

**Churches
in Ireland**
Connecting
in Christ

**Irish Council
of Churches**



**2022
Annual Report**

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ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2022

	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
Rt Rev Andrew Forster

We have just emerged from a period in our recent history that had been christened ‘The Decade of Centenaries’. The term refers to a ten-year period which incorporated the 100th anniversaries of numerous milestones in our shared but contested history. The decade was bookended by the Home Rule Crisis and the Ulster

Covenant Campaign of 1912, and partition and the establishment of two parliaments in Ireland in 1921–22.

The centenaries were approached with caution – trepidation, indeed – and sensitivity around the use of language was deemed to be of critical importance. A misplaced word here, or an injudicious remark there, might have had an incendiary effect.

As we look back, now, on the decade, we can breathe a sigh of relief, I think, that we have ‘made it’. That is not to ignore the challenging backdrop of political paralysis at Stormont; division over Brexit; a severe cost-of-living crisis; and the sporadic violence that reared its head again in Omagh recently. But we have ‘made it’ through, thanks in no small measure to the use of temperate and mod-

erating language and the sensitivity with which historic milestones were observed. For some, these were cause for celebration; for others, for forbearance; and for others, still, occasions to be ignored.

On one hand, the nervousness and sensitivity which surrounded these anniversaries was proof that, in the grand scheme of things, a hundred years really isn’t that long a period. On the other hand, a century can bring such dramatic change, now, that the world would be virtually unrecognisable to our forebears.

This year, we have another centenary to mark, observe, commemorate – insert your own verb here – but I will use the world ‘celebrate’. We celebrate the 100th anniversary of the first meeting of the United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communities in Ireland, which would soon become known as the Irish Council of Churches.

The ICC’s status as one of the earliest national ecumenical bodies in the world is something worth applauding and celebrating, especially when we recall that the founding member churches first came together at a time when the island of Ireland was ravaged by a vicious and bloody civil war. They gathered with the deeply held conviction that churches witnessing together could offer a tangible symbol of hope and tolerance – one more in keeping, dare I say, with the commandments of the one whom we serve?

It was the same conviction that led Roman Catholic and Protestant church leaders to come together, 50 years later, for what became known as the Ballymascanlon Talks, a process that paved the way for the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. 1973 was one of the bloodiest years of ‘the Trou-

We know that the churches have something greater and transformative to offer our island. It is the message of a reconciling God offering reconciliation to a broken and divided world. In this significant year, let us seek to live out the theme of our wonderful anniversary service, ‘Celebrating our reconciling vision of hope.’

bles’ – a year when Northern Ireland seemed to teeter on the edge of the abyss – and yet, out of that horror, the churches sought to chart and proclaim a better way.

I can’t help but wonder what our island might be like, and what the church landscape might look like, if we had decided to remain in our own ecclesiastical bunkers, lobbing metaphorical theological grenades at each other, rather than climbing out of the trenches and marching into the spiritual no man’s land. The courage, or perhaps, more accurately, the faith of those leaders was rewarded abundantly, and the spiritual map of Ireland was changed dramatically and, I trust, irrevocably.

This year, then, should be a year of thankfulness, acknowledging with joy that the journey of Christian unity is always a path worth travelling, whilst seeking to discern the future that God has planned for us.

However, our thankfulness must always be tempered by the humble realisation that our failings have had consequences. This sentence from the

church leaders, in their 2021 St Patrick’s Day Statement, has the power to move each one of us to deeper repentance and firmer resolve:

As Christian churches we acknowledge and lament the times that we failed to bring to a fearful and divided society that message of the deeper connection that binds us, despite our different identities, as children of God, made in His image and likeness.

We know that the churches have something greater and transformative to offer our island. It is the message of a reconciling God offering reconciliation to a broken and divided world. In this significant year, let us seek to live out the theme of our wonderful anniversary service, ‘Celebrating our reconciling vision of hope.’

The last year has seen significant change in the leadership of the Irish Council of Churches. We bade a fond farewell to Dr Nicola Brady as she moved to the important role of General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). It was with genuine delight that we welcomed Dr Damian Jackson, our

Programme Officer, into his new post as General Secretary of ICC. We want to assure him of our prayers and support in his new role and thank him for the significant impact he has had already. We also want to thank Rebecca Schwindt and Megan Ross for their continued commitment and hard work for ICC. We hope to appoint a new staff member in due course.

Recently, an old friend, who was a little concerned about my workload, asked me a genuine question: “Why are you involved in the Irish Council of Churches?” I could give any number of answers – not least the fact that I really enjoy it! If that same question was asked of those involved with ICC over the last 100 years, I suspect the answer would be pretty similar; it’s that we want to be part of the answer to Jesus’ prayer:

“I pray also for all those who will believe in me through their message, that all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”
John, 17:20-21



HONORARY TREASURER — *Report Year 2022*

WRITER
Jonathan Wilson

The accounts for the year show a deficit of £5,807, which is slightly better than budget, even after increased energy and utility costs. During the year we also performed essential maintenance to the Inter-Church Centre.

Member subscriptions returned to pre-covid levels in 2022 and will be maintained at that level for 2023, a testament to the cautious management of the organisations' financial resources, despite increasing costs. It is likely we will have to increase subscriptions in the coming years to keep pace with expenditure. Trustees will maintain this cautious approach

to planned expenditure throughout 2023.

