

Churches  
in Ireland  
Connecting  
in Christ

Irish Council  
of Churches



2021  
Annual Report

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## ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2021

	Year Joined ICC
Church of Ireland	1923
Methodist Church in Ireland	1923
Moravian Church, Irish District	1923
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	1923
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church	1923
Religious Society of Friends	1923
Salvation Army (Ireland Division)	1965
Lutheran Church in Ireland	1972
Greek Orthodox Church in Britain & Ireland	1997
Cherubim & Seraphim Church	2001
Romanian Orthodox Church	2004
Antiochian Orthodox Church	2005
Redeemed Christian Church of God	2014
Indian Orthodox Church in Ireland	2019
Syrian Orthodox Church in Ireland	2020



## PRESIDENT —Report

WRITER

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

*2021 marked the Centenary of the partition of Ireland and the creation of Northern Ireland. For some 2021 was an opportunity for celebration while for others it was a time of grief. For many it highlighted the continuing need to find ways in which, despite our different aspirations, we can build a peaceful future together.*

In June 1921 King George V speaking to the Senate and House of Commons of the new Northern Ireland Parliament said: 'I pray that today may be the first step towards an end to strife ... and in that hope I appeal to all Irishmen to pause, stretch out the hand of forbearance and conciliation and to join in making for the land which they love a new era of peace, contentment and goodwill.'

100 years later we are still some way off achieving what was prayed for on that occasion. However, that should not blind us to the fact that there is still much we can do together to build a healthy society.

This year's AGM has the theme of 'The Unfinished Work of Peace' which is the title of the Paper prepared by ICC and circulated in the hope of encouraging local engagement in peacebuilding.

Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the peacemakers', and the Apostle Paul's advice was: 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone ... If your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.'

In the business of peacemaking the Christian Gospel invites all to love their neighbour. So as we seek to navigate a way through our contested past, the Gospel calls us to find ways to heal relationships in the present and create the circumstances that will make for a hopeful future.

One of the few positives that Covid-19 has produced is a new sense of neighbourliness. It has been so encouraging to see how the community has come together in care and helpfulness as people have reached across various divides to meet someone else's need. We need to continue in this spirit for the continued good of society.

Christ's teaching, ministry and sacrifice were offered in the context of a society that was politically divided, wounded by conflict and injustice. Yet He lived out this message of hope by repeatedly and intentionally crossing boundaries and affirming people of all sorts. He did not seek to minimize differences but rather sought to establish connections and build relationships.

Jesus told the story of a Good Samaritan which provides a significant picture of how faith and practice should connect.

The story illustrates how the command to love our neighbor as ourselves should be worked out in everyday life.

The Gospel calls us to find ways to heal relationships in the present and create the circumstances that will make for a hopeful future.

When the legal expert asked, 'And who is my neighbour?', Jesus' answer shows that the man was asking the wrong question.

His answer shows that we are not to pick and choose who is worthy of our help – what counts is an inner attitude of spirit that acts compassionately toward 'the other' whoever that might be.

The hero in the story is not the respected priest or the teacher of the law, but the one who crossed religious and cultural divides to do what was right. This was what Jesus approved of.

This compassionate act of the Samaritan was set in a public space and involved political and community leaders.

The story challenges us all to act with respect and civility towards the other – people with whom we may fundamentally differ.

Above and beyond race, ethnicity, religion, politics or any of the other categories that separate, what binds us together is basic human compassion arising from the fact that we are all created in the image of God.

This story of the Good Samaritan speaks powerfully to a society that

is fractured and is still broken. If we are to heal our common life we need to resist being captive to our own agendas, and to see each other through God's eyes, building relationships of compassion and support as we love our neighbour.

This is challenging work to be engaged in. But it is the Jesus way for bringing healing, and for Jesus it eventually led to Him sacrificing His own life on the Cross.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ presents a radical call not only to embrace individually all that He offers us in His Gospel of redemption, but in His name to choose to love our neighbour as ourselves and 'stretch out the hand of forbearance and conciliation and join in making for the land which we love a new era of peace, contentment and goodwill'.

#### STAFF

ICC is blessed by having excellent staff in Megan, Rebecca and Damian and we offer our thanks to them. All give of their best and often way beyond the call of duty in serving the Church through ICC's ministry. It has been a pleasure to work with them.

In thanking Megan we also send our good wishes to her and Jordan on the birth of their son Isaac.

We were sorry to lose our General Secretary, Nicola. Nicola is someone motivated by her rich faith in Christ and His call to 'love our neighbour'. She has brought her talents of heart and head to help the Church find relevant ways of responding to various societal needs, and not least the ongoing work of peace building. While we will miss her insightful and skilled leadership, she leaves a significant legacy on which we can build for the future. We wish her well in her new role as General Secretary of CTBI.



## HONORARY TREASURER — *Report Year 2021*

WRITER  
*Jonathan Wilson*

The accounts for the year show a deficit of £9,907, reflecting primarily the Covid-19 grant provided to member churches against 2021 subscriptions. For most of the year, meetings continued to be held online, however it was possible to hold the Inter-Church Meeting in person, although it was reduced to a one day, rather than overnight event. The value of holding the IICM as an in person meeting was evident to all present. Further, our total reserves now stand at £551,104 and are sufficient to provide for the financial requirements of the organisation going forward.

