



Churches
in Ireland
Connecting
in Christ

Irish Council
of Churches

2023
Annual Report

CONTENTS

Core Reports

	President
04.....	<i>Right Rev Andrew Forster</i>
	Finance Report
06.....	<i>Dr Damian Jackson</i>
	General Secretary
07.....	<i>Dr Damian Jackson</i>
	Good Relations Officer
12.....	<i>Rev Karen Campbell</i>
	Irish Inter-Church Meeting
13.....	<i>Megan Ross</i>
	Women's Link
15.....	<i>Joyce Bond</i>

Associated Organisations

	Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
16.....	<i>Dr Nicola Brady</i>
	Christian Aid
18.....	<i>Rosamond Bennett</i>



ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2023

	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

The Annual General Meeting of the Irish Council of Churches is, for me, a day of great joyfulness and fellowship that renews the sense of hope I have in the mission of God and His church in the island that we love and share. There is something particularly heartening in celebrating the wonderful diversity of the church in Ireland. I am always struck – indeed moved – by the beauty of our unity that is brought to life in the rich kaleidoscope of our diversity. Unity in diversity gives birth to hope. This hope is greater than a mere sense of optimism that things will turn out well. It is hope grounded in the realisation that together we are part of the answer to Jesus’s prayer in

John 17 that we ‘would be one’. Our ecumenism mustn’t just be conceptual or theoretical, but the lived reality of our calling to be one in Christ.

Hope and the vision that comes along with it are usually informed and influenced by the context in which we find ourselves. In my case, that is in the cross-border Church of Ireland diocese of Derry and Raphoe, and living in Northern Ireland’s second city, where Heather and I have made our home.

The city’s name has long been a source of contention, testifying to a divided and often bloody past. Even today, a quarter of a century after the Good Friday Agreement, the name we use for it – ‘Derry’ or ‘Londonderry’ – may reveal something about ourselves. Occasionally, some of us plump for a compromise option, ‘Derry/Londonderry’, in an effort to avoid causing offence. The late broadcaster, Gerry Anderson, got round the problem by referring to his hometown as ‘Stroke

City’. Both versions implicitly and simultaneously acknowledge a divided past and a shared present.

The iconic Derry Walls are the jewel in the city’s cultural crown. Famed in history and in song, they have been walked on and fought over for generations, revered and cursed in equal measure. The walls were originally built to protect and defend – to keep some people out and others in. Walking on the mile-long ramparts, you get a real sense of history closing in on you, as you pass by forbidding cannon, stopping perhaps at Artillery Bastion, Coward’s Bastion, Magazine Gate and Hangman’s Bastion.

Nowadays, though, despite the sometimes gruesome names and the fearsome trophies of war, the Walls are renowned as an international tourist attraction – a ‘must-see’ destination for the tens of thousands of visitors who flock to the Maiden City each year. Over the last three Easters, the ramparts have served as the backdrop for the Walled City Passion festival, which includes a dramatic re-enactment of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

So, the famous old Walls are no longer a symbol of power and division. Instead, they are shared and enjoyed by the whole community, and their changed context inspires me to find new hope in building a vision for the churches’ ministry and mission.

The power and influence that – for better or worse – the Church once enjoyed, is now consigned very firmly to the past. The walls of self-importance and self-righteousness which used to surround it have been well and truly demolished. Retreating and adopting a siege mentality might have seemed a logical response to our predicament. Instead, though, a humble – and even humbled – Church has emerged, still

I am always struck - indeed moved - by the beauty of our unity that is brought to life in the rich kaleidoscope of our diversity. Unity in diversity gives birth to hope.

eager to share the Good News and perhaps better equipped to do so in today's radically changed cultural landscape. The power available to us comes not from position or stature or reputation, but through enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Since early on in my episcopal ministry, I have been wearing a pectoral cross carved from a piece of ancient bog oak dug up in Glencolmcille. In some ways, it sums up my vision for the churches' ministry in these challenging times. The tree the cross came from may well have been growing when Columba founded his monastery in that remote part of South West Donegal. The truth we seek to live out and proclaim has been handed down from generation to generation, and is reflected in the antiquity of the cross I wear. Yet it is also something very new, as it was fashioned - 'transformed', you might say - only four years ago.

During the Council's centenary year, we have focussed on the theme of 'Celebrating our reconciling vision of hope'. We have been so blessed

by the remarkable journey that our ecumenical endeavour has brought us on, and that is so clearly evident in the transformation of our relationships. There is so much to look back and be thankful for; and yet the journey goes on, and there is still so much to do.

The Irish Council of Churches remains committed to its founding principles and also to continuing to answer the call to foster stronger unity and deeper cooperation between our member churches. We must be alive to the promptings of the Spirit as we seek to discern the way forward in our ministry to God's people.

In John's account of the resurrection, we are told of the disciples gathered together, with the doors locked. They were fearful of the next knock on the door; their future seemed both insecure and uncertain. Into the very heart of that fearful, stressed out group came the risen Jesus who said, 'Peace be with you.' Like the disciples, we live in a time of uncertainty and insecurity, but also, like them, we hear the words of Jesus, 'Peace be with you'

and, just like them, we answer the call to be bearers of that peace in a needy world.

As my presidential term draws to a close, I wish to thank you for all your prayers and support. It has been the privilege of a lifetime to have served you as President for the last two years. During that time, I got to know - and came to depend upon - our staff team. I wish to thank them for the trojan work they did to help me as president and to acknowledge all they do, day in and day out, to advance the work of ICC.

Finally, I feel very blessed to hand over the presidency to my dear friend Bishop Sarah Groves who will bring immense wisdom and experience to the role, as well as great pastoral warmth. I know that we are in very safe hands. I pray that God will bless Sarah's time at the helm and that she will lead us on to ever greater things together in God's name and to God's glory.

FINANCE REPORT — *Report Year 2023*

WRITER
Dr Damian Jackson

At the AGM last year, after eight years of service, Jonathan Wilson stepped down as honorary treasurer. Since then the Executive Committee has sought to identify a new treasurer without success. In the interim the General Secretary has been undertaking the responsibilities of the treasurer, reporting to the Joint Management Committee and with the support of the Financial Assistant and external professional advice from Viable Corporate Services.