With the reduced risk from Covid-19, meetings returned to an in-person format with limited exceptions, leading to a corresponding increase in meeting costs. Most significantly, the Inter-Church Meeting was again held over two days, allowing for much-valued time for delegates to network and make new connections. A varied approach to meetings, whereby some are held in-person and some online-only, continues to prove useful and allows 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.

Our total reserves now stand at £545,297 and are sufficient to provide for the financial requirements of the organisation going forward.

The Executive Committee, informed by the Joint Management Com-

mittee, are discussing plans for the Inter-Church Centre on Elmwood Avenue. The building itself is no longer well-suited to the needs of the organisation, being much too large. It has proved challenging to find tenants from the non-profit sector and the building needs considerable capital investment to bring it in to line with regards to accessibility, energy efficiency and IT standards. Several options are being examined and the Executive Committee will bring proposals to the next AGM for the Council to consider.

During 2022 we continued to prioritise partnership working, both with our neighbouring ecumenical organisations, and in our ongoing academic research projects with the DCU Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations. 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 varied challenges they face in their work at local congregation, community and national levels remains a priority for the coming year.

Finally, 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 this year.

GENERAL SECRETARY

—Report

WRITER
Dr Damian Jackson



INTRODUCTION

I have been blessed in that when I started as interim general secretary in ICC, I was not starting from scratch. Not only had I the privilege of working for ICC/IICM for the previous five years, but my predecessor Nicola Brady was very gracious and considered in the way she handed everything over in an orderly fashion. I was able to get straight into the varied and wide ranging work in which the ICC is engaged.

CONNECTING IN CHRIST

It has been a great joy to visit member churches and congregations throughout the year across the island, from Waterford to Limerick, Dublin to Gracehill and Belfast. It was a particular privilege to be invited as an ecumenical observer to the national synthesis event of the Irish Synodal process of the Catholic Church in Athlone in June.

AGM

The 99th Annual Meeting of the Irish Council of Churches took place in East Belfast Mission Methodist Church on 31st March 2022.

The meeting was the context for the election of Bishop Andrew Forster

as ICC President for 2022–2024, replacing the Very Rev Ivan Patterson. Bishop Sarah Groves of the Moravian Church was elected Vice President for 2022–2024 and will serve as President from 2024–2026.

The theme of the meeting was “The Unfinished Work of Peace”, based on the strategy document adopted by ICC/IICM last year. This document examines the role of the national ecumenical bodies in peacebuilding and reconciliation work, the various methods by which they have pursued this calling in the past, and outlines a new vision for a shared future that will guide and inspire our work in peacebuilding and reconciliation in future years.

Rev Dr Tony Davidson, a former President of ICC gave the keynote address, reflecting on this document and challenging the churches in Ireland to collaborate in articulating such a vision, inspired by the Christ who takes the inevitability out of history,

set free from the seeming inertia of the status quo.

In a panel discussion on local inter-church reconciliation work, the meeting heard from Dr Gladys Ganiel, who spoke about her involvement in the 4 Corners Festival, Hedley Abernethy of Corrymeela; Rev Tracey McRoberts, Rector at St Matthew’s on the Shankill Road; and Ed Petersen of Clonard Monastery.

In his Presidential Address, Bishop Forster called for a deepening of our journey of engagement with one another and the society around us:

we are called to a journey of engagement and understanding and that has become a journey of love. God made us in all our diversity to bless his world and be lights in his world. This is the vision we have – that the church can be a light of hope that can shine on our communities. The journey of the church has been guided by a vision of something better: a

God made us in all our diversity to bless his world and be lights in his world. This is the vision we have – that the church can be a light of hope ...



reconciled community and reconciled family of God.

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

Living out this vision of a reconciled community underpins the work of ICC in all of our relationships and partnerships. ICC/IICM is a practitioner partner in two research projects with the Center for Religion, Human Values and International Relations in Dublin City University, through its Director, Professor Philip McDonagh.

Multilateralism and Methodology

The first project, *Multilateralism and Methodology*, has examined how the voices of faith communities can contribute to collaborative responses to address global challenges in the area of justice and peace. It concluded in February 2022 with an event in the Helix in DCU which drew together a wide variety of representatives from faith communities, international organisations, civil society, NGOs and government to develop a submission by the project to the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE).

The CoFoE was an initiative of the European Union launched on Europe Day, 9 May 2021, aiming to engage with EU citizens and civic society in order to share ideas and help to



shape the medium-term future of the European Union.

Following keynote addresses on major issues facing Europe from Francis Jacobs (“Founding values of post-war Europe”); Anne Barrington (“Housing and the future of Europe”); Jane Morrice (“the Good Friday Agreement approach to EU peacebuilding”) Bishop Noel Treanor (“Conference on the Future of Europe”); and on the second day, by Catherine Day (“EU and Irish migration policies”). Working groups then addressed eight different themes including wellbeing indicators and an overall vision of the economy, migration policies, housing policy, the Good Friday Agreement approach to EU peacebuilding, and the dialogue between faith communities and public authorities

The meeting concluded with a panel discussion among the representatives of different faith communities. This was chaired by Archbishop Michael Jackson and comprised Gillian Kingston, Vice-President, World Methodist Council; Karen Jardine, Presbyterian Church in Ireland; Ahmed Hasain, Islamic Cultural Centre; Dr. Hemant Kumar, Vedic Hindu Cultural Centre of Ireland; and Bishop Brendan Leahy, IICM co-Chair.

