanne Cousins, who has been convenor for a number of years stepping down, and Very Rev Abigail Sines taking on the role of convenor. The IFWG wish to express their thanks to Rev Cousins for her dedicated leadership over the years and her commitment to strengthening the Church of Ireland's interfaith engagement. The IFWG also was pleased to welcome a new member, Mr George Woodman.

The IFWG meets online and reports regularly to the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue. The aims continue to be supporting 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 in being a voice within the Church of Ireland for refugees.

2024 Dialogue of Friendship: Listening Well to Build Communities

This year was the fourth year of collaboration between the IFWG and the Sanctuary in Faith stream, part of Places of Sanctuary Ireland. Setting the stage for day's sessions, Archbishop Michael Jackson welcomed attendees and noted that the theme of 'listening well' captured the urgency to dig down into the self-understanding of communities and to focus the human curiosity on what is good. The keynote speaker was Dr Ebun Joseph, Special Rapporteur for the National Action Plan Against Racism; Module Coordinator and Lecturer in Black Studies at University College Dublin; Director of the Institute of Antiracism and Black Studies; and Founder, African Scholars Association Ireland. In her keynote address Dr Joseph took the theme 'From Fear to Friendship: Cultivating Acceptance, One Conversation at a Time' and spoke about the need to break down fear and division in society.

A series of panel sessions highlighted a range of different organisations working in the space of intercultural and interfaith relations. Mr Gideon Yutzy and Mr Kent Chadwick spoke on the activities of the Waterford Conversation Club, whose members are from different nationalities, meet regularly for conversation and food, providing opportunities for people from the locality who would not normally come into contact with each other to get together and understand each other. Pastor Hudson Kaunda and Ms Medahan Weldegabir of All Nations Ministries, Belfast, described the work of this Christian charity which supports local people, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in North Belfast. Their projects include providing household items and clothing; courses in English, life in the UK, sewing, driving theory and IT; an allotment; and providing upcycled bikes to newcomers and locals. Ed Peterson and Edwin Graham of the Northern Ireland Interfaith Forum spoke about their activities in recent years which include the PeacePlus Interfaith and Belief Project, discussions around religious education issues, climate action, and peace and reconciliation. Ms Lynn Jackson of Holocaust Education Ireland spoke about her organisation's work promoting Holocaust education, awareness and remembrance, including the significant schools work which the organization undertakes.

Reflecting on the day Dr Lucy Michael of the Archbishop of Armagh's Reference Group on Racial Equality and Justice noted that shared humanity was a common theme amongst all the speakers. 'The word dialogue has perhaps been undermined by those who want to undermine other people's human rights,' she commented emphasising the power of connection and having the courage to stand with those who were on the receiving end of racism.

One of the attendees for the day shared this feedback on how the content of the sessions had impacted her: 'Words fail me many times to describe what I wish to say – however this event really uplifted me, to hear all that is going on in love in pockets around Ireland. Many are passionate about a better world where we can live together in peace, where we can learn from each other, where racism can become less and less – the work of

Sanctuary Ambassadors is so vital in schools, where young people meet – I would wish to stay motivated, to speak out just to be a light in some small way’.

Looking Ahead to 2026

Online Scriptural Reasoning (February)

Scriptural Reasoning is a method of reading, listening to and reflecting on religious texts together, for the purposes of learning about, exploring and appreciating our differences and similarities. There is no expected outcome or ‘agreement’ as such, simply an opportunity to listen and learn together. The ‘main event’ of Scriptural Reasoning is the facilitated small group discussion which follows the presentation of the three texts. The IFWG is planning a Scriptural Reasoning event during Interfaith Harmony Week (1-7 February), and potential Muslim and Jewish presenters already have been contacted. Booking link will be circulated in mid-January.

Dialogue of Friendship: Faithfully Caring for Creation (May)

The IFWG is looking ahead to another year of collaboration with Sanctuary in Faith for the Dialogue of Friendship event, to take place on 16 May at Dundrum Methodist Church in Dublin. The theme will be ‘Faithfully Caring for Creation’ and the keynote speaker will be the Revd David Coleman, Environmental Chaplain for Eco-Congregation Scotland.

There will also be panel presentations including the following:

- Dr Raja Harun MBE, Understanding ‘Al Mizan’, an Islamic perspective of stewardship of the world;
- Hilary Abrahamson, Dublin Jewish Progressive Congregation;
- Dublin City Interfaith Forum ‘Safe Haven’ Initiative;
- East Belfast Mission, recently recognised as a Church of Sanctuary;
- Dr Manizha Khan, Sanctuary Ambassador and board member for Places of Sanctuary Ireland.