The accounts for the year show a deficit of £19,153 which is more than the budgeted amount (£15,051.63). The primary reason for this larger than budgeted deficit is due to once-off costs associated with events marking the centenary of the Irish Council of Churches and the 50th anniversary of the Ballymascanlon Talks.

These events included a joint service of celebration and thanksgiving in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast in January. In September, "Being Churches Together in 21st Century Ireland": a Symposium was organised. At this

symposium, "Called to be One" - an updated history of ICC and IICM by Canon Dr Ian Ellis, was launched. The final anniversary event was the Irish Inter-Church Meeting which, fifty years after the Ballymascanlon Talks, further explored the theme for the year: "Our Reconciling Vision of Hope".

These events were significant, both in marking the occasions of the anniversaries, and in providing an opportunity for us, as churches in Ireland, to consider how to continue the vision of hope for reconciliation to which our forebears responded decades ago. The Trustees agreed that these events should be funded from reserves.

In response to the underlying deficit, the ICC Trustees have agreed to an increase in membership subscription levels of 5% for 2024, which will reduce our anticipated deficit to about £9,000, with a view to further measures in subsequent years in order to reduce it further. This increase in subscriptions comes after five years in which subscriptions were maintained at the same level, resulting in an effective decrease in funding, as a result of inflation. Nevertheless, due to the cautious management of the organisations' financial resources, despite increasing costs, underlying deficits have been kept at a manageable level up to this point.

Our total reserves now stand at £526,144 and are sufficient to provide for the financial requirements of the organisation going forward.

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.

During 2023 we continued to prioritise partnership working, both with our neighbouring ecumenical organisations, and in our ongoing relationships with Christian Aid, CTBI and 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.

Particular thanks are due to the members of the Joint Management Committee, ICC Executive and Irish Inter-Church Committee for their support and careful attention to matters of finance and governance during the year, as well as the staff team for their ongoing diligence and commitment in pursuing the mission of ICC and IICM.

GENERAL SECRETARY

—Report

WRITER
Dr Damian Jackson



INTRODUCTION

2023 was a hugely significant year in the life of the Irish Council of Churches as we celebrated our Centenary. It also marked the 50th Anniversary of the 1973 Ballymascanlon Talks which led to the establishment of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

The theme for the anniversary year was *Celebrating Our Reconciling Vision of Hope*, reflecting the ongoing reconciling work to which we are committed, empowered by the hope we have in the vision of a new creation, restored and united in worship of the Risen Lord, who is the fulcrum of our unity.

In January we held a joint service of worship and thanksgiving, bearing witness to our unity in diversity. Later in the year a symposium was organised, where invited speakers helped us to examine how we are currently relating to one another and the world around us, and challenged us to continue our reconciling mission. At the symposium we launched a new history of ICC and IICM by Canon Dr Ian Ellis. Thirdly, the Inter-Church Meeting in October reflected on our values and vision adopted 12 years ago. During the course of the year we also published articles in member church magazines covering the origins of ICC and IICM, the contribution they have made over the years, how we work together today, our future plans.

100TH ANNUAL MEETING

The 100th ICC AGM was held in St Mary's Cathedral, Limerick on 30th March. Bishop Michael Burrows was the keynote speaker and his title was "I Have a Dream: One person's ecumenical vision at this *kairos* moment". Bishop Burrows presented ten ecumenical dreams for the churches in Ireland (plus one bonus dream!). A very engaged discussion followed, picking up in particular on the "dreams" of better engagement with scripture, cherishing of inter-church families, and the challenge that we not become complacent.

Gillian Kingston responded to the keynote, picking up on many of its points, drawing on a re-articulation of the Lund principle, that we should ask ourselves whether "instead of doing ecumenical things, we do things ecumenically".

In his remarks, the ICC President paid tribute to Jonathan Wilson, the ICC Honorary Treasurer of the previous eight years as he stepped down from that role.

ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

Joint Service of Worship

The joint service of worship, celebrating the Centenary of ICC and

the 50th Anniversary of the Ballymascanlon Talks was held in St. Anne's Cathedral on 22 Jan 2023. Archbishop Eamon Martin and Rev Dr Harold Good were the preachers. Reflecting on this point in history, Archbishop Martin said that it was a credit to the pioneers of Ballymascanlon that the congregation in the Cathedral "could gather today as true friends in Christ, and much closer companions on the Way, as brothers and sisters who can share each other's joys and burdens and be open and honest about our successes and our vulnerabilities." Rev Dr Good spoke of the need for the Christian churches to bring *humility* and *hope* to realising a vision of reconciliation. Dr Good added, "Hope looks at the world as it is and responds with a determination to change it."

Together these messages communicated our desire as churches to contribute to the ongoing reconciliation of our island, in humility - recognising that we have not always played the role we should have - and in hope, offering to contribute to any process of truth recovery, and to create spaces for dialogue and exchange in the pursuit of peace.



The congregation also included The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Tina Black, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Chris Heaton-Harris MP, and the Tánaiste Micheál Martin TD. It received significant coverage in print and online media in both jurisdictions, picking up on the messages of the preachers and recognising the long history of ICC and IICM in bringing churches together on the island.

Symposium - Being Churches Together in 21st Century Ireland

Held in The Helix in Dublin City University in September, the theme of the symposium was “Being Churches together in 21st Century Ireland”.

Three speakers were invited to address how churches could come together in Ireland, to bring their values to bear in better living out our *Reconciling Vision of Hope* in an Ireland subject to many polarising and fracturing pressures. Prof. Philip McDonagh (DCU) spoke on *Witnessing for a Reason: Connecting Christian values and public concerns*. Dr Nicola Brady (CTBI) addressed *Witnessing Together: How churches build connection and work together effectively*. Rev Dr Livingstone Thompson (Moravian Church) spoke on *Witness-*



ing in Diversity: Churches working for an Ireland of belonging.

The symposium was also the occasion of the launch of *Called to be One: Honouring the Centenary of the Irish Council of Churches and the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting* at which the author and Bishop Brendan Leahy spoke.

Roundtable discussions followed, giving attendees the opportunity to discuss the role of churches in a more diverse Ireland, a more secular Ireland, an unequal Ireland, an unreconciled Ireland, or Churches, climate justice and care of creation. A final plenary was moderated by the ICC President.

