

**Churches  
in Ireland**  
Connecting  
in Christ

**Irish Council  
of Churches**



**2018**  
Annual Report

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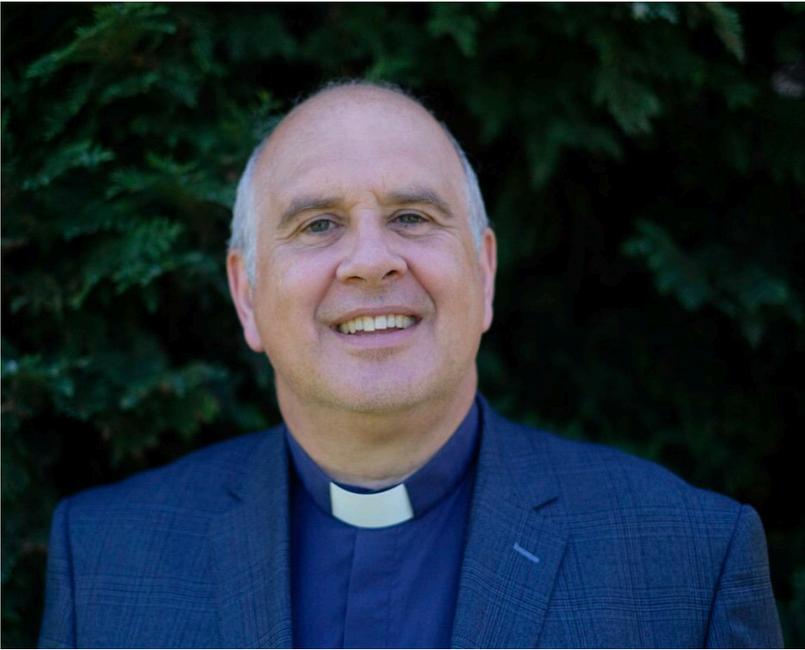
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## ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2018

	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
Russian Orthodox Church in Ireland	2003
Romanian Orthodox Church	2004
Antiochian Orthodox Church	2005
Redeemed Christian Church of God	2014



## PRESIDENT —*Report*

WRITER  
*Rev Brian Anderson*

*'By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful things' Prov 24; 3-4.*

Three great themes are recorded by the writer of this verse: wisdom, knowledge and understanding. At first glance, it seems that the author uses them almost interchangeably. A wider examination shows a difference in the way the three terms are understood.

Simply put, these 'gifts' as they are called in the Bible are defined as:

- Knowledge – the facts (Proverbs 9:10, Proverbs 18:15, Colossians 2:8, 1 Timothy 2:4).
- Understanding – the ability to translate meaning from the facts (Psalm 119:130, Proverbs 3:5-7, 18:2, Philippians 1:9-10).
- Wisdom – knowing what to do next, given an understanding of the facts and circumstances (Ecclesiastes 8:1, James 3:17).

Those with knowledge are able to collect, remember, and access information. But it is possible to have knowledge and lack understanding and wisdom. I will resist the temptation of naming them. Someone might have the facts, but not know what they mean or what to do next. Those with understanding are able to extract the meaning out of information. They “see through” the facts to the dynamics of what, how, and why. Understanding is a lens which brings the facts into crisp focus and produces principles. Those with wisdom know which principle to apply in a given context. Wisdom collates, observes and speaks of transformation.

It could be argued that with today's 24 hour news availability and social media there is no lack of knowledge. However, with the cascade of information we have seen through the phenomenon of fake news, not all knowledge is accurate. Yet these are not the only means of gaining knowledge. I find spending time with others, particularly those with understandings different to mine, informative and challenging. That anonymous quote “you can't understand someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes” is true. It is this part of my role of President of ICC I find most rewarding.

**M**eet hostility with clarity about the distinctiveness of the gospel and do this with grace, hospitality, welcome and love. Prayer softens many a heart.

For example, in conjunction with the Church Leaders' group, understanding of difference has grown through the 4 regional events co-ordinated largely by ICC. Following a meeting with the leaders of the 5 main political parties it was decided to get together representatives from health, education, business, farming, and the wider community and voluntary sector, along with local church leaders, to meet with local MLAs from the five main parties. The feedback suggests they appreciated the opportunity to speak together and to widen their knowledge.

As you read the General Secretary's report you will note the significant contribution ICC has made in bringing Churches together to tackle the issues across the island of Ireland that bring hardship and concern. It is also encouraging to note the work of local inter church groups as the Programme Officer encourages them.

It is also worth noting, in passing, that ICC brings together churches who may differ on some issues, to work for the Common Good. We model what we advocate.