Interfaith Learning Pilgrimage to Cairo (October)

During the latter half of 2025, the IFWG entered into conversation with the Church Mission Society Ireland (CMSI) regarding the development of an interfaith programme, building on CMSI’s longstanding links with the Anglican Diocese of Egypt and its Centre of Christian-Muslim Understanding and Partnership.

The pilgrimage is planned for October 2026. Ideally, the group of 10-12 people traveling from Ireland will include participants from both Muslim and Christian backgrounds (and possibly other faiths if there is interest). In this regard it would differ significantly from other CMS Ireland teams, and the experience would be not simply of going to observe an interfaith dialogue project somewhere else, but that the entire experience of preparation and travel for the group would be an interfaith initiative. In Cairo the programme will include:

- Learning from the Diocese of Egypt’s Centre for Christian Muslim Understanding and Partnership, including participation in ‘Journey of Learning’ workshops, a journey through shared scriptures with members of the Islamic community in Cairo;
- Learning visits to the Diocesan ministries for refugees, which include educational, medical, and livelihood supports;
- Meetings with Islamic and Coptic communities and faith leaders.

The Interfaith Learning Pilgrimage application process was opened in October, and applications will close in late January 2026. After the selection process is finalised, the selected participants will be provided with a schedule of preparation and orientation sessions. Participants will be largely responsible for self-funding participation fees, however, with CCUD approval, the IFWG is pleased to note that part of its budget allocation for 2026 will be directed towards providing partial bursaries for individuals for whom the full participation cost would be prohibitive.

*Very Rev Abigail Sines,
December 2025*

Appendix 1 ~ Annual Church Meetings

The Methodist Church in Ireland Annual Conference

Report of Attendance

The Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe

Along with Iris Suiter, I attended the Methodist Conference in Portadown in June - unfortunately only on the eve of the first day of the representative session and on that first day itself. However, it was possible within that timeframe to experience warm hospitality, to renew many friendships and to gain some useful insights concerning how business is done. Despite my many years of involvement with the Covenant process, I had never previously had such an experience of the nuts-and-bolts operation of the Irish Connection.

It was of course a pleasure, along with the bishop of Connor, to participate in the consecration of the incoming episcopal minister \ President Rev Alan Wardlow and to hear his inaugural discourse. The following evening, I attended (but not as a liturgical participant) the Ordination of two new presbyters and was of course struck by the remarkable similarity between the Methodist Ordinal and our own. The main differences arose when the ordinands offered eloquent testimonies, received with loud applause, concerning their journeys to that moment. Furthermore, although I should have known not to be surprised, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of hymns and worship songs sung during the liturgies and indeed in the course of conference business. Three separate and lengthy songs taking the place of the Gradual hymn somewhat wearied my Anglican soul. That said, I did feel exhilarated by the rendering of the Wesleyan hymn ‘And are we yet alive’ at the opening of proceedings. And I was delighted to learn, looking ahead to next year, that the President / episcopal minister elected and designated for 2026/ 27 will be Rev Janet Unsworth of Edgehill who is such a wise and delightful colleague at the Covenant Council.

Much of the business which I witnessed was akin to what would occur at our own synods ... pioneering initiatives and meeting their costs, discussions of ethical investment and whether any of the church’s money was inadvertently financing fracking, discussion of education North and South including the affairs of Methodist College and Wesley College, even procedural wrangles of various sorts. One interesting decision peculiar to Methodism was a decision that from next year the Lay Leader like the President should hold office for a single year. A context in which I could not but admire the Methodists (although in this matter I know to compare their polity with ours is akin to the proverbial comparison of apples and oranges) relates to their dealing with the Charitable Regulatory Authorities North and South. Methodism is essentially but two charities, one on each side of the border. All the local accounts of circuits and societies are subsumed into a single consolidated and audited account for submission to the Regulator. It would appear to be a somewhat heavenly practice.