Recommendations were synthesised from the keynote inputs and the reports of working group facilitators and from these a submission to the CoFoE was made.

This was a highly significant output for the project and the Irish Churches, as it was the only CoFoE submission which brought the contributions and insights of faith communities to the consultation.

While this event effectively brought the project to a conclusion, work has continued as opportunities for further application and dissemination of the findings have arisen at national and European levels. Discussions are also taking place on the potential for engaging in a new strand of research using the same approach, applied to other areas concern including world food security and democracy and polarisation.

Economics of Belonging

The second partnership with DCU is called *Economics of Belonging*. It seeks to explore how a wider, values-based vision of the economy based on justice and the common good could better inform policy decisions. The first phase examined wellbeing frameworks and applied them to policy

areas of priority concern for churches including housing and homelessness, child food poverty, youth reoffending, and penal reform.

The second phase will entail area-specific studies examining how local communities could improve standards of living and wellbeing and the role that churches could play. As a framework for these studies, the project will draw on Community Wealth Building (CWB).

CWB is a new people-centred approach to the local economy, which redirects wealth and resources back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. It aims to equip communities to tackle the inequalities and disadvantages that are so acutely felt by people today, and to provide the means to practically deliver on the ambition of a wellbeing economy.

In collaboration with East Belfast Mission, Sarah Longlands, Chief Executive of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) addressed the Economics of Belonging project working group. CLES is the lead organisation for CWB in the UK. The project working group has identified the North East Inner City area of Dublin and East Belfast as case studies under this phase of the project.

Religion in Societies Emerging from COVID-19

ICC is also a partner in a research project being undertaken under the direction of Professor Gladys Ganiel of Queen's University, Belfast. This project is coordinated between universities in Ireland, Poland, Canada and Germany and focuses on Church and State relationships during and since the pandemic, looking at what it means now in terms of the practice of religion.

CHURCH LEADERS' GROUP

During 2022 the the Church Leaders' Group had several meetings with government representatives on the Protocol and released statements at Easter, expressing support for the people of Ukraine, and in summer, on the cost of living crisis.

They also held a service of reflection for the life of Queen Elizabeth II in St. Anne's Cathedral in September which was attended by King Charles II. The prayers were led by the President of ICC, and ICC Past President Archbishop John McDowell preached.

In November they were invited to Áras an Úachtaráin to meet President Higgins. Conversation focussed on the unfinished work of peace and the cost of living crisis, as well as the im-

that have the potential to threaten peaceful community relations and undermine reconciliation efforts across Northern Ireland and between the jurisdictions on the island.

Legacy

The Legacy Working Group met numerous times during the year, with the emphasis of its work on the needs of victims and survivors of the conflict. Discussion was focused by the developments in the Legacy Bill as it progresses through Westminster.

The group met with Lord Caine, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with responsibility for guiding the legislation through the House of Lords. Representatives



pact of Climate Change, in particular in the Horn of Africa.

THE UNFINISHED WORK OF PEACE

Much of our work can be conceived of as implementation of the Unfinished Work of Peace Strategy that formed the theme of our last AGM. In particular the work of the Legacy and Brexit Working Groups is concerned at the moment with developments

emphasised the importance of putting the needs of victims first and the absence of any concrete measures to enable reconciliation or even articulate what reconciliation means in the bill. The group also met with representatives of the Northern Ireland Office to discuss the legislation and raised similar concerns.

03

Churches have a role to speak prophetically, bringing the voices of those who are marginalised to the fore, as well as highlighting and supporting the unseen reconciling work that churches undertake in local communities.

The group agreed that reconciliation is the key value underpinning churches' work and the need to undertake a process of reflection on what we mean by the term, and how we communicate it consistently. While conscious that it is important to be informed on political developments, the Churches have a role to speak prophetically, to bring the voices of those who are marginalised to the fore, and to highlight and support the unseen reconciling work that churches undertake in local communities all the time.

Brexit

The Brexit Working Group has been focused on the negotiations around the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. Advised by the working group, the General Secretary has participated in the Northern Ireland Civic Working Group on the Protocol (NICWGP) facilitated by Professor Katy Hayward of Queen's University. Through the NICWGP, ICC has been able to participate in discussions with State and European bodies.

The focus of the churches' messaging has been to communicate concern at the implications of divisive discourse and unilateral action on local community relations; potential for erosion of human rights under the proposed legislation; the impact on those who are most vulnerable in NI as a result of the cost of living crisis which has been exacerbated by the lack of a functioning Executive; and misinformation as to the content and intent of the Protocol.

This concern for reconciliation and peace at grassroots level contrasted with much of the discussion which focused on the implications of the Protocol for trade, tax, funding, business and migration issues. Over the course of the year the NICWGP met with the NI Withdrawal team of the UK Mission to EU, European Commission negotiating team, European Parliament Trade Committee and the House of Lords sub-committee on the Protocol.