IICM

The final event marking these anniversaries was the Irish Inter-Church Meeting on 19th-20th October. It again used the theme of these anniversary events: *Our Reconciling Vision of Hope*, to look at the journey of reconciliation between the Irish churches over the past 50 years, to consider the gifts and challenges we are experiencing today and to look forward to future years.

Canon Dr Ian Ellis spoke on the context surrounding the Ballymascanlon



Talks 50 years ago and the priorities, challenges and achievements of those early years. In the keynote address Fr Martin Browne of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity addressed recent developments and directions in international ecumenical relations and how they can inform our journey here in Ireland. Rev Dr Donald Watts highlighted some of the accomplishments and impacts of the IICM in recent years, and shared about the process of reflection and discernment which led to the articulation of our values of faith, holiness, respect, hope and witness, and vision – to be a benchmark of unity for churches and communities globally.

Rev Dr Heather Morris, ICC Vice-President Bishop Sarah Groves and myself comprised a panel on current challenges in our inter-church relations. The Meeting concluded with a facilitated participatory discussion on our vision and values, as well as our priorities for the coming years. During this discussion a strong theme was the need to balance theological reflection with practical collaborative action in our work programme, each informing the other under the theme of *Connecting in Christ*, and underpinned by our values and vision.

MEMBER CHURCHES

During the year, I and other ICC Trustees were received as ecumenical guests at several of our member church annual meetings. The ICC President was the keynote speaker at the Annual Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Ecumenism of the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

There were also several significant meetings and events for our member churches:

In January I, along with the representative of the Indian Orthodox Church on the ICC Executive Committee Fr Anish John, met over zoom with the new Bishop of the Indian Orthodox Church, Bishop Abraham Stephanos. He became Metropolitan of the UK, Europe, and Africa dioceses in November 2022.

Dr Joan Back and I attended the 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Cherubim and Seraphim church in Ireland and were able to bring greetings from ICC and IICM.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God organised a "Light Up Ireland" event attended by the RCCG Worldwide Overseer, Pastor E.A Adeboye at which Rev Fr Anish John brought greetings from ICC and IICC.

The Moravian Church held a service marking the 75th Anniversary of the arrival of the Windrush Empire in Leicester at which I was honoured to be asked to speak on behalf of the Irish Churches.

It was also a privilege, along with Nicola Brady, to attend a service of worship in September with the Armenian Church, bringing a message of solidarity from the Irish Churches to our brothers and sisters in Armenia, who have suffered so much violence and displacement.

CHURCH LEADERS GROUP (IRELAND)

On the 25th May the members of the Church Leaders Group, along with other church representatives, met with King Charles III when he visited St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral. The King had the opportunity to hear something of the work of the Church in Ireland in relation to peace building, environmental issues, and

reflections on this milestone anniversary.

A particularly significant event was a joint church service, led by the five Church Leaders, which took place at the Chiesa Evangelica Valdese – the Waldensian Evangelical Church. Based on resources that the Church Leaders developed for congregations and parishes as they reflected on the



04

work with the impoverished and with those from other places in the world now living in the local community in Northern Ireland. This was followed by a short service with words of encouragement and prayer for the King in the cathedral.

The Church Leaders Group were invited to Rome to take part in a special seminar to mark the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement's 25th anniversary. Organised jointly by the British and Irish ambassadors to the Holy See, the UK and Ireland's official representatives to the Vatican City State, the seminar explored the role that churches and faith-based leaders play in peace-making and reconciliation more broadly. Each leader had an opportunity to share their personal

25th anniversary of the Agreement in April, the service was attended by those taking part in the seminar, the two ambassadors and members of the wider diplomatic corps, along with the wider Christian community in the city.

INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL CONNECTIONS

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Our collaborations with CTBI continued in 2023 and are detailed in the CTBI report. Of particular value are the regular meetings with our counterparts in the other national ecumenical instruments. Our participation in the Churches Refugee Network and the opportunity to contribute to the resources developed for Racial Justice Sunday also inform and

expand our engagement on these issues. We were also able to run another workshop organised with *Rethinking Conflict* which this year heard from the Sri Lankan National Council of Churches as they shared about their ongoing work for peace.

Conference of European Churches

CEC hosted the Meeting of the General Secretaries of the European National Councils of Churches in person for the first time since 2019 in its offices in Brussels from 27 Feb to 1 Mar. The agenda included CEC's Call & Witness Strategy, and its "Pathways to Peace" document, which provides a framework for CEC's peacebuilding work, to which I was invited to give a response from the perspective of the churches in Ireland.

PROJECT WORK
We have continued to work on many other issues that reflect our concerns for peace and justice in Ireland today.

The Legacy Working Group met on several occasions during 2023 to discuss the progress of the legislation on legacy through Westminster and what the response of the churches should be at the appropriate time. The group has also met with representatives from several projects seeking, in different ways, to address the legacy of the conflict by highlighting the voices of victims and enabling stories to be told that reflect the full spectrum of experiences of the conflict.

ICC continues to be represented on the Northern Ireland Civic Work-

ing Group on the Protocol, which is facilitated by Dr Katy Hayward of Queen's University. This group met with various UK government and EU representatives and in June submitted proposals on the framework for ongoing dialogue with civil society promised in the terms of the Windsor Framework.

Gillian Kingston, as a former ICC President, represented us in October in an event organised by the Shared Island Unit of the Department of the Taoiseach. Part of the Shared Island Dialogue series, the event considered the theme of 'Accommodating National Identities' and was chaired by Miriam O'Callaghan. Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Micheál Martin TD participated for the

On World Refugee Day, 20th June, the Irish Inter-Church Committee released a statement speaking out against intimidation of people seeking international protection, stating that:

The targeting of people seeking protection in Ireland is unacceptable and wrong. As Christians we are called to love our neighbour. The scriptures again and again specifically command us to care for the stranger in our land. Underlying this targeting are fears arising from issues such as the housing and cost of living crises. These are valid matters for protest, and affect some areas and groups more than others, but the scapegoating of people seeking international protection is both unfair and distracts attention from the real causes.