I sadly missed Saturday’s proceedings, which apparently included a measured debate concerning the tragedy of Gaza, and also consideration of the Covenant Council report. In the context of interchangeable ministry with us, Methodists have been agonising over how to handle the issue of full connection. Such connection is part of the DNA of Methodist ministry, not usually resigned or forsaken except frankly in a situation of a fall from grace. So what is to be done when a Presbyterian in good standing and full connection accepts an incumbency in the Church of Ireland? Will their continuing connection mean they remain members of the Conference and have to check in annually with the Stationing Committee? Where does this leave the authority of the bishop and is there a real danger of alternative episcopal or quasi - episcopal oversight? The solution that is emerging is not to sever connection but to acknowledge that all its requirements and implications are completely in abeyance as long as an appointment is held in the Church of Ireland. And, once a Presbyterian who has transferred their ministry from one polity to the other retires, it should be up to them to decide which polity they consider to be their essential place of belonging during their years of superannuation.

A few other points concerning their manner of conducting business appeared to me instructive:

- Time is used very efficiently. Business begins precisely at 9am and while the evenings are dominated by worshipping activity, there is no real ‘hanging around’ during a very full day.
- While the conference met in a spacious church joined to a hall where there was space to view displays and to consume complimentary tea and coffee, there was simply no attempt to provide catering. One could bring one’s own food into the hall or buy modest snacks from a horse-box style stall in the car park outside. Apart from that, culinary matters were left to oneself. On the other hand, the church does contribute to the travel costs of Conference members.
- There seemed to be little of the highly distracting neo - parliamentary walking about in the course of sessions which we witness at the synods: the C.of I. seems to regard such resort to ambulatory exercise almost as part of our ancient rights and freedoms.

All in all, one knew one was in the presence of special friends in a church which perhaps in spite of itself readily reveals its Anglican parentage. And despite many upbeat plans for mission and outreach, and its traditional commitment to a social Gospel, it is a church very conscious of its own smallness. Key people are clearly carrying out a remarkable plurality of voluntary roles. The Covenant with the Church of Ireland is perhaps valued for slightly different reasons than would be pertinent to us. It gives a sense of a wider belonging within the Reformed family, particularly in less populated areas. It provides an umbrella under which several joint initiatives can be attempted which they could not do on their own but to which they can contribute gladly and distinctively.

It was a joy to address the Conference as it opened and, being a stuffy Anglican, to offer a modest reflection just ahead of Pentecost on Cranmer’s collect for that Feast. Cranmer saw ‘right judgment in all things’ as a supreme if understated spiritual gift. It was fascinating to observe the manner in which the Conference seeks collectively to make right judgments. In a turbulent world where unexpected issues are always confronting us and where the church itself finds an agreed response difficult, the words of Wesley’s apparently eccentric opening hymn are prophetic, realistic yet determined.

*What troubles have we seen, what conflicts have we past,
Fightings without and fears within, since we assembled last!
Yet out of all the Lord hath brought us by his love*

I left the Conference for Limerick finding myself singing the hymn which included such words of defiant realism in the car.

Michael Tuan, Limerick & Kildare
The Rt Rev MAJ Burrows
Chair

The Methodist Church in Ireland Annual Conference Report of Attendance

The Methodist Conference with the theme ‘Compelled by Love’ was held in Thomas St. Methodist Church in Portadown from the 5th – 7th June 2025. Bishop Burrows and I attended as representatives of the Church of Ireland.

Election and Installation of Rev Alan Wardlow as President of the Conference and of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

This took place on the Thursday evening the 5th June. The Church was filled to capacity for the occasion. After a brief address by the outgoing President Rev Dr John Alderdice, then the formal proceedings took place to nominate, elect and install Rev Alan Wardlow as the new President. After his installation Rev Alan

Wardlow gave his inaugural address on the theme. He used Paul as an example of someone who set out as an apostle but felt *compelled* to preach and tell others about Jesus Christ (1st Corinthians 9 v 16.) He told us how people like Gypsy Smith and John Wesley, when they put their trust in the Lord, shared the gospel with others. If all who professed faith would witness and preach then the Church would grow.

The Representative session

The whole conference was based around worship, moving in and out from work of the Governance committees to Bible study and praise. The representative session started with a Bible study, led by Eleanor Hayden, from Acts Ch 3, in which she compared the beggar sitting outside the gate of the temple to where most people are, “outside” the Church. The difference between then and now is that the community came running when Peter addressed the beggar but now, we have lost our sense of expectation.