Migration, Asylum and Racial Justice

The Church of Sanctuary Working group continues to support churches on the pathway to becoming Places of Sanctuary. In 2022 four new churches adopted the Statement of Commitment, which is the first step on that path. Encouragingly, the Church of Ireland diocese of Cork, Cloyne & Ross voted unanimously on a motion encouraging all of the parishes in the diocese to become Churches of Sanctuary.

Community Sponsorship continues to be a tangible way in which churches and their local communities can directly impact the lives of people in need of international protection. I was invited to attend the *Share Network* Conference on Community Sponsorship in Cologne at which Rory O'Neill of the Irish Refugee Council spoke about the Irish Community Sponsorship Programme and Fr Paul O'Boyle of Clane parish in Co. Kildare spoke about the parish's

experience sponsoring a family from Syria.

Continuing the "Every Nation, Tribe and People" research work undertaken in 2021 on the experiences of and attitudes towards people from ethnic minorities in the Irish Churches, ICC began developing a handbook for congregations interested in working with intention towards being inclusive places, where people from all backgrounds can fully participate in the life of their church community. This will be published in 2023.

I contributed a chapter, "Ireland, Churches, and Racial Justice" to "Race for Justice", a new CTBI book exploring the responses of churches in Britain in Ireland to racism and inequality, edited by Richard Reddie. I was interviewed by Richard about the chapter at the CTBI AGM.

ICC is represented on the Churches Refugee Network (CRN) which is facilitated by Richard Reddie. CRN prepared a resource for churches to use on Racial Justice Sunday (13th February), called "Racial Justice: What's it got to do with me?" I was invited to contribute a reflection to it, as well as to the associated Radio 4 Sunday Service.

INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL CONNECTIONS

CTBI

Our connection with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland continues to be key to several areas of our work. The appointment of Dr



Nicola Brady as General Secretary has led to a further strengthening of the relationship. This can be seen in the CTBI report in our partnership with *Rethinking Conflict* in providing a residential workshop to support clergy and church representatives working in local peacebuilding and reconciliation. The regular meetings between representatives of the national ecumenical instruments facilitated by CTBI are of great value.

WCC

Gina Copty represented ICC at the 11th WCC General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany from August 31 to September 8. The theme of the Assembly was “Christ’s Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity.” Over 4,000 people attended the Assembly from across the World, representing 295 of the 352 member churches.

In addition to a series of blog posts on the ICC website detailing the actual experience of attending the Assembly, Ms Copty reported to the ICC Executive Committee that the atmosphere was one of mutual dialogue and meaningful encounters. The word “reconciliation” from the theme was particularly apt as the delegates grappled with divisive issues ranging from the war in Ukraine, climate justice, the rights of indigenous people and peace in the Middle East, to name a few.

Pertinent to ICC’s work are two statements released at the Assembly.

The statement on “Confronting Racism and Xenophobia, Overcoming Discrimination” highlights the contrast between the warm treatment of Ukrainian refugees and the cold treatment of refugees of African and Middle Eastern descent. The statement on “Unity,” addresses the fact that God’s beautiful creation has been impacted by the ecological crisis, war, the pandemic, poverty and gender-based violence.

CONCLUSION

The range and scope of the work of ICC/IICM belies the small nature of the organisation. This is only possible because of the commitment and engagement of member churches, and in particular, their representatives on the ICC Executive Committee. I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to them and express my thanks to them. The committee welcomed Rev Helen Freeburn, Ms Yvonne Langebach and Mr Mark Kernohan as new representatives in 2022. I would also like to express my appreciation for Rev Dr Paul Bailie who also was appointed to the Executive in July, but who sadly and suddenly died in November. In the brief time I knew him his warmth, humour and wisdom were so apparent, and I would like to express heartfelt condolences to his family.

I would specifically like to thank Bishop Andrew as ICC President for his wisdom and support throughout the year. Vice President Bishop Sarah,

and Immediate Past President Very Rev Ivan Patterson have also been most generous with their time and insights on many occasions.

Having served as ICC Treasurer for the past eight years, Jonathan Wilson is stepping down at this meeting. I’m sure I reflect the wishes of the Council when I express my gratitude to him for his significant contribution to the organisation, which has been considerably reorganised and streamlined in its finances and governance procedures under his guidance and advice.

Finally, I would like to state my appreciation to Rebecca Schwindt who, through many challenging times, carried the significant financial and administrative burden of the organisation with grace and efficiency; and to Megan Ross whose contribution on return from maternity leave was out of all proportion to the time she had in the office. Without them there would be no ICC!

Captions (p8-p11)

- 01 Rev Dr Tony Davidson
- 02 AGM panel on local inter-church reconciliation
- 03 ICC Executive Committee Retreat at the Benedictine Abbey, Rostrevor
- 04 Participants at the Multilateralism and Methodology Conference on the Future of Europe event in DCU

IICM —Report

Preface

The thirty-fourth meeting of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting took place on Thursday 10 November – Friday 11 November in Dromantine Conference Centre, Newry. The IICM is the formal meeting between the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Irish Council of Churches. It gathers senior church leaders and lay representatives from across 16 denominations in Ireland, bringing together the broad spectrum of Roman Catholic, Reformed, Migrant-led, Independent and Orthodox traditions. The theme chosen for the 2022 meeting was “Creatively reconfiguring our post-pandemic understanding of church”

WRITER

Dr Damian Jackson

The IICM asked what, having experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, are we to perceive about who we are?