In 2021, recognising the significant financial challenges facing our member churches, the trustees decided to provide some relief to member churches in the form of an exceptional Covid-19 grant that would temporarily reduce the level of member subscriptions.

This was a one-year exceptional measure, and given that subscription levels represent the minimum level required for the sustainable operation of the organisation under normal circumstances, and have not increased since 2017, they return to their previous level in 2022.

While the rising costs of utilities and the challenging climate for investments have put some pressure on the organisation's finances, the cautious approach adopted by trustees has meant that they remain sustainable. Trustees will maintain this cautious approach to planned expenditure throughout 2022. Again, there will likely be some savings arising from the limitations on in-person meetings and events. The constantly changing restrictions, which are different in each jurisdiction, entail the development of online backup plans for all in-person meetings. Therefore a varied approach is adopted, where some meetings are online-only (where travel and meeting in person is not necessary), and others are organised in-person, with backup plans to move them online if restrictions demand it. It is hoped that this approach will continue to allow for more efficient use of time and

resources, whilst also fostering the connection and trust that underpin the relationships essential to the effectiveness of the organisation. We find these relations are only truly developed through in-person encounter.

During this time we have continued to prioritise partnership working, exemplified in our ongoing academic research projects with the DCU Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, and in our partnership with Vox Magazine and Evangelical Alliance in our research on the experiences of and attitudes to people from ethnic minorities in the churches in Ireland. We are grateful for the continued support of our member churches and their commitment to the work that is done together through ICC and IICM. Supporting them through the challenges they face in continuing to live with the consequences of the pandemic will remain a key strategic priority for the coming year.

I would like to thank colleagues on the Joint Management Committee, ICC Executive and Irish Inter-Church Committee for their support and careful attention to matters of finance and governance. I would also like to thank our staff team and, in particular, to acknowledge the very careful and detailed work carried out by our Finance Assistant, Rebecca Schwindt, under very challenging circumstances. Finally I would like to record a heartfelt thank you to our previous General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady, who during her time came to terms with the financial and governance workings of the organisation and provided excellent support to me by carrying out her duties with diligence and expertise.

## OUTGOING GENERAL SECRETARY —*Report*

WRITER  
*Dr Nicola Brady*



It was with very mixed emotions that I moved on from my role as General Secretary of ICC at the end of 2021 to take up the post of General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The five and half years I spent with ICC passed incredibly quickly as we worked to support our member churches to respond together to a series of unprecedented challenges.

I would like to begin my final report by expressing my gratitude for the relationships that have supported me on a personal level in my work as General Secretary. Those relationships provide the essential foundation for all of the work done by ICC and IICM. A recurring theme in the evaluation forms from our meetings and events over the years has been the importance that participants place on the fellowship that lies at the heart of all that

we do. Throughout the pandemic we really saw the benefits of this investment in relationships as we were able to facilitate member churches in supporting each other through listening, sharing and collaboration. The level of trust that had been built up allowed us to continue sensitive and complex work via video conference, and bring that collective Christian witness to the major challenges facing society.

**SOLIDARITY IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19**  
The prolonged experience of the pandemic placed significant pressures on churches as they sought to support their members and respond to community needs. In the words of a report authored by Dr Gladys Ganiel of Queen's University Belfast, and produced in partnership with the IICM, the experience brought home to people that church was 'something other than a building'. This report, based on in-depth

interviews with clergy and faith leaders, followed on from research carried out in the form of a survey in 2020, also done in partnership with IICM.

The findings proved valuable in providing an early assessment of the impact of the pandemic, particularly for those in leadership roles in our churches. Responding to the report, the IICM Co-Chairs Bishop Brendan Leahy and Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson reflected:

"As the abrupt disruption of initial lockdown measures extended into a longer term reality, Ireland's Christian churches have journeyed alongside a suffering community, sharing in its grief and uncertainty about the future. ... The impact of COVID-19 has prompted us to ask searching questions about what it means to be a community of Christian believers in today's society."

**R**elationships provide the essential foundation for all of the work done by ICC and IICM. Fellowship ... lies at the heart of all that we do.



They noted in particular that “it is a matter of concern that this report once again illustrates the significant pressures on clergy. Collaborative leadership has been highlighted as a significant area for attention and investment within churches, brought to the fore primarily by the experience of moving worship and outreach into the digital space, but with further potential in other areas of church life.”

At the Annual General Meeting, which took place online on 25th March, members took time to reflect on the learning from the pandemic experience, with inputs from Dr Gladys Ganiel, and from Professor Philip McDonagh of the Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations in Dublin City University (DCU). Professor McDonagh invited participants to reflect on the role of the churches and the wider faith sector in helping to shape the debate on public policy and, critically, the values that underpin that policy, with particular reference to the protection of the most vulnerable. This was evident in the contribution of member churches, alongside representatives of the wider faith sector, in the

roundtable conversations convened by government representatives in both jurisdictions on the island throughout the pandemic.