How we take the knowledge (it can be both positive and challenging) and translate it into meaning can bring understanding. I have witnessed how

the work of ICC has created those informed spaces to allow deeper discussion. ICC has brought understanding this year to issues such a Brexit, Homelessness, Paramilitary Influences in Northern Ireland and Educational issues in the Republic of Ireland.

So, where to find that elusive third quality Wisdom, what to do with knowledge and understanding for the Common Good and the sharing of Christ, His love and the struggle against injustice? What does wisdom look like? Below, I have outlined some principles that inform how we seek to achieve this as ICC:

1. Place reconciliation, grace, and justice at the heart of our conversation. This means allowing healing and reconciliation and forgiveness to unfold.
2. Care for the entire wellbeing of people. We care for their bodies, communities, spirituality, and larger social and ecological environments. In this, we discover the presence of the Spirit going before us.
3. We are Church - embrace both hiddenness and openness by rejecting the lure to become one more social institution among many. This means offering an

alternative vision shaped by the future and present reign of God. The Church subverts, challenges, reflects, and transforms the culture around it, and in which God has immersed it. In doing so, the Church pursues "the very mission at the core of the Church's identity."

4. And where the Church finds those who cannot re-imagine a new future, who harp back to a destructive culture of the past, we must challenge for a better Ireland, particularly for those on the margins.
5. Meet hostility with clarity about the distinctiveness of the gospel and do this with grace, hospitality, welcome and love. Prayer softens many a heart.
6. Wisdom comes from collaboration, so in partnership with IICM, we speak with a unified voice that Christian witness can share.

Where Knowledge, Understanding and Wisdom come together the Bible writers note this as a Rare and Beautiful thing. Our prayer would be that our island home would be known for such beauty.



## HONORARY TREASURER —*Report Year 2018*

WRITER  
*Jonathan Wilson*

The accounts for 2018 show that both income and expenditure have been delivered in line with budget. They have been prepared in accordance with the accounting requirements for Charities and show the full activities of both the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, represented as unrestricted and restricted funds as appropriate. Our accounts for 2017 were submitted to the Charity Commission NI and are now available to view on the Commission website. We continue to progress our registration with the Charities Regulatory Authority in the Republic of Ireland.

This year, in line with best practice, we ran a tender process and success-

fully appointed a new independent examiner to carry out the overview of our accounts. We would like to thank our previous examiner, McCleary & Co., for their work over many years. On conclusion of the tender process, the Joint Management Committee (JMC) appointed Miscampbell & Co., Belfast, to carry out the independent examination of the 2018 accounts and we thank them for their detailed work and diligence since they took over.

Recognising that all our member churches are operating in a challenging financial environment, where rising costs and low returns on investments are now the norm, the JMC has placed particular emphasis on cost controls in its budgetary processes. Due to the success of that process, for 2019, we have been able to hold the membership subscription levels at the 2017 rate. It has been acknowledged by our member churches that, with inflation, this amounts to an effective cut in subscriptions. It is important to state that it has only been possible to do this because of the high level of engagement and commitment of our member churches, with member

subscriptions being paid promptly and member churches offering meeting venues, hospitality and volunteering time and expertise to support our work. This consistent and generous support is greatly appreciated by our staff and trustees.

During 2018 our internal financial procedures were reviewed and updated where necessary. We responded to requests from member churches for an early indication of membership subscription rates by implementing a new timeline for approval of the budget and subscription levels. We undertook a detailed review of our reserves and investment policy and are currently in the process of finalising a three-year financial plan. We updated our risk register in the context of the General Data Protection Regulation and carried out a review of our filing, archiving and IT systems.

I would like to thank the ICC staff and colleagues on the JMC and ICC Executive for their cooperation and careful attention to these important matters.



## GENERAL SECRETARY —Report

WRITER  
*Dr Nicola Brady*

### Introduction

In 2018 we took some time to evaluate the work of our two central committees: the ICC Executive and the Irish Inter-Church Committee. We asked members for their views on the way we have been working to date, and what the future priorities should be. The feedback was very encouraging. Members make a significant time commitment to the work of ICC and IICM and it is important to ensure that we are doing all we can to maximise impact. Both committees expressed a strong desire to engage with local inter-church work in different parts of the island to affirm, and learn from, the many ways in which local churches have come together to respond to the needs of the surrounding community.

### ICC Executive

The ICC Executive began the year with the annual retreat in Drumalis as an opportunity to take time out and reflect. The retreat leader this year was Roz Stirling of Cleopas Retreats who took the theme of “Water from the Well” to explore how we can draw deeply from the resources of God as they apply to personal and ministry life.