The Executive Committee heard from trustees Georgina Copty and George Sayegh, who both shared about the circumstances being experienced in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel. Committee members considered how we in the churches in Ireland can support those who are suffering, through prayer, advocacy, education and supporting our partner development organisa-

tions. We have created a page on our website with ideas for support, prayer points and information sources. It also links to actions and reports from our member churches and partner organisations. Through regular meetings organised but CTBI and Christian Aid, we have been able to link with our counterparts in Israel/Palestine who are suffering and working for peace, and shared about the particular

05



Government. Gillian participated as a panel speaker on *Reflections on National Identity on the Island of Ireland*.

On 21st April, Rev Bob Kikuyu, Head of Global Theology with Christian Aid spoke on "Loss and Damage: Hope and Recovery" at an event we jointly organised, which was hosted at the Irish School of Ecumenics in Trinity College.

role that Christians in the area have in bringing healing and reconciliation.

RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Our relationships with the Centre for Human Values, Religion and International Relations in DCU continues to be pivotal for ICC and IICM. Last year's annual report gave an account of the 2022 event in DCU under our Multilateralism and Methodology project, which led to a submission to the Conference on the Future of Europe. One of the action points in that submission was to examine how we could contribute to the development of the Article 17 dialogue between the European Union and faith communities. Following consultation with the Centre, CEC and COMECE, the IICM Co-Chairs therefore wrote to Othmar Karas, the European Parliament Vice President with responsibility for the dialogue. This letter was positively received and has led to proposals that are being considered with the aim of strengthening and embedding the dialogue in member states.

ICC and IICM are also partners, and have representation on the advisory board of another research project called RECOV-19 led by Prof Gladys Ganiel. This is a three-year, multi-disciplinary research project analysing the role of religion in societies emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult for us to imagine the context and reality of the relationships between the churches in 1923, or even in 1973, but as we reflected during 2023 we gave thanks for those who made courageous decisions 100, and 50 years ago, and asked for God's guidance as we continue to seek to live out the hope that is within us, looking towards the promise of the new creation where our unity will be made complete.

Although through faith we are already one in Him, our reconciling work is nevertheless ongoing. In practice this must entail the renewing and transforming of our minds across the churches - at both national and local levels. In a video they made for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year Archbishops of Armagh spoke about this, with Archbishop John McDowell calling for churches

financial support which made this appointment possible. Karen is already transforming our work and making connections within our churches and outside to develop our capacity to make a meaningful contribution to reconciliation and peacebuilding on our island.

As ever the trustees have been invaluable in their support and wisdom in



06

to think of themselves as the Christian people of Ireland - from different traditions, but united in our basic identity in Christ. Inasmuch as we can live out of that identity as the Christian people in a particular place - local or national, we will be better able to bear witness through our love for one another and our neighbour.

In closing I would like to pay tribute to the staff team - Megan and Rebecca, who continue to serve wholeheartedly and faithfully. I'm thrilled that in 2024 we have been joined by our new Good Relations Officer, Rev Karen Campbell, who introduces herself elsewhere in these reports. We are thankful to our member churches, the Catholic Bishops' Conference, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and Benefact Trust for their

guiding our plans and are at the core of everything we do. In 2023 we welcomed Rev Barry McCroskery (Presbyterian), Dr Bridget Nichols (Church of Ireland) and Rev Calin Florea (Romanian Orthodox) as new trustees.

Finally I'd like to express particular thanks to Bishop Andrew Forster for his wise and dextrous leadership over the past two years, which entailed significant change, and important moments for ICC as an organisation, all of which he navigated with sensitivity and humour. I look forward to the next two years with Bishop Sarah Groves as she takes over the presidency today.



GOOD RELATIONS OFFICER —Report

WRITER
Rev Karen Campbell

As part of the ICC strategic plan for peace, the following purpose statement was agreed:

Churches working together in the community to build a society where difference is respected and valued.

This statement captures the potential and challenge of working towards a shared vision of a flourishing society whilst still acknowledging our differences.

During these initial months, I have been ‘listening with purpose’ to churches, community leaders, colleagues and former ICC staff regarding the challenges of peacemaking. This current month I will focus on formulating an appropriate response on behalf of the legacy committee to the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery. The recent court ruling determined that the Legacy Act breached articles 2 and 3 on the European Convention of Human Rights. This, in combination with the findings of the Kenova report offer the churches an opportunity to be a prophetic voice in reiterating the importance of a shared understanding of reconciliation that keeps victims’ voices at the centre.

The past couple of months have also involved conversations concerning how churches are collecting oral history from the troubles. This helps answer the question: How might

ICC/IICM facilitate ways for victims/survivors to speak back into their denominations. Through dialogue with different denominations over the coming months, it will be possible to identify strategies individually and collectively to support churches in becoming more trauma-informed and sensitive towards victims’ needs.

As we move towards the Summer months and parades season, it will be an opportunity to learn how churches in interface areas sustain safe spaces and promote a culture of peace.

Finally, it has been a privilege to work extensively on: “From Every Nation? A Handbook for a Congregation’s Journey from Welcome to Belonging”. I eagerly look forward to observing how this resource might be used in congregations to strengthen good, rich relationships across cultures.

IICM —Report

Preface

The thirty-fifth meeting of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting took place from Thursday 19 October – Friday 20 October 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 “Our Reconciling Vision of Hope: Fifty years since the Ballymascanlon Talks”

WRITER
Megan Ross

2023 was particularly significant for Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) as it was the 50th Anniversary of the first Ballymascanlon Talks, which led to its establishment. The Talks brought together Protestant and Catholic Churches across the island in the midst of the Troubles.

The IICC therefore proposed that this IICM should return to the Talks’ original intention and use the theme of the January Anniversary service to ask, as *Churches in Ireland: Connecting in Christ*, what is *Our Reconciling Vision of Hope* for ourselves and our own relationships today?

The meeting began with IICM Co-Chair, Bishop Andrew Forster welcoming Canon Dr Ian Ellis to lead the first session covering the history of the Ballymascanlon Talks. Having launched *Called to be One* a



few months earlier Canon Dr Ellis explored the context around the Ballymascanlon Talks. He posed three questions to the delegates: ‘Is our unity truly such as will draw the world to faith?’, ‘Are we really doing as much as we can together?’, and finally ‘Do our actions match our words?’