The world is very materialistic, and does not regard as a real that which cannot be perceived by our physical senses, but we in the Christian churches know that there's so much more to being human. Did society catch a glimpse of this “something more” in our collective response to the pandemic, in the more altruistic moments when we supported one another? Are there ways as church that we can live that out more fruitfully in a context where perhaps it is receiving more open reception?

Following an opening welcome from Irish Inter-Church Meeting co-chair Bishop Brendan Leahy, Professor

John Fitzgerald from Trinity College Dublin traced the societal story from January 2020 to today. This included an analysis of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges arising as a result of climate change and the cost of living crisis.

Notwithstanding the understandably diminished power of the churches' voice in a more secularised society, Prof Fitzgerald nevertheless encouraged churches to continue to speak publicly, and with humility, saying what they believe is the right thing to do.

In subsequent discussions, representatives reflected that politicians have a challenging task in 'selling' the need for longer-term policy initiatives such as those pertaining to climate justice. It was suggested that there could be a role for churches to support this by using their voice to contribute in public discourse with a concern for the common good of all people including future generations.

Participants then reflected on a changing local church, led by Breige O'Hare, who provided opportunities to prayerfully consider the impact of these challenging times on those working in ministry at local level. She focused in particular on the importance of the space we create for people to deepen robust, honest relationships with Christ and with each other in these anxious times. Without this space we are not equipped to bring comfort and hope.

When people are anxious there is a tendency to blame - and the targets of that blame tend to be people in authority or people who are vulnerable. If churches can learn to hold a space for emotional connection and presence, perhaps this tendency to blame can be mitigated through an experience of Jesus with us, in the

knowledge that God cares about us personally and how life is impacting on us.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has affected us greatly on this island, its impact for our brothers and sisters in the global church has been significantly different, where it was often one amongst many crises. Bob Kikuyu of Christian Aid (Kenya) and Dr Conchita Reyes of Trócaire (Guatemala) shared about the situation in their countries. In many churches dependence on in-person tithing meant that they were not able to respond to the impact of loss of employment, increase in domestic violence, and drug use amongst teenagers that were the result of Covid-necessitated lockdowns.

Many church-run social services could no longer operate. Since the easing of restrictions the nature of church has changed, with less-centralised authority structures and an increase in people meeting in neighbourhood house churches.

A panel discussion heard about the grassroots realities in Irish churches, and specifically what the impacts have been on churches that have more recently joined ICC. Fr Anish John (Indian Orthodox) and Pastor Dare Adetuberu (Redeemed Christian Church of God) explained that because a disproportionate number of their members were deemed essential workers, they were often doubly-alienated, both as many of them contracted Covid, whilst often keenly feeling their separation from family members in other parts of the world.

Ruth Garvey-Williams, editor of *Vox Magazine*, spoke about the 'Finding Faith Tour' she undertook in May, travelling all around Ireland visiting churches, Christian ministries and individual Christians from across

the spectrum of denominations. She observed that the churches which are thriving are those which have embraced the changes in society and themselves, and especially the call to 'be the church', and not just 'go to church'. She called on the churches to respond in faith, and that it is in embracing weakness that God's glory is revealed.

Finally, a panel of young people from YouthLink shared their perspectives on the Covid-19 pandemic, and its effects on their day-to-day and social lives. They considered what churches can do to better meet the needs of younger people. Often churches focus on creating 'content' for young people - while resources and programmes are useful and necessary, the panelists emphasised that connection has to come before content. Without an inter-personal connection, where care, interest and compassion are shown, the impact of programmes and activities will be greatly diminished.

The meeting closed with a reflective session on 'What the Spirit Saying to the Churches', facilitated by IICM co-chair Bishop Andrew Forster, who concluded by noting that although we have all been through the same storm, we have certainly not all been in the same boat. Some were on an ocean liner, impervious to the waves; some on a small rowing boat, tossed and turned but still upright; and many have been desperately clinging to a piece of driftwood.

But Jesus says "take courage, do not be afraid" – God has not been taken by surprise, and out of the peace that passes understanding, there was a sense that the churches in Ireland can move from "come and see" to "go and be", to meet our brothers and sisters in their place of need.



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WOMEN'S LINK —Report

WRITER
Joyce Bond

Women's Link were privileged to be represented in Belfast Cathedral at the Service of worship celebrating the establishment of the Irish Council of Churches and 50 years since the historic Ballymascanlon talks.

SUPPORT FOR AGENCIES:

The pandemic made face-to-face meetings difficult for Women's Organisations, however we were grateful for the use of technology and meetings by Zoom. Organisations presented Services on R.T.E. Projects overseas were supported. Organisations, north and south, supported Food Banks, Women's Refuges with basic provisions, Refugees - through external agencies such as British Red Cross; Irish Red Cross; Local Councils as well as Christian and other Community Depots or Centres to provide Welcome packages, Baby basic packages. Women's Aid and Hospital Maternity & Neo-natal units were supported. Baby changing and feeding facilities were provided

at Agricultural Shows & Ploughing Champions. Mothers' Union piloted a five session Gender Justice Course - "Equipping the Church to Take Action and End Domestic Abuse"

NEW MWI PRESIDENT INSTALLED:

Olive Rowe was installed as All Ireland President of Methodist Women Ireland in Darling St. Methodist Church, Enniskillen, by Rev. David Nixon, Methodist President. The preacher was Bishop David McClay a friend of Olive's since childhood. 3 Area Vice Presidents were installed, and the project for 2022 was "I am Girl" with their aim of improving conditions for girls in Africa. Members and guests enjoyed a lovely time of Christian fellowship.