#### ECONOMICS OF BELONGING

A priority concern of member churches was to ensure that social justice would be a guiding principle in the economic recovery from COVID-19, and that no one would be left behind. The opportunity to partner with the Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations at DCU on a project entitled the Economics of Belonging was therefore timely. This project brings together representatives of IICM, Dublin City Inter-faith Forum, the wider Community and Voluntary sector, and academics and researchers from different disciplines within DCU.

The project examined the global trend towards the use of wellbeing indicators to shape and inform government policy, and measure the impact of those policies. A particular focus of the work was to assess the extent to which there is currently, and might be in the future, a role for faith communities in drawing from their experience in pastoral and social care to help

shape and inform the debate and analysis on societal wellbeing.

During the course of the work to date IICM representatives engaged with those providing advice to government on wellbeing frameworks in both jurisdictions on the island, and learned about the wider global context from leading expert Dr Sabina Alkire of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development initiative.

Participants also identified two specific areas of social need that might have demonstration value in terms of the concrete application of this kind of approach: homelessness and child food poverty. These areas were chosen because they are priority concerns for faith-based social services and because they offer significant potential in terms of breaking the cycles that keep people trapped in poverty and deprivation. To date the project has learned about the application of the Housing First policy in Finland, with a presentation from one of its leading architects Juha Kaakinen, and collaborated with postgraduate research students in the Law Department of DCU to produce case studies on the legal and policy frameworks that govern responses to these issues in Ireland, shaped by questions arising from the experience of the faith sector. The final report and recommendations from this project are due to be published in 2022.

#### MULTILATERALISM AND METHODOLOGY

A second research project undertaken in collaboration with the Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations at DCU focussed on the wider international context and the challenges that currently face the whole of humanity. Entitled Multilateralism and Methodology, this project examines

the role and contribution of the faith sector in promoting collaborative responses to global challenges in the area of justice and peace.

The project has its origins in a book by Professor Philip McDonagh et al. entitled *On the Significance of Religion for Global Diplomacy* (Routledge 2021). IICM has been a practitioner partner in this project, drawing on the experience of the national ecumenical instruments in Ireland, notably in relation to peace and reconciliation work, to interrogate and apply the analysis and recommendations contained in the book.

A series of roundtable discussions, via video conference, brought together participants from around the world, representing faith communities, NGOs, academia and multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, to discuss how faith communities can contribute to reconciliation, healing, and a renewal of global commitments to peace and human rights at what might be considered a point of inflection in our history.

The roundtables provided space to reflect on the political, social, economic and cultural contexts in which the work of diplomacy takes place, and the intersection of religious faith with those realities. Participants analysed the challenges and opportunities for religious leaders at a time when trust in institutions is declining, but the need for healing of relationships and respectful, inclusive dialogue in the public square is evident. Findings to date highlight the need for religious leaders to be both courageous and self-critical: courageous in articulating what a religious perspective can contribute to the challenges of the present time, and self-critical in

acknowledging the shortcomings of religious communities in areas such as the treatment of minorities.

In addition, the project sought to examine the practical application of the recommendations by initiating opportunities for public engagement by religious leaders on these questions, in partnership with other sectors of society. In October, under the auspices of the project, a panel discussion was organised as part of the global conference of the European Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna. The theme for the panel was 'Promoting Human Rights: Religious Actors and Public Values'. The discussion centred on the need and potential to improve the mutual literacy between religious and secular human rights actors, through

of the faith sector to the promotion of human rights.

In December the first of two events to support faith communities on the island of Ireland to contribute to the Conference on the Future of Europe took place as part of the project. The IICM Co-Chairs are grateful to Bishop Noel Treanor from the Catholic diocese of Down and Connor for leading the preparatory work for IICM on this consultation. Religious leaders and representatives from across the island of Ireland gathered online to discuss key themes around the Conference on the Future of Europe including the regional and global role of the European Union; the EU response to migrants and asylum seekers; the creation of a social and physical en-



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the creation of spaces for dialogue, development of mutual understanding and collaboration on issues of shared concern. Issues raised in this panel were taken up in plenary sessions of the conference and helped to convey the commitment

environment characterised by equity, sustainability, and shared agency; the impact of social media on democratic discourse; the promotion of European values; and to consider the role of religious communities regionally and nationally when it comes to Europe's challenges and

**R**eligious leaders [need] to be both courageous and self-critical: courageous in articulating what a religious perspective can contribute to the challenges of the present time, and self-critical in acknowledging the shortcomings of religious communities.

priorities. Understandably, in light of our history, there was particular emphasis on the European Union as a peace project. An in-person conference in February 2022 will allow participants to prepare a submission to the Conference.

#### BREXIT

Throughout the year IICM was also engaging with EU representatives in another strand of its work, bringing the perspective of the faith sector to civic engagement on the issues arising from the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol. This work continues to build on the consultation undertaken with member churches in the wake of the 2016 referendum which identified amongst the priority concerns the protection of the peace process and community relations, the impact on the most vulnerable of any resulting increase in cost of living, and the potential for divergence in rights protections between the different jurisdictions on the island and how this might disproportionately impact vulnerable groups such as migrants from EU countries and people seeking asylum.