In response to the first question, delegates reflected on how unity and diversity co-exist and how in today’s context the unity of the church will be judged by our willingness and readiness to work together in the service of a world in great need. regarding the second question, in short, the answer was no. With reference to the World Conference on Faith and Order, held in 1952, the notion of doing things ecumenically rather than just doing ecumenical things was considered. In relation to the final question, the importance of the church being open and accountable was highlighted.

Fr. Martin Browne (Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity) delivered the keynote address on Current Dynamics in International Inter-Church Relations. He highlighted recent developments and directions in international ecumenical relations and how they can inform our journey here in Ireland. Setting out the challenge that the

future of the IICM ‘could include a greater and more intentional focus not just on reconciliation but on unity’, he reflected on the ‘pioneers who took risks and endured criticism for doing what we can do so unselfconsciously today’ noting that the next step is one of greater closeness as brothers and sisters in Christ. Fr Browne considered the idea of full visible unity and how this encapsulates our reconciling vision of hope. The keynote address was closed by highlighting that promoting greater unity is a task for every one of us.

Later in the day, delegates were given the opportunity for reflection on our vision for inter-church relations in Ireland, as we meet, dialogue and work together. Roundtable discussion followed the ICC/IICM “Churches in Ireland: Connecting in Christ” vision and position statements developed a decade ago.

In the evening representatives joined together in a service of thanksgiving and reflection. The service was jointly led by representatives from across the membership of the Irish Council of Churches and the Catholic Bishops Conference. During the service participants were given the opportunity to take part in an act of confession for

our individual and collective failings. Together they shared in an act of commitment, through the lighting of candles, to symbolise their vision and commitment for the future.

Day two of the conference began with Rev Dr Donald Watts (Presbyterian Church in Ireland) sharing the positive accomplishments of IICM and its initiatives over the years, noting that “we are involved in a dynamic movement rather than a static structure”. Rev Dr Watts summarised the accomplishments of the IICM in noting that, as an organisation we can identify issues of common concern to the churches. Where once the churches may have acted individually, now it is normal for them to at least discuss things together, and usually work together to find collaborative approaches.

This was followed by a panel session which considered current challenges to our vision of a more connected Church in Ireland, as well as areas offering opportunity for closer relationships and collaboration. The panel comprised ICC Vice-President Bishop Sarah Groves, Rev Dr Heather Morris (Secretary of Conference for the Methodist Church in Ireland) and Dr Damian Jackson (IICM joint secretary). In this session the role of hospitality was discussed as we aim to move from knowing each other a little to forming trusting relationships, open to change and challenge.

The final session was a facilitated discussion where participants were asked to think about the next 20 years of the IICM and how it can witness to the deeper connection that binds Christians together.

Addresses from each session can be found in the resources section of our website www.irishchurches.org/resources.

08



09



09

10





WOMEN'S LINK —Report

WRITER
Joyce Bond

Mothers' Union Triennial Conference "Re-Imagining MU" took place at An Grianan, Termonfeckin, in March. Rev. Canon Dr. Maurice Elliott spoke on "Equipping our Leaders", he challenged members to use innovative methods to report back to branches.

Mothers' Union held the inaugural talk to celebrate Annabella Hayes Day, founder of Mothers' Union in Ireland on 7 February. June Butler, All Ireland MU President, gave a brief history of Annabella Hayes' life. Mairead McGuinness MEP, spoke glowingly about the action and outreach work of Mothers' Union.

The Right Rev. John McDowell, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland commissioned The Ven. Dr. Stephen McBride, Archdeacon of Connor, Vicar of Antrim, as All Ireland Chaplain to Mothers' Union in St. Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, in June.

Over 150 attended The MU Getaway held in Cavan. Melanie Douglas, re-

tired lay pastor from Bangor, spoke on "Abundant Life", there was time for personal reflection, prayer and praise.

During the 16 Days of Activism the Mothers' Union RISE UP call to change the story of domestic abuse echoed around the 11 Dioceses. Throughout the year MU along with organisations worldwide advocated for men, women (1 in 3) and children could expect to be affected by gender-based violence. RISE UP is an acronym -encouraging members and parishes to Respond, Inform, Support, and Empower as they Unite in Prayer. MU branches North and South held Prayer Breakfasts liaising with local domestic abuse services with speakers from Women's Aid, Teermann and the PSNI

Conferences "Equipping the Church to take Action and End Domestic Abuse" were held in Portadown and Dublin in the Autumn to remind MU members of their Christian calling to do something – to speak up, speak out and respond in action as Christians working for the betterment of society.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER – FRIDAY 1
MARCH 2024.

Judith Anderson, Chairperson N.I. Executive Committee and Abby Anderson attended the LINK Day

in St. Andrew's, London in July. The theme for 2024 was prepared by the Christian Women of Palestine Ephesians 4 v 1 "I Beg You.. Bear With One Another in Love". A preparation day was held in the Agape Centre and another on zoom.

When the Order of Service for 2024 was prepared over four years ago by Christian Palestinian women, they were not to know then how much they and we would depend on the power of prayer for the sad and volatile situation in Gaza and Israel.

Y-PRAY? CONFERENCE will take place by zoom on 4 May 2024. Full details may be found on the WWDP website: wwdp.org.uk

METHODIST WOMEN IRELAND Methodist women have been meeting face to face in their branches with speakers. MWI President Mrs. Olive Rowe's project for her second and final term of office is Mental Health. The All-Ireland Fellowship weekend was held in Drumalis in September and the Southern Branch Annual Weekend in Killarney. The World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women study Day was held in Leeson Park, Dublin.

MORAVIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION Mrs. Kathy Kitson attended the Central Committee Meeting in April via zoom in England. Monthly meetings in Belfast have been held during lunchtime/afternoon in Belfast, whereas numbers attending Gracehill have been small since covid.

On a personal note - I attended the 100th ICC AGM in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick. I was also privileged to be the recipient of Royal Maundy from King Charles 111 at his first Maundy Thursday Service during Holy Week in York Minster having been nominated by the Bishop of Connor.