Greetings to the conference

A number of greetings were given from guests to the conference:

- Rev Helen Cameron, President of the Methodist Church in Britain and Carolyn Godfrey, Vice President in Britain, brought greetings and said that they felt inspired by the word “Compelled” and wished the Conference every blessing.
- Dr Oliver Abi Aba, His Eminence from Methodist Church Nigeria told us that there was approximately 2 million members in the Methodist church in Nigeria, where all the services were loud and members loved to dance and praise the Lord. He reminded us that the World Day of Prayer service for 6th March 2026 has been written by the women in Nigeria.
- Rt Rev Michael Burrows, Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe, spoke of his role as co-chair of the Covenant Council. He gave an anecdote from his school days at Wesley College when he told his friend that the only difference between the Methodist church and Church of Ireland was no Bishops in the Methodist Church. He quoted from the Collect for Pentecost that the Church was to exercise the right judgement.
- Bible society – representative from the Bible society showed a video showing the growth of the Church in Cuba and their hope to put a Bible into every person’s hand.

Resolutions of the Governance Board

The Governance Board Consists of 15 trustees and a major component of the Governance Board’s work consists of monitoring and mitigating risks to the Church. The current top identified risks are:

- Decline in Membership;
- Financial Challenges;
- Decline in number of candidates coming forward for ordained ministry;
- Divided opinions on human sexuality;
- Safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults;
- Filling voluntary positions in local churches.

These risks are addressed throughout the year in a variety of ways by individuals, teams and committees.

Speakers from some of the committees spoke about their work. We heard about the work of the Social Responsibility Committee. This was very interesting as we were told about the work with those in poverty, the effect on children, school absence due to basic hygiene products, lack of foster carers and the increased use of food banks.

We were told about the Environmental policy and how the Methodist Church formed an Environmental Action Group in 2024 to be sustainability advocates in Churches, taking care of property, reducing energy use, waste management and obtaining grants to mitigate costs. It also highlighted the damage to seabeds in the Pacific and Cook Islands because of the mining of minerals needed for car batteries. God created our environment; it is our job to take care of it.

This was followed by a bible study from Rev Dr Martyn Atkins from Cliff College, who spoke about the Pentecost from Acts ch.2 and how the Holy Spirit makes movement and used the analogy if God drops of pebble in a puddle, watch the ripples.

Returning to business, the Connexion team – the Mission team of the Church and how they support missionaries with service grants and their work with other mission partners. Every Youth and Children strategy has struggled since covid, and the team are listening to the children before they reach the planning stage.

As at any business conference, there is amendments to the resolutions, discussion follows and then the conference representatives can vote. Many of the resolutions were similar to those of C of I.

On the Friday evening there was a service of ordination for Fadzanayi Jongoro and Andrew Topley. Each candidate gave a brief account of his/her call and present experience before their ordination.

All in all, it was a very interesting experience, the interspersed worship was meaningful and the speakers on each resolution were brief and gave us an insight to the work of the Methodist Church.

Mrs Iris Sutor

The Church in Wales' Governing Body Newport September 2025

The Governing Body met for two days in the ICC Newport at a kairos moment for the Church in Wales. There was joy at the appointment of Cherry Vann over the summer, as the Archbishop of Wales, but there was also a sense of shock, pain and hurt over recent revelations in Bangor Diocese and the immediate resignation of the previous Archbishop.

They gathered prayerfully and intentionally, seeking God at this time, and the two days to the observer were characterised by humility and grace.

With only 146 delegates possibly attending, the gathering felt more intimate than General Synod in Ireland. Seating was arranged with circular tables, allowing for some group discussion and sharing during business. Provision of lunch and dinner at the Convention Centre further enhanced this feeling of collegiality. Headphones were provided for translation when speakers indicated that they would speak in Welsh.

Many of the issues, such as balancing missional funding against dwindling local finance, were familiar. However, the most marked difference came with the second morning given over to provisions for same-sex relationships. Reaching the end of a trial period of providing prayers for a same sex couple after a civil marriage, the Governing Body sought to discern whether to continue or discontinue this provision or go further with the provision of a marriage service.

While an indication would eventually be sought, no decision was being made. This was to be a listening exercise. What followed was a truly humbling and moving morning. Bishop Mary made some simple suggested guidelines. Speakers would not refer to previous speakers. There would be at least 30 seconds of silence between contributions. There would be no applause offered for any speech. Without any adversarial momentum, the morning became a safe space where people spoke their truth, and it soon became the many voices of the composite personality of the Church in Wales.

I was made most welcome and affirmed many times in our Celtic similarities. It was a privilege to be among a church intentionally and prayerfully discerning God's ways among them as they journey forward.

Very Rev Paul Draper