In an open letter to political and civic leaders in October 2020 IICM had underlined the significance of the Protocol and the need for civic engagement to support this process: “The Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol follows the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement as an

international agreement that will have a defining influence on the future of people in Northern Ireland. We are concerned that the level of engagement with civil society and public awareness raising has not adequately reflected the true significance of this framework.” This remained a concern throughout 2021 as IICM representatives participated in a variety of civic dialogue events bringing the concerns of member churches, particularly those serving communities at risk of violence.

The response of the Church Leaders’ Group to the outbreak of violence in April 2021 in the form of an open letter to political leaders was informed by consultation with those working on the ground in affected communities. The letter stated: “As Christian Church Leaders from across the island of Ireland we appeal to our political leaders to come together in a unified response to the heartbreaking scenes witnessed on our streets last week and renew their commitment to peace, reconciliation and the protection of the most vulnerable. The causes of this most recent outbreak of violence are complex and, in some respects, deep-rooted. Church representatives and other community leaders working on the ground in affected communities have spoken to us of their frustration at seeing another generation of young people risk their lives and their futures because repeated warnings about the need

to treat our fragile peace with care went unheeded.” The letter was followed by meeting with the PSNI Chief Constable and representatives of the British and Irish Governments.

#### THE UNFINISHED WORK OF PEACE

IICM continued to engage with the longer term work of peace-building and reconciliation through its legacy working group throughout 2021, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. In a presentation to a group of political leaders the ICC President described the work of the group as “listening with a purpose”. In February the different strands of this work were brought together in a consultation paper entitled *The Unfinished Work of Peace* as part of a process supported by *Rethinking Conflict*, an organisation founded by Rev Gary Mason. In the paper, the main pillars of this work of IICM are identified as follows: support for victims; collective commemorations and memorialisation; formal legacy processes and structures; tackling paramilitarism; shaping a new vision for a shared future. The strategy aims to acknowledge the important peace and reconciliation work that is already happening in different areas of church life, giving a sense of how these different types of initiatives can be connected. At the same time, it aims to identify opportunities for further development of this work, and to encourage increased participation.

## IDENTITY AND BELONGING

When the 2020 Irish Inter-Church Meeting was cancelled because of COVID-19 the chosen theme of 'Identity and Belonging: Past, Present, Future' was carried over to 2021 and proved to be even more relevant in the context of the centenary of the partition of Ireland and the establishment of Northern Ireland. IICM supported the work of the Church Leaders' group in this area throughout the year and ICC Executive members represented their denominations at the Service of Reflection and Hope which took place in October. The controversy that followed the decision by the President of Ireland to decline an invitation to the event brought particular scrutiny to the churches' engagement with these contentious centenaries. Ultimately, the tone and content of the Service of Reflection and Hope, and the varied programme of initiatives and engagements that took place throughout the year, led many commentators and observers to conclude that this had been a sincere effort by the churches to seek to deepen the work of reconciliation through self-critical reflection and engagement with other perspectives. Critically, there was strong support from those involved in grassroots peace-building work and the 2021 IICM affirmed the valuable contribution of this work in terms of inter-church relationships.

## CONCLUSION

As I move on I would like to express my deep appreciation for the support and the trust that has enabled me to do this work at ICC/IICM. The members of the ICC Executive and Inter-Church Committee have consistently provided feedback and encouragement, challenging us to maximise the impact of any

initiatives undertaken. The JMC has carried out detailed scrutiny of work plans, budgets and risk assessments, and been an unfailing support to me in my management role. Particular thanks are due to the Treasurer, Mr Jonathan Wilson, and to the three Presidents who have been my line manager during my time at ICC: Archbishop John McDowell, Rev Brian Anderson, and most recently Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson. Rev Patterson has been particularly generous with his time and with his support throughout the challenges of the pandemic. Lastly I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation for the wonderful staff team I have been privileged to lead. I thank Damian, Megan and Rebecca for their support and I look forward to continuing to work with you all in my new role.

## Captions (p8-p9)

- 01 The Church Leaders' Group 2021
- 02 Co-Chairs of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting recognise Dr Brady's work as General Secretary of ICC and IICM



## PROGRAMME OFFICER —*Report*

WRITER  
*Dr Damian Jackson*

During 2021, my work primarily focussed on racial inclusion, climate justice and fostering closer relations with our partners – academic, grassroots, and with our member churches themselves. Thematically, these all reflect a desire to recognise and honour our global connectedness as bearers of the image of God – it’s really about loving our neighbour.

EVERY PEOPLE, TRIBE AND NATION?  
EXPLORING RACE AND THE CHURCHES IN IRELAND

One of the objectives for my work has been to support our member churches in their engagement in the areas of migration and integration, both by keeping them informed of policy and legislative developments, and through supporting them in the integration of their increasingly diverse congregations.