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

In 2023 CTBI began the implementation of a new five-year strategic plan. The response from our member churches, and from our partners in the national inter-church structures on these islands, has been very encouraging. Some highlights from the work undertaken in each of the priority areas are provided below.

PRIORITY 1: STRENGTHENING ECUMENICAL ENGAGEMENT IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Our work in this area seeks to encourage and support inter-church relations across Britain and Ireland by providing resources, creating opportunities for networking and relationship-building and facilitating collaboration. A valuable addition to our work in 2023 has been the creation of a quarterly virtual roundtable for national General Secretaries, together with the national ecumenical officer (or similar role) for member churches across Britain and Ireland. The agenda for these meetings is set by the national

ecumenical officers and during 2023 the group chose to focus on (i) sharing the learning from the journey of the different national inter-church structures; (ii) the call to be bridge-builders in a fragmenting world; and (iii) looking ahead to the 2024 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity theme. Feedback on these meetings has been very positive and they will continue throughout 2024.

Conscious of the significance of our shared experiences and working relationships in the British-Irish context, CTBI facilitates networking and preparation ahead of interna-

maximise the representation of the Irish churches in this work, including in the preparation of materials for Racial Justice Sunday, connecting with the existing work of ICC/IICM and Irish member churches in this context. We have been reflecting on the relationship between the work of mission and evangelisation and the churches' engagement with social justice and community-building, and the contribution of inter-church engagement to the strengthening of our collective Christian witness to an increasingly diverse and often fractured public square.



tional ecumenical events. In 2023 we partnered with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) to organise a preparatory meeting for British and Irish delegates attending the CEC General Assembly in June to help participants engage with the theme 'Under God's blessing – shaping the future'.

PRIORITY 2: WORKING TOGETHER FOR MISSION AND THE COMMON GOOD

This strategic priority includes work in the areas of inter faith dialogue, racial justice and mission theology. We have been working with ICC to

PRIORITY 3: HEALING SOCIETY'S FRACTURES: IDENTITIES, BORDERS, AND NATIONALITIES

The experience of the Irish churches in the work of peace and reconciliation is a valuable contribution to our British-Irish dialogue as we seek to develop the capacity of churches to respond to societal fractures. In December 2023 we were grateful for the opportunity to partner once again with ICC/IICM and Rev Gary Mason of Rethinking Conflict for a second workshop to learn from the experience of those engaged in peace and reconciliation work in the local

church context. We heard their concerns about the impact of prolonged political instability. We discussed the limitations on the capacity of the local church to engage in peace-building work while dealing with a cost-of-living crisis and the decrease in volunteers experienced in the wider community and voluntary sector since the pandemic. A particular focus of this workshop was the challenge of engaging with armed actors, in the midst of ongoing uncertainty about Government's approach to dealing with the legacy of the past. The group was connected via Zoom with the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka to learn from the experience of the CTBI-funded project 'A reconciled land'. The clear message from participants was the need for long-term investment in the work of peace, particularly if we are to engage the younger generations that continue to be impacted by the legacy of conflict. CTBI trustees have welcomed the opportunity to support the creation of the Good Relations Officer post for ICC/IICM post through the ecumenical fund as a contribution to this work.

PRIORITY 4: WORKING FOR GLOBAL PEACE AND JUSTICE

At this time of escalating conflict around the world and increasing insecurity, we have found that the Good Friday Agreement remains a significant beacon of hope. The opportunity provided by the reflections on the 25th anniversary of that agreement in 2023 has been a source of encouragement to our members and to those we engage with in the international context, including Christian Aid and the World Council of Churches. We are grateful for the contribution of ICC and Irish member churches to our reflections on the situation in Israel and Palestine and for the opportunity to make a joint solidarity visit

to the Armenian Church in October at a time of great suffering for that community.

PRIORITY 5: PROMOTING ETHICAL AND INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

We are very grateful for the support of colleagues in ICC/IICM and their contribution to our work. We look forward to working together during 2024 to deepen relationships and collaborate on areas of shared concern, sharing the learning from our experiences where these may be helpful in the wider public square. The coming year will bring particular emphasis on our engagement with politics and political leadership in the context of the General Elections that are anticipated for both the UK and Irish Governments.

Captions (p8-p16)

- | | |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01 | Dr Jackson visiting the Romanian Orthodox Church |
| 02 | Rev Canon Dr Ian Ellis at the Being Churches Together Symposium |
| 03 | Rt Rev Forster and Rt Rev Thomas Tut Puot Mut, Chairperson of the South Sudan Council of Churches. |
| 04 | The Dean of Belfast with church leaders at the Anniversary Service |
| 05 | ICC Representatives during the visit of King Charles III to Northern Ireland |
| 06 | Dr Joan Back and Dr Damian Jackson at the Anniversary Celebration of the Cherubim & Seraphim Church |
| 07 | Participants during the IICM |
| 08 | Martin Browne OSB, Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, delivering the IICM keynote |
| 09 | Delegates at the 2023 IICM |
| 10 | Rt Rev Andrew Forster, Dr Damian Jackson and Most Rev Eamon Martin at the opening of the IICM |
| 11 | Joyce Bond, Jacqui McLoughlin, Sally Cotter (Connor MU Diocesan President), Arlene Creighton (CEO Women's Aid ABCL&N) |
| 12 | Dr Nicola Brady (CTBI) and Dr Damian Jackson (ICC) during a visit of Bishop Hovakim Manukyan to the Armenian Church in Dublin in October |



CHRISTIAN AID —Update

WRITER
Rosamond Bennett
Chief Executive Officer
Christian Aid Ireland

Christian Aid Ireland works for a world where no one is left behind.

In 2023, we responded to many humanitarian emergencies, some of which have received significant media attention and therefore more support from the public in general, others received little or no coverage.

Thanks to denominational and institutional funding as well as the generosity of our supporters we were able to support our local partners to respond quickly and reach some of those most in need.

Here are some highlights of Christian Aid's emergency work in 2023:

FEBRUARY - TURKEY/SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

The earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northern Syria in early February caused widespread devastation killing around 60,000 men, women and children.

The situation was particularly grim in northwest Syria, which was already struggling with the impact of more than 12 years of war. The region already had over four million people in need of aid before the earthquake struck, including nearly 2 million people living in camps after being displaced by the conflict.