MOTHERS' UNION GATHERING IN BELFAST:

Mothers' Union is a global, women-led volunteer movement. United in diversity and living out their faith in the Anglican Church worldwide, individuals and vulnerable families are supported to enable their lives to be transformed. Members work with people of all faiths and none.

Members from UK and Ireland came to The MU Gathering held in Belfast in September. Bishop Andrew

Forster preached at the two services in Belfast Cathedral on Friday afternoon/evening. The business meeting was held at The Waterfront Hall the following day. June Butler MU All-Ireland Provincial President and Bev Julien CEO MU (MSH) warmly welcomed members and guests to the General Meeting. The day concluded with a Concert presented by the Clare Chorale.

WORLDWIDE PRESIDENT IN IRELAND:

The Mothers' Union Worldwide President, Sheran Harper, was in Ireland in the Autumn. The MU theme was "Transformation Now". She spoke at the Women's Getaway weekend, at Church services and information evenings about transformation of our lives, personally and spiritually and how to transform MU to be relevant to the 21st century. She reminded members of the powerful impact of Mothers' Union worldwide and inspired them to continue to support the work of Mothers' Union in the local community and worldwide.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER:

Judith Anderson Chairperson reported that the World Day of Prayer Preparation Day at the Agape Centre, Belfast, was well supported. The 2023 Service has been written by Christian women of Taiwan on the theme of "I have heard about your faith". The service includes stories of faith focusing on issues shared by women and girls around the world and challenges us to prayerful action. The various elements of the service inform and commit us to positive prayer for the people of Taiwan particularly at this time of international conflict which is impacting heavily on Taiwan.

FELLOWSHIP DAY:

Women's Link Fellowship Day will take place in May 2023

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

It has been a great joy that my role as General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), which I took up in January 2022, allows me to remain connected to the work of ICC and IICM, and to the staff, trustees and committee members. CTBI works with the national ecumenical instruments on these islands to discern how best to deepen ecumenical relationships and to promote significant initiatives and events.

We worked together this year to promote the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, to organise a BBC radio broadcast service for Racial Justice Sunday and an online workshop to promote a new resource for Sanctuary Sunday. We are particularly grateful to Damian Jackson for his contribution to our Race for Justice publication,



which he spoke about at our AGM in October.

It was a privilege to support the preparation and networking of British and Irish delegates to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The group really benefitted from the exchange of information and ideas, the fellowship and support, and the opportunity to reflect together on our return. We will continue to liaise together with the WCC to build on the Assembly experience to deepen the connection to our work. We will also facilitate similar collaboration ahead of the Conference of European Churches Assembly in Estonia in June 2023.

Two of our joint initiatives with ICC/IICM from the past year are particular highlights for me — 'Life Beyond Borders' and the workshop on peace and reconciliation in Dublin.

There is great interest in Britain in the learning from the Irish peace process. In recent years CTBI has worked with ICC/IICM to raise awareness among church leaders in Britain of the impact of Brexit on borders in Ireland, and facilitate sharing of perspectives from the different jurisdictions. These exchanges were taking place at a time when the combination of the pandemic and the changes to border procedures post-Brexit were creating



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a heightened awareness of borders within Britain.

The sharing of ideas and experiences continued this year with the participation of Professor Katy Hayward, from Queen’s University Belfast, and Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu of the Methodist Church in Ireland, in CTBI’s ‘Life Beyond Borders’ event which took place in Liverpool on 8th November 2022. This event was organised in partnership with the Churches Refugee Network, on which ICC/IICM are also represented.

The main objectives were to bring together people working on issues of migration and asylum from different backgrounds and perspectives, to listen to people who are currently experiencing the asylum process, and then to explore together how churches might best work to ensure that policy and practice in this area respect the rights and dignity of all, in keeping with our values.

Dr Yambasu shared from his experience of borders in Africa and Europe, from his personal experience in crossing borders in his ministry, and the issues raised by the 2021 centenary of the establishment of the British-Irish border on the island of Ireland. The importance of the churches being well-informed in order to better engage with public policy in this area was emphasised, with Professor Katy Hayward providing a comprehensive overview of the technical issues that need to be considered in debates around border controls and migration policy.

It was significant and very moving to hear from people experiencing the asylum process about how it can limit their opportunities to experience belonging and participate in society. Many useful connections were made and this work will continue over

the coming year. The pressures are increasing and churches need to be ready to respond. Creating space for dialogue and sharing of resources can strengthen and amplify that response.

That same month another important exchange took place in Dublin in partnership with ICC/IICM and Rethinking Conflict, a peace-building NGO established by Rev Gary Mason of the Methodist Church. Under the auspices of ICC/IICM’s strategy The Unfinished Work of Peace, Rethinking Conflict organised a residential programme for a group of church representatives working to promote peace and reconciliation.