In recent times, the ICC has become conscious of increasing instances of

racism, discrimination and xenophobic discourses in Ireland, and have been discussing how we in the churches should respond. There has been a clear sense that in order to be able to speak into the public square on this matter with integrity and credibility the starting point for this work had to be within the churches themselves.

I therefore convened an advisory group of people from member churches with relevant experience and expertise. Following discussion the advisory group agreed that we should initially undertake research in the form of an online survey. We did this in collaboration with VOX magazine, with the support of Evangelical Alliance Ireland and Northern Ireland, and Tearfund, in order to attain as broad as possible an engagement across the whole landscape of Christianity in Ireland.

The aim of the survey was to deepen our understanding of the experiences of people from ethnic minorities in church, and the attitudes of majority ethnic people to diversity in church. In addition to quantitative questions, the survey gathered qualitative data through open questions, giving plenty of

space for more considered description of feelings, particular incidents, and thoughts to give as full a picture as possible.

### Attitudes:

From some of the main findings we can see that committed church members overwhelmingly recognise that this is timely and important work, and long to see our churches reflect the unity in diversity of our created reality reflected in throughout our church communities:

- 90% of respondents think it is important for churches in Ireland / Northern Ireland to engage in conversations about race and racism.
- 82% strongly agree or agree that “Racism and discrimination are real problems in Ireland / Northern Ireland”
- 67% strongly agree or agree that “White privilege makes life so much easier for white people in Ireland”
- 93% strongly agree or agree that churches are enriched by ethnic diversity
- 81% of people from the ethnic majority strongly agree or agree that “the leadership of a church should reflect the ethnic diversity of its congregation”

### Experiences:

While it’s encouraging that most of the ethnic minority respondents haven’t experienced racism or discrimination in our churches, it’s still alarming that over 1/3 have occasionally or regularly experienced discrimination, micro-aggressions or “jokes” at their expense. We have much work to do.

We asked, "Have you experienced any of the following within the church?"

**RACISM:** Never 78% Occasionally 20.5% Regularly 1.5%

**DISCRIMINATION:** Never 64.5% Occasionally 31% Regularly 4.5%

**MICRO-AGGRESSIONS:** Never 52% Occasionally 41% Regularly 7%

**"JOKES":** Never 59% Occasionally 36.5% Regularly 4.5%

With micro aggressions in particular respondents rarely report them - in the words of one respondent:

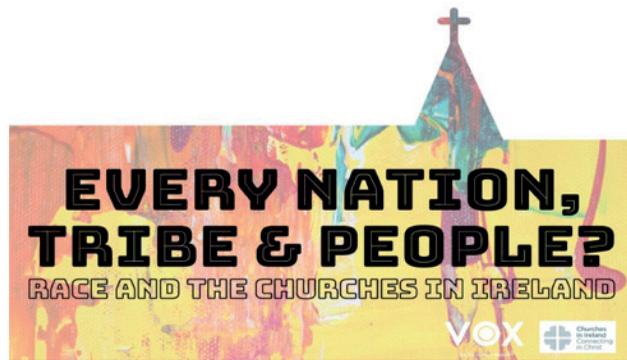
The incidents would be so slight but recurring that it would seem as though I was being dramatic.

A particularly concerning finding is that 20% of ethnic minority respondents had left or considered leaving a church because of the way they were treated, in particular with regard to their culture or ethnicity. For example:

In leadership meetings when I am the only voice from a different cultural background I have been told, "well you're here now and that is how we do things here.", which had the undertone of "if you don't like it go back to where you came from."

### Pushback

Amongst ethnic majority respondents there is a vociferous minority who push back against this work. One of the objections is that by asking these questions we are "stirring up division". This is particularly evident in responses to open questions about white privilege or Black Lives Matter, both of which elicit strong responses and seem to be touching areas that are very sensitive.



My sense is that this is because questions about white privilege and the work of the Black Lives Matter movement both critique a conception of racism as solely an individual's vice. They seek to examine how it is also functions systemically to maintain (current) power structures which favour the "white Irish/British/Northern Irish" population.

These responses should prompt us as Christians to consider some fundamental questions about our own identity and what it is grounded upon. Beginning with our relationship to church: what is the purpose of church, and who is it for? Do we cling tightly to control of "how things are done" in church, or do we look at it as a place where a diverse group of people, all image-bearers of God, gather to worship in ways that reflect their whole selves? Or are we functioning as a shelter for those who wish to protect a narrowly conceived church identity by perpetuating barriers to inclusion of those who are not "one of us"?

Unity is not uniformity, nor is recognition and discussion of diversity a stirring of division. The only way to unity is through a recognition and celebration of our diversity, as we see in Acts chapter 2:9-11.

To move towards this unity we need to hold more lightly to the way things have always been - our most fundamental identity is secure in Christ. This will not happen without intentional and persistent action in churches across Ireland.