In the days that followed the earthquake, Christian Aid's local partners were on the ground in northwest Syria supporting relief efforts. Over the next six months they reached more than 60,000 people in northwest Syria and another 5,000 people in southern Turkey.

Our emergency response was only possible thanks to funding from key donors, including Irish Aid and the Irish Emergency Alliance, as well as the generosity of Christian Aid

Ireland supporters and our sponsoring churches who donated an incredible £600,000/€700,000 to our earthquake appeal.

APRIL - CONFLICT IN SUDAN IMPACTS NEIGHBOURING SOUTH SUDAN

In April, fighting erupted in Sudan which has since forced over 8 million people to flee their homes. While the majority are displaced within Sudan, more than one million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, including South Sudan.

Most of those arriving in South Sudan are returning South Sudanese nationals. They are mostly entering the country through the Joda border crossing in Upper Nile state before ending up in displacement sites in the nearby town of Renk.

Christian Aid's local partner Lutheran World Federation gave cash to families in Renk so that they could buy food and other essentials, as well as handing out dignity kits containing soap and sanitary towels for women and girls. With Irish Aid funds, another local partner is also providing cash to support people living in a camp in the north-west of the country.

MAY - CYCLONE MOCHA IN MYANMAR

This year we were successful in getting funding from ECHO – the European Union's aid agency, for a number of humanitarian responses. One of which was for a community in Yinmarpin township in Myanmar. Yinmarpin was the target of a military assault in May and then was hit by Cyclone Mocha. Homes and fields were destroyed and people had no choice but to flee into the jungle with whatever they could carry. Thanks to the ECHO funding our local partners were able to provide emergency food aid.

JUNE - BOMBING OF THE DAM IN UKRAINE

02



The Nova Kakhovka dam was destroyed in June, causing widespread flooding across southern Ukraine. Over 4,000 houses were flooded. Christian Aid's partners were immediately on hand to respond and even evacuated some of those stranded by the floods.

Thanks to donations from Christian Aid Ireland's supporters, our partners reached nearly 10,000 people with emergency support in the weeks that followed the dam collapse, handing out food, water, bedding and medicine.

SEPTEMBER - FLOODS IN LIBYA

On Sunday 10 September, Storm Daniel hit Libya. Almost 6,000 people are known to have died after the catastrophic Mediterranean storm burst two dams and flooded the eastern port city of Derna.

Christian Aid worked with Dan Church Aid, our Act Alliance partner who have a long-established presence in Libya, to send emergency supplies for the most pressing needs, including, medical assistance, emergency shelter and food.

OCTOBER - ISRAEL AND GAZA

On the morning of Saturday 7 Oct, more than 1,200 Israelis were killed in a Hamas attack. Many more were injured, making it the deadliest attack in Israel in decades. Israeli civilians, including women and children, were forcibly taken hostage.

In the first four months of the conflict that followed around 30,000 Palestinians were killed — more than 1 in 75 of the population of Gaza. 70% are believed to be women and children. Another 70,000 Palestinians have also been injured. Airstrikes have caused widespread destruction of homes, schools, healthcare facilities and telecommunication installations.

Since the outbreak of the conflict, Christian Aid's partners in Gaza have provided medical support as well as food, water and blankets to people living in shelters after fleeing their homes to escape airstrikes. This support has been carried out despite the vast majority of our partner staff being displaced themselves. Our partner in Khan Younis in southern Gaza also opened up their community shelter to displaced families and another partner has been documenting human rights abuses and possible war crimes.

VISIT OF REV BOB KIKUYU

We were also pleased to host Rev Bob Kikuyu our Senior Theology Lead on a visit to Ireland in April. Bob took part in Christian Aid's annual service on RTE One and he also spoke to a group convened by the Irish Council of Churches at the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Rev Bob presented on his experience of climate change impacts in Kenya and Christian Aid's campaign for Loss and Damage funding to support countries on the frontline of the climate crisis.

HEARTFELT THANKS

Finally, we would like to extend our grateful appreciation to all the churches in Ireland who support us so generously with their time, volunteers, financial support and prayers.

Captions

- 01 On 6 February 2023, a huge earthquake devastated southern Turkey and northwest Syria, killing more than 50,000 people. Six-year-old Sara (not her real name) lived in a tent in a collective shelter after the earthquake damaged her home in rural Aleppo, in northwest Syria. Funded by the Irish Aid, Christian Aid's local partner Hurras Network gave Sara and 2,500 other children displaced by the earthquake an emergency kit containing essentials such as food, blankets, warm clothing and soap as well as stationery to keep them entertained.
- 02 40-year-old mum of ten Martha standing in front of the makeshift shelter she is living in in the transit centre in Renk, Upper Nile State, South Sudan. Credit: Silvano Yokwe/Christian Aid.

ICC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2023

President

Rt Rev Andrew Forster

Vice-President

Rt Rev Sarah Groves

Immediate Past President

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

Hon Treasurer

Vacant

General Secretary

Dr Damian Jackson

Antiochian Orthodox Church

Mr William Hunter

Cherubim and Seraphim Church

Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube

Church of Ireland

Ms Georgina Copty

Dr Bridget Nichols

Rev Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum

Greek Orthodox Church in Britain & Ireland

Mr George Sayegh

Lutheran Church in Ireland

Ms Yvonne Langebach

Methodist Church in Ireland

Rev Brian Anderson

Ms Gillian Kingston

Rev Dr Heather Morris

Moravian Church Irish District

Mr Mark Kernohan

Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church

Rt Rev Colin Campbell

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Rev Helen Freeburn

Rev Trevor Gribben

Rev Barry McCroskery

Redeemed Christian Church of God
Pastor Tunde Adebayo-Oke

Religious Society of Friends

James Nelson

Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland

Rev Calin Florea

Salvation Army (Ireland Division)