The May Executive meeting was hosted by the Church of Ireland in Church House, Rathmines, and provided an opportunity to hear from members of staff about key areas of work, namely Synod preparations and the Bishops’ Appeal. There was also a presentation from Fr Anish John of the Indian Orthodox Church, which provided an overview of the origins of the Indian Orthodox Church and its global ecumenical outreach, as well as highlighting some of the priorities from its work and mission in Ireland.

In September the Executive met in the Duncairn Centre, Belfast, and had an opportunity to learn about the evolution of this building from church to community centre and how the relationship of the congregation to the surrounding community shaped that

journey. The meeting also included a panel discussion on educational disadvantage, with a particular emphasis on how this is limiting the life chances of young people and leaving them vulnerable to involvement in crime and paramilitary activity.

The November meeting was hosted by Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church in Dublin. There was an opportunity to meet with representatives of the Syrian Orthodox Church, who are currently in the early stages of the membership application process. In addition, the meeting had a particular focus on communications and the Council’s use of social media.

### ICC AGM

For the 2018 AGM delegates received a warm welcome to Drogheda Presbyterian Church. We are very grateful to Rev Damien Burke and the members of his congregation for their hospitality. There was also a strong representation of local churches in the Drogheda area and a group has continued to meet with our Programme Officer in recent months.

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At this AGM the ICC Presidency passed from Bishop John McDowell to Rev Brian Anderson. Reflecting on his two years in office, Bishop John placed particular emphasis on the vocation of ICC to model for the wider society relationships that value diversity. This becomes increasingly necessary as the foundations of democracy come under threat in a global context, but on the island of Ireland the unique challenges of a post-conflict society give an even greater urgency to this task.

As a staff team we are very grateful to Bishop John for his leadership, support and commitment to the work of ICC and IICM during his term of office. His experience and insights were an invaluable support to me as I took up the post of General Secretary in 2016.

02



Rev Brian Anderson also brings considerable experience at community level to the role of President. Addressing the AGM, he explained that he would be taking the common good as a particular focus for his presidency and was anxious that the inter-church structures would enable member churches to be agents of hope in a fractured society — in both jurisdictions on the island — where that hope is badly needed.

03



The keynote address was given by Mr Kevin Conmy from the Belfast Secretariat of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. Entitled “The Reconciliation Challenge, Twenty Years on from the Good Friday Agreement and in the Brexit Era”, this address prompted reflection about leadership in the unfinished work of peace. Mr Conmy expressed concern that the spirit that had made possible the achievements of 1998 appeared absent in the current challenges to community relations. He made an appeal for all those in positions of leadership in society to recommit ourselves to the work

of reconciliation, recognising that this is the only way to give a better future to the generations to come.

## IICC

The Irish Inter-Church Committee (IICC) continues to hold its regular meetings in Dundalk, while alternating between the two jurisdictions on the island for the expanded meeting.

This year the expanded meeting of the IICC took place in Clonard Monastery, Belfast, in May. We are very grateful to the Redemptorist community for their hospitality and welcome. We chose Clonard because it offered the opportunity for participants to see first-hand some of the challenges presented by the unfinished work of reconciliation as experienced daily by those who live on inter-face areas. There was an opportunity to hear from those who are supporting local communities to break free of the control of paramilitary organisations, and build relationships across the sectarian divide. The meeting also provided an opportunity to reflect on the increasing political polarisation in Northern Ireland and the emergence of “civic nationalism” and “civic unionism”.

A significant number of workshops and working group meetings have taken place under the auspices of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting over the past year. This is an important part of our methodology and outreach as it allows us to connect people with particular areas of expertise across our member churches, to share information and resources and support each other. It is also an effective way of expanding the range of expertise and experience available to the IICC in its work.

In April, there was a workshop on housing and homelessness which examined current challenges in both jurisdictions on the island from a moral and pastoral perspective, with input from faith-based organisations providing frontline services. A resource to facilitate reflection and engagement on these issues at local congregation level is currently being prepared.

In May, a workshop in Belfast considered the implications of the unfinished work of reconciliation in preparation for the Irish Inter-Church Meeting later that year. This workshop allowed representatives of member churches to share some of the learning and priority concerns arising from their work on reconciliation. It also provided an opportunity for partnership with Youthlink to draw on the learning from their inter-church engagement with youth leaders and young adults.

Over the summer the working group on issues impacting victims and survivors met several times to exchange information as member churches prepared their submissions to the Northern Ireland Office on its consultation ‘Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland’s Past’. The group held a meeting with the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors as part of this preparatory work.

In November the IICM partnered with the Belfast Secretariat of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs to deliver a workshop on supporting local churches to respond to paramilitary style attacks. There was significant participation from local clergy and inter-church groups from areas where this form of violence is a particular concern.