CTBI was grateful for the opportunity to bring representatives from England, Scotland and Wales to join the conversation and share learning. Together the group considered the value of international exchanges, learning about similarities and differences with the work of racial justice and reconciliation in the US. We reflected on the leadership role of churches at a time of significant global crises and conflict, hosted by Professor Philip McDonagh in Dublin City University.

Finally, with former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, the group reflected on what the churches might have to offer in the context of current threats to peace connected to the Brexit process.

I have greatly valued our collaboration over the past year, and I look forward to extending and deepening that cooperation in the years ahead.

Captions (p13-p17)

- 01 Delegates at the 2022 IICM
- 02 Panel on youth perspectives on the Covid-19 Pandemic with Joe McKeown and young people from Youthlink
- 03 Professor John Fitzgerald delivering the IICM keynote
- 04 Women's Link Members with June Butler - Mothers' Union All-Ireland Provincial President, (front left) and Sheran Harper Worldwide President (front right)
- 05 Contributors to the Life Beyond Borders Conference: Zrinka Bralo, CEO of Migrants Organise; Professor Katy Hayward, Queen's University; Bishop John Perumbalath, Chair of the Churches' Refugee Network; Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu of the Methodist Church in Ireland. A refugee from Sarajevo, Zrinka Bralo is founder of the Women on the Move Awards, and winner of the 2011 Voices of Courage Award by the Women's Refugee Commission in New York
- 06 Participants in the workshop on peacebuilding and reconciliation organised with Reconciling Conflict, with former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern.
- 07 Christian Aid Ireland activists at a COP27 rally in Belfast in November 2022, joining the chorus of voices worldwide demanding that rich countries compensate poor countries for the devastation caused by extreme weather events. At the COP27 summit, countries pledged to create a Loss and Damage Fund. Donations from the Irish churches support Christian Aid's work to tackle the underlying cases of poverty.



CHRISTIAN AID —Update

WRITER
Rosamond Bennett
Chief Executive Officer
Christian Aid Ireland

Last spring, as Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine and millions of people fled the fighting, the Irish churches wasted no time in launching fundraising appeals to support the relief efforts of Christian Aid and our partners. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Moderator's Appeal, the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal and the Dean of Belfast's special Black Santa sit-out for Ukraine together yielded an astonishing £565,000/€645,000.

Nearly 8 million people have crossed Ukraine's borders to reach safety while 5.5 million others have been displaced within the country, many initially abandoning their homes with only a few days' worth of clothing and provisions. Across Ukraine, people have had to cope with the bombing of residential areas, the destruction

of civilian infrastructure and a winter without reliable heat or electricity.

Working with partners, Christian Aid has reached over 800,000 people within Ukraine as well as Ukrainian refugees in Hungary and Romania. We have distributed cash so that people have the money to pay for essentials and handed out grants to community groups ('accidental humanitarians') to give them the freedom to decide for themselves what needs to be prioritised in their local area. We also distributed food packages and provided support to shelters housing displaced people.

We have provided medical equipment to hospitals and health centres and funded 15 mobile health teams to provide medical care and psychological support to people living in shelters and remote areas across Ukraine. We have also supported efforts to evacuate people to safer areas, as well as ensuring specialist care for people dealing with the aftermath of human rights violations or requiring legal assistance.

While the war rumbles on in Ukraine, it has distracted media and political attention away from the escalating

crisis in the Horn of Africa where 23 million people are desperately short of food. Five failed rainy seasons have ushered in the region's worst drought in 40 years and created famine-like conditions in the hardest-hit areas. People are being forced to take desperate measures to survive in the face of extreme hunger as the drought causes failed harvests and livestock deaths. The severe conditions are being made worse by the climate crisis and the war in Ukraine which has caused food prices to rise and badly impacted grain exports to the region.

Working through local partners, Christian Aid is responding in Ethiopia and Kenya, helping over 300,000 people by repairing wells, handing out water purification kits, providing cash support, trucking water to drought-affected communities as well as providing fodder and veterinary medicine to keep valuable livestock alive. In northern Kenya, Christian Aid is being supported by Irish Aid to help reach even more families impacted by the drought.

Meanwhile, a Taliban edict preventing female aid workers from carrying out their life-saving work forced several agencies, including Christian Aid, to pause their programmes across Afghanistan. Imposed in late December, the ban adds to the misery of a severe economic crisis, widespread food shortages and Kabul's coldest winter in a decade. Christian Aid has been in Afghanistan for decades, working through local partners to provide food packages to vulnerable families displaced by conflict. We also provide additional nutritional support to hundreds of pregnant women, new mothers and malnourished infants. The ban is a double blow for the women and girls of Afghanistan because besides providing much of their aid to pregnant women, new mums and their children, female NGO workers bring

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in a much-needed income to support their families.

November brought some better news when the COP27 climate summit in Egypt agreed a last-minute deal to create a Loss and Damage Fund, something Christian Aid has long campaigned for. For millions of people in the world's poorest countries, climate change is becoming an ever more powerful driver of poverty. Once established, the new Loss and Damage Fund will give effect to the 'polluter pays principle' by compensating poor countries for the billions of dollars' worth of extreme weather events visited on them by the emissions of richer, industrialised countries.