### CHURCH OF SANCTUARY

One way churches can work towards inclusion is through the Church of Sanctuary Network. Following our November 2020 webinar promoting the churches of sanctuary network we formed an inter-church working group seeking to encourage churches to begin the path of becoming a church of sanctuary. This involves the relevant church committee making a statement of commitment and then over the subsequent year the congregation goes through a three part process denoted learn, embed and share. At the end of this year they can be formally certified as a church of sanctuary. In October we organised a gathering at which the Chair of Places of Sanctuary Ireland, Andy Pollak awarded Dublin Central Mission Methodist Church a certificate as a Church of Sanctuary. Thus far eight other churches have made the Statement of Commitment this year. More information is available at <https://ireland.cityofsanctuary.org/sanctuary-in-faith>, or get in touch with me

at [damian@irishchurches.org](mailto:damian@irishchurches.org) if your church would be interested in exploring this.

#### CLIMATE JUSTICE AND CARE OF CREATION

The theme of interconnectedness was also a theme in our work on climate justice this year. We held a series of workshops in partnership with Christian Aid examining how best we could work together to highlight how the impact of climate change falls most devastatingly on those who have done least to cause it, usually in the developing world. This led to the “Voices of the Climate Crisis” event which we held in May. The aim of this event was to better equip Irish churches to respond to climate change by connecting them with people directly impacted and introducing them to resources developed by Christian Aid that will support their engagement.

In advance of the COP26 climate negotiations in Glasgow in November the ICC and IICM wrote an open letter to the delegations from both jurisdictions on the island, asking them to support calls for:

- the creation of an international loss and damage fund in line with the ‘polluter pays’ principle
- an end to the use of public money to subsidise fossil fuel exploration, extraction and use
- a requirement for the implementation of national action plans to meet obligations with sectoral annual targets for emissions reduction

It also calls for both jurisdiction to collaborate better to:

- protect and foster biodiversity.

- ensure a just transition to a lower carbon economy
- promote increased investment in renewable energy sources
- transform transport policy with a prioritisation of infrastructure to support walking, cycling and public transport before electric cars
- progressively reduce dependence on fossil fuels, specifically rejecting the construction of an LNG terminal and the use of imported fracked gas
- ensure that policies across all areas of government reflect our commitment to climate justice.

I was also invited to write an article for the Church of Ireland’s Search Magazine on the outcomes of COP26 and how churches can respond practically.

Resources for churches to engage on climate justice can be found at [irishchurches.org/climate](http://irishchurches.org/climate).

#### BUILDING CLOSER RELATIONS

COVID-19 has meant that we’re physically disconnected from one another, and this has sometimes also led to an emotional and spiritual disconnection. The implications of this are amplified for those who are at the margins of our society. Within the churches we know that it has impacted our communities hard and particularly those from the smaller churches, many of whom are categorised as essential workers.

In order to sustain the connections that we do have between the national and local ecumenical work, I organised a series of regional inter-church meetings over zoom to provide an opportunity for

people involved in church leadership to share about their experiences and challenges as a result of the pandemic, as well as to share pastorally with one another. The feedback indicated that this was a much appreciated opportunity for mutual encouragement and listening. The meetings also discussed either the “Unfinished Work of Peace” consultation document or a chapter I wrote on the anti-racism work of the churches which is to be published in an upcoming book entitled *Race for Justice*, edited by Richard Reddie, CTBI Director of Justice and Inclusion.

I had the opportunity to speak at a webinar marking the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Irish School of Ecumenics on the challenges and opportunities facing ecumenism in Ireland today. I also had the opportunity twice to lecture their students in International Peace Studies on ICC/IICM work on reconciliation and peacebuilding.

I was invited to speak to the Church of Ireland’s Church and Society Commission on the recent developments in the asylum and migration systems in Ireland, in particular the white paper that has been published to provide for ending the direct provision system and the regularisation scheme for undocumented migrants that has recently been opened.

#### FINALLY

It has been a privilege to work with Nicola Brady over the past 5 years. I’ve learnt so much from her and have greatly appreciated her encouragement and support. I’m delighted that we will continue to have opportunities to work together due to our ongoing collaborations with CTBI.

## WOMEN'S LINK —Report

WRITER  
*Joyce Bond*

Dr. Nicola Brady's appointment as the General Secretary of CTBI brought much pleasure to members of Women's Link. Nicola has experience with ecumenical and faith-based relationships, and we wish her God's blessing in her new role in 2022.

We thank God for the technology that has enabled fellowship where possible amongst members of Women's Link organisations and local churches during Covid-19, however concerns in relation to the Omicron variant continue.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & ABUSE**  
Methodist Women Ireland is working with Women's Aid and fundraising for them through their main project "No excuse for abuse". Information and prayer cards were distributed to each Methodist Church. MWI General Officers did an online evening course organised by the Methodist Church on domestic abuse and some did a six-week course organised by Belfast Bible College on "Abuse and Theology".

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the instances of domestic abuse and violence have risen sharply. Mothers' Union President June Butler and Jacqui Armstrong spoke on the scale of gender-based violence at General Synod. They presented a video on how the Church of Ireland can pray, raise greater awareness, and take action in dioceses and parishes. Many MU branches within the dioceses help their local Women's Aid refuges with donations for local families at this critical time.