Colonel Neil Webb

St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church

Fr Anish John

Syrian Orthodox Church in Ireland

Fr Dr Jobymon Skaria

OFFICERS 2022-2024

President

Rt Rev Andrew Forster

Vice-President

Rt Rev Sarah Groves

Immediate Past President

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

IRISH INTER-CHURCH COMMITTEE 2023

Co-Chairs

Most Rev Dr Brendan Leahy
Rt Rev Andrew Forster

General Secretary

Dr Damian Jackson

Joint Secretary

Very Rev Kieran McDermott

ICC Past President

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

ICC Vice-President

Rt Rev Sarah Groves

Roman Catholic

Most Rev Dr Eamon Martin
Most Rev Alan McGuckian
Most Rev Larry Duffy
Most Rev Michael Router
Most Rev Niall Coll
Rev Andrew McMahon
Dr Joan Back
Mr Tommy Burns

Church of Ireland

Mrs June Butler
Very Rev Niall Sloane

Presbyterian Church

Rev Trevor Gribben
Rev Helen Freeburn

Methodist Church

Rev Dr Heather Morris

Religious Society of Friends

James Nelson

Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church

Rt Rev Colin Campbell

Ex-Officio: Church Leaders

Rev David Turtle (President MCI)
Rt Rev Dr Sam Mawhinney (Moderator PCI)
Rt Rev John McDowell (CoI Archbishop of Armagh)

JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ICC President

Rt Rev Andrew Forster

ICC Vice-President

Rt Rev Sarah Groves

Joint Secretary IICC

Very Rev Kieran McDermott

ICC Hon Treasurer

Vacant

General Secretary

Dr Damian Jackson

Co-opted

Rev Trevor Gribben
Rev Brian Anderson
Most Rev Larry Duffy

ADMINISTRATION

NI Charity Number
NIC102643

ROI Employer Number
9582744F

Address
Inter Church Centre
48 Elmwood Avenue
Belfast
BT9 6AZ
028 (048) 9066 3145
info@irishchurches.org
www.irishchurches.org

Auditors
Miscampbell & Co
6 Annadale Ave,
Belfast
BT7 3JH

Solicitors
Cleaver Fulton Rankin Solicitors
50 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT1 2QH

General Secretary
Dr Damian Jackson

Good Relations Officer
Rev Karen Campbell

**Communications and Administration
Assistant**
Megan Ross

**Finance and Administration
Assistant**
Rebecca Schwindt

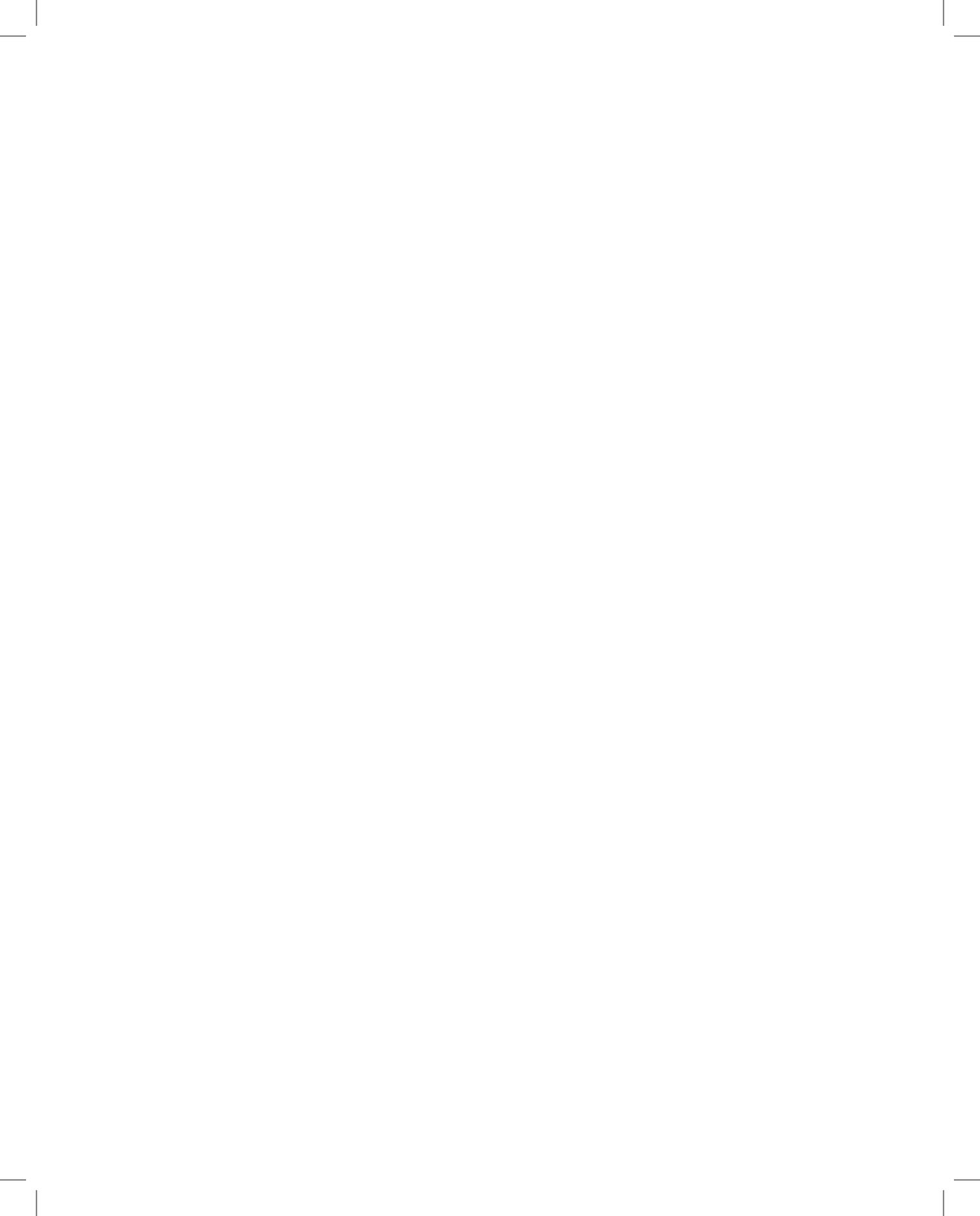
Credits
Annual Report 2023

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

All material © Irish Council of Churches 2023
All photos © Damian Jackson/ICC

except photos:

Cover Photo © Frank Dillon Photography
11 p15 © Womens Link
01 p18 © Hurras Network/Christian Aid
02 p19 © Silvano Yokwe/Christian Aid







Submitted to the
101st Annual Meeting of the Council
April 2024