Besides responding to humanitarian emergencies and campaigning to tackle the root causes of poverty, Christian Aid also carries out long-term development work to make a material difference to the lives of people struggling with poverty. One recent example of this is in Nigeria where we are helping farmers access affordable veterinary care. In the north-east of the country, sheep and goats are the lifeblood of many rural

communities and farmers sell the milk and meat to pay for essentials such as food, healthcare and school fees. But four in ten families in the region live below the poverty line and veterinary treatment is beyond the means of many families. With World Food Programme funds, we have trained veterinary assistants to provide basic, low-cost care for farm animals. By administering vaccines, treating parasites and advising farmers on infection control and nutrition, the new 'para-vets' are keeping valuable livestock alive and healthy.

All of our work - humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and tackling the root causes of poverty and inequality - is made possible by the generosity of the Irish churches and their faithful members whose support has remained steadfast despite all the challenges we have faced here at home. Even in situations of unimaginable anguish, your love brings hope.

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,

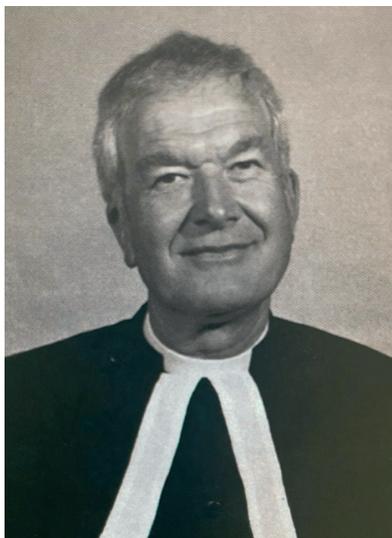
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communities and congregations who are bringing hope to the poor and working for justice. Your prayers, your activism and your generosity are truly transforming lives.

Captions (p18)

- 01 In north-east Nigeria, sheep and goats provide families with an income to pay for food, healthcare and school fees but veterinary care is beyond the means of many. Christian Aid-trained 'para-vets' including Idris Mohammed Ali provide basic, low-cost veterinary care such as administering vaccines, treating parasites and providing advice on infection control and nutrition, helping keep these valuable animals alive and healthy.
- 02 Christian Aid's partner is using dog-assisted therapy to support children at a centre for displaced people in western Ukraine. Here, Doxa the dog comforts a child during a therapy session.



IN MEMORIAM

**Norman Wilson Taggart, BA,
BD, PhD**

Norman Taggart attended, first, Woodvale and later Donegall Square Methodist Church, where the Embury-Heck window behind the pulpit, with its depiction of Christ's calling to go and teach all nations, captured his imagination leading to a consecrated commitment to the world Church and world mission. 'Wherever you sat', he said, 'it felt as if Jesus's eyes were on you as he gave the great commission'.

In this service he was a preacher, lecturer, historian, ecumenist and statesman. He was educated at Royal

Belfast Academical Institute and Queens University Belfast before attending Edgehill Theological College. His ministry was fully shared by his wife Margaret, whom he met when she was 16 and he 17 and they were married eight years later in 1960. They had four children, Grace, Patrick, Sam and Sarah.

Ordained a presbyter in the Church of South India in 1963 he and Margaret spent 24 years serving the world church, including five years at the World Church Office in London and 17 years in Ireland. He served in the Medak diocese of south India and later, Kollupitiya, Sri Lanka. Returning home to Ireland he served in Sligo, Greenisland, Belfast Central Mission, Cavehill and Coleraine.

He was Organising Secretary of ICC in 1968-1972, during the first years of the "Troubles", immediately before the first Ballymascanlon Talks which would lead to the establishment of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

In 2004 he published "Conflict, Controversy and Co-operation. The Irish Council of Churches and the Troubles", describing it as "a personal perspective on the role and influence of the Irish Council of Churches between 1968 and 1972". It traces the first formal contacts between ICC, its member churches, and the Roman Catholic Church. Ecumenism was still widely viewed as an irrelevance, a dangerous perversion of the gospel, or an issue too hot to handle.

In his review of the book, former Leader of the Corrymeela Commu-

nity Rev Dr John Morrow describes it as "a very significant part of the story of the Irish Council of Churches and how it developed and responded to the first four years of the "Troubles" when he was its Executive Secretary", pointing out that at the time:

The deep suspicions in the wider society sparked off by the "Troubles" made any efforts at a united witness inevitably political as well as ecclesiastical. ... A deep-seated tendency to equate 'dialogue' with 'betrayal' constantly dogged our steps.

Those of us who continue the work of "Connecting in Christ" today must agree with Morrow when he asserts that "Many others have built on the trust which was pioneered during this period by Norman and other key leaders."

At his service of installation as President of the Methodist Church in Ireland in 1997 he described himself as "... first a Christian. Second, I am a Methodist; third, I am an ecumenist".

A part-time lecturer at Edgehill and Union Colleges, he was, in addition, a contributor to the Methodist Missionary Project and a prolific author with several other major titles including a biography of William Arthur, and two volumes on the history of the Irish Methodist contribution to world mission.

He died on 10 December 2022 in the eighty-eighth year of his age and the sixty-third year of his ministry. His body was laid to rest in Middle Churchyard, Ballinderry.

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