### PRISONS WEEK

Prisons Week, held annually in October, provides literature to help support Christians in praying for the needs of all those affected by prison: prisoners and their victims, their families and communities, and those working and volunteering in prisons and the criminal justice system. Mothers' Union is one of the sponsoring organisations and is represented on their UK Board of Reference. MU members support work in prisons using the daily prayer leaflet prepared by prisoners and others affected by prisons. Prison visitation has been impossible because of Covid19; Christmas cards and gifts were delivered to 200 prisoners in a prison housing women and young offenders.

### RETREATS

The Moravian Women's Association Irish and Overseas meetings during the year were cancelled. Kathleen Kitson MWA District Secretary participated in the online Central Committee held in England. The MWA Irish District Retreat has been planned for May 2022 at Drumalis, Larne.

The Methodist Women Ireland face-to-face Fellowship Weekend in Drumalis with restricted numbers provided wonderful fellowship with Revd. Heather Morris, Hazel Loney and Elizabeth McWatters as Leaders/Speakers.

**WORLD DAY OF PRAYER SERVICE 2022**  
THEME: "I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU."

The service for 2022 has been prepared by the Christian women of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This text from Jeremiah 29:11 has been used to reflect on some of the issues facing us today: poverty, domestic abuse, and disability, finding hope in difficult situations and providing encouragement in the help that we give to each other. The Preparation Day was held via Zoom and the Bible Study was led by Rev Louise Bowes.

The Y-Pray? Conference from 29 April to 1 May is for women interested in exploring prayer creatively and includes a full and varied programme with time for fellowship and relaxation. Anyone interested should contact the ICC office and ask for further information.

# CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND —Update

## Preface

The ICC is an associate member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. CTBI was set up to take forward the churches' ecumenical agenda on a strategic Four Nations basis. It works closely with Action for Churches Together in Scotland, Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales), Churches Together in England and the Irish Council of Churches.

## WRITER

*Dr Nicola Brady*

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) provides a forum for Christian churches to come together and build relationships, exchange perspectives and collaborate on issues that are of shared concern across the different nations on these islands. Through this collective engagement we seek to raise the profile of inter-church cooperation in the public square with particular focus on social justice and the common good.

In recent years, major strands of CTBI work have focused on identity-based social pressures and fractures as an area where inter-church bodies can give leadership by modelling a respectful dialogue that has unity in diversity at its heart. CTBI works with the national ecumeni-



cal instruments (NEIs) to support member churches in responding to these challenges in a range of ways, including advocacy on racial justice and social exclusion, the creation of spaces for respectful dialogue on issues relating to political and national identity, and sharing best practice from churches and faith-based organisations in living out the Christian call to be good neighbours by supporting their local communities.

A central focus of this work is a project on Church, Nationhood and Identity, which is being developed in partnership with the NEIs. ICC led a series of focus groups during 2020-21 to explore the priority concerns in relation to identity in the different national contexts. On 28th April 2021, participants from the four NEIs were brought together for a webinar where Professor Francis Campbell of the University of Notre Dame, Australia, responded to the findings and challenged the churches to reflect on how we support people on these islands as they seek to navigate intense societal changes — internal and external — that place significant pressure on relationships. Professor Campbell suggested that churches,

speaking from a place of solidarity rather than superiority, sharing the learning from their own journey of reconciliation, could provide society with the space, technique and language for engagement on these issues.

Professor Campbell's reflection effectively encapsulates the approach CTBI seeks to bring to its work in a range of related areas. We aim to build on a solid foundation of inter-church relationships, supported by cooperation in areas such as mission (through the Mission Theology Advisory Group) to bring a strong collective Christian voice to an increasingly pluralist public square.

An important element of this engagement is the work undertaken to equip our member churches to work with representatives of other faith communities on issues of shared concern. Recent work in this area has included a particular focus on women's leadership, across the wider faith sector, in the work of justice and peace, with the publication of #HerFaithMatters.

A similar emphasis on peace-building underpins the work of the Synergy Network, of which

CTBI is a founding member, which supports churches and faith-based groups across Britain and Ireland to encourage greater Church participation and action on serious youth violence. This work sees churches engage alongside political and other civic leaders to raise awareness of the factors that can lead to young lives being devastated by violence, and to offer best practice examples of effective intervention and prevention.

CTBI is known for supporting and resourcing the churches to mark key moments in the Church calendar. In the past year we have been encouraged by increased engagement with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and with Racial Justice Sunday, notably in the flourishing of creative activity in the digital space. A new initiative was the CTBI-led the work on Climate Sunday ahead of the COP26 conference in October-November, which engaged churches across these

islands and a wide range of partner organisations.

Throughout the pandemic we have seen an increase in both the frequency and variety of opportunities for British-Irish sharing and cooperation. The challenge for us now is to build on these to achieve a lasting deepening of relationships, demonstrated through meaningful action and solidarity. The work of the Churches Refugee Network throughout the year provides a helpful model, developing a work plan that ranges from advocacy to Government on issues of national policy, and engagement with partners around the world to raise awareness of global issues impacting the displacement of peoples and the treatment of refugees.

We are very grateful for the support and contribution of ICC, with particular thanks to ICC Programme Officer Damian Jackson for his contribution to the Churches' Refugee Network and to the Racial Justice

Sunday resources and forthcoming publication.

We invite you to keep up-to-date with the latest news, information and resources from CTBI by signing up for the monthly newsletter on the homepage <https://ctbi.org.uk>.

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## CHRISTIAN AID —Update

WRITER  
*Rosamond Bennett*  
Chief Executive Officer  
*Christian Aid Ireland*

Last year, the world watched with horror as a humanitarian catastrophe began to take hold in Afghanistan. Even before the Taliban seized power in August, the country was facing unbearable hunger and hardship as well as suffering its worst drought in nearly 30 years. Subsequent sanctions delayed aid and contributed to a collapse of the economy. With nearly nine million people only one step away from famine, some parents became so desperate that they even contemplated selling a child to buy food to feed the rest of the family.

But even in situations of unimaginable anguish, love brings hope. With the help of our sponsoring

churches and their members, Christian Aid has responded to the crisis in Afghanistan. Through local partners, we provided food packages to more than 2,000 vulnerable families in need of life-saving support after being displaced by conflict. We have also helped hundreds of pregnant women, new mothers and malnourished infants by giving them additional nutritional support.

Afghanistan is not the only country caught between conflict and political instability on the one hand and climate change on the other. In South Sudan too, people displaced by conflict are facing the ravages of climate change. Last year the worst flooding in almost 60 years inundated thousands of square kilometres of rich farmland, destroying homes, killing livestock, and devastating crops. But with your help we have given blankets, mosquito nets, water purification tablets and cash to flood-affected families as well as cash, seeds, farming tools and fishing kits to families struggling to get enough food to eat.

These aid distributions were only possible because of the generosity of the Irish churches and their faithful members whose support remained steadfast despite the privations brought by the coronavirus pandemic. Even when our supporters were unable to see loved ones or enjoy many of life's pleasures, they made sacrifices to bring hope to those for whom covid is not the only – or even the worst – crisis they face.

Here, the vaccine roll-out has been an enormous blessing and it's been wonderful to see normal life beginning to return. The jabs have allowed us to do more of the things we enjoy and see more of the people we love. But the protection afforded by vaccines is a privilege enjoyed mainly by the inhabitants of rich countries and it is deeply unjust that so many people across the developing world still cannot access vaccines. Our supporters have joined the chorus of voices demanding vaccine justice for people in low income countries.

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But for millions of people in the world's poorest countries, climate change is becoming an ever more powerful driver of poverty. And so it was right last November, as world leaders gathered at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, that Christian Aid supporters raised their voices to demand climate justice for our global neighbours. At rallies and prayer events in Belfast

and Glasgow, we joined calls for world leaders to take urgent and decisive action to reduce global carbon emissions to 'net zero' and bring the fossil fuel era to a close. And while the final agreement fell short of what is required, we are working hard to close the gap.

We have a struggle ahead to build a world in which everyone can thrive

but we are buoyed up by the success we have achieved already. We are incredibly grateful to churches, communities and congregations who are bringing hope to the poor and working for justice. Your prayers, your activism and your generosity are truly transforming lives.

Captions (p13-p19)

- 01 Exploring Race and the Churches in Ireland. Research undertaken with Vox Magazine and Evangelical Alliance
- 02 Women's Link partner, Connor Mother's Union supporting Women's Aid
- 03 CTBI Church, Nationhood and Identity focus group discussion
- 04 Andy Pollak of Places of Sanctuary Ireland awarding a certificate to Rev Laurence Graham of Dublin Central Mission Methodist Church as a Church of Sanctuary
- 05 North-West regional inter-church meeting facilitated by the Programme Officer
- 06 Ahmad with members of his family outside their home in Kabul. Ahmad received support at the end of January 2022 from Christian Aid's local partner A4T
- 07 A woman paddles her canoe through flooded fields in Unity State, South Sudan during a visit by Christian Aid's partners
- 08 In November, five Christian Aid Ireland activists joined street demonstrations outside the COP26 climate summit. Front: Helen Newell - St John's Orangefield in Belfast. Back (L-R), Presbyterian minister, Rev Cheryl Meban from Lisburn; Stephen Trew - St. Saviour's Church of Ireland in Dollingstown, County Armagh; Darren Vermaak - Dundrum Methodist Church in Dublin; and Dr Jeni McCaughey - St Patrick's Church of Ireland in Whitehead, County Antrim.

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Pastor Tunde Adebayo-Oke

**Religious Society of Friends**

James Nelson

**Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland**

Vacant

**Salvation Army (Ireland Division)**

Colonel Neil Webb

**St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church**

Fr Anish K John

**Syrian Orthodox Church in Ireland**

Fr Biju Parekkattil

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### **Salvation Army**

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Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube

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Rt Rev John McDowell (CoI Arch-  
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Annual Report 2021

Design, Layout and Editing by Damian Jackson and Megan Ross  
Printed by GPS Colour Graphics Ltd

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Submitted to the  
**99<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Council**  
March 2022