Also in November a working group on education issues in the Republic

of Ireland met to discuss school admissions, the place of religious education in the national curriculum, relationship and sexuality education and educational disadvantage.

The IICC has encouraged staff to continue to identify ways to support, affirm and encourage local inter-church work, using partnership approaches where possible. In December IICM Co-Chair Rev Brian Anderson addressed the Connect conference for local inter-church groups organised by the Irish School of Ecumenics. Rev Anderson gave an address on dealing with difference in the context of Brexit, drawing on Miroslav Volf’s concept of ‘soft difference’.

## Brexit

Unsurprisingly, Brexit and the resulting uncertainty has been a dominant theme on our agenda. Our member churches, from their pastoral experience, are acutely conscious of the concerns about jobs, opportunities for young people, peace and good relations and the future of EU-funded projects that are impacting our local communities.

With so many unanswered questions, it was felt that the most helpful approach for the inter-church structures would be to begin with a consultation exercise to allow us to identify the specific areas of concern, and then examine what resources churches might have at their disposal to support those affected. With the support of the Community Relations Council NI we put in place a consultation process which allowed us to gather a wide range of views and perspectives. An event was organised in November to share the findings and discuss possible responses. A number of resources were devel-



oped out of this initiative including video messages and a guide for local churches on how to facilitate conversations around Brexit.

A recurring theme throughout the work was the need for a focus on relationships, with participants expressing concern about the increasing polarisation and the deterioration of relationships evident in the public debate. There is an important role for churches in modelling at local, national and inter-national level, a way of dealing with contentious issues that respects diversity and has the common good at its core. The ICC President and General Secretary, together with other faith sector and community and voluntary representatives, had the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Theresa May and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Karen Bradley in November, to share some of the priority concerns arising from this work.

Through our participation in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) we have been sharing information with churches in England, Scotland and Wales. The CTBI trustees have expressed a particular interest in learning more about the work of the Irish churches in this context and a visit to Belfast is planned for 2019.

### Church Leaders

The ICC President is a member of the Church Leaders' group and is supported by the General Secretary in this work. The meeting hosted by ICC in June 2018 provided an opportunity for Church Leaders to hear from senior representatives of the PSNI and An Garda Síochána about the various types of scams that are impacting vulnerable people, and how churches could contribute to awareness-raising efforts. Church Leaders agreed to support public awareness initiatives

on this theme, as well as distributing information through church networks. Following on from the Church Leaders' meeting with the leaders of the Northern Ireland political parties in September 2018, the ICC successfully applied for funding from the Community Relations Council NI to continue this dialogue on a regional basis, across Northern Ireland, with wider civil society participation. This work began in December 2018 and will conclude in February 2019. It brings together local politicians, church representatives and community leaders from a wide range of sectors including charities, education, policing, youth work, health and social care, business and farming.

### Communications

In seeking to maximise our impact during 2018 we have had a particular focus on communications. We were delighted to welcome Megan Brown

to our staff team as Communications Assistant in May. Together with our Programme Officer, Megan has undertaken a strategic review of our communications and has introduced some new initiatives, particularly in the area of social media. Our Communications Officers' meeting continues to be an important area of work and these regular exchanges are greatly valued by participants. This year we were able to coordinate engagement from the Church Leaders' group with the BBC in its review of religious and ethical programming and organise a workshop for Martin Bashir, the BBC's religion editor, when he made a visit to Belfast. The workshop took place in Clonard Monastery where we brought together thirty representatives of the faith sector from a wide range of different areas of work for a discussion on how the faith sector engages with, and is portrayed in, the media. The BBC is keen to build on these positive engagements with further initiatives in the future.

### International Engagement

The General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches took place in Novi Sad, Serbia, from 31st May to 6th June. It was a well-chosen location, with a long history of cultural encounter and confrontation and important symbolic significance in terms of European conflicts. The work of reconciliation, which is central to the mission of CEC and to the role of the churches in Europe, was clearly emphasised. The Assembly programme included worship, bible study, keynote addresses, panel discussions and workshops, as well as the governance element of the agenda. I was nominated to serve as one of the "keynote listeners" providing independent feedback to the Strategy and Policy Committee. The purpose of this Committee was to review progress against the strategic framework agreed after the last General Assembly and make recommendations for the future.

There were over 500 participants and observers from all over Europe and the Assembly provided a valuable opportunity to hear about the different priorities and concerns impacting member churches.

The CEC General Secretaries' meeting took place in Vienna in September and had a particular focus on inter-religious dialogue. CEC is currently analysing the impact of the *Charta Oecumenica* — An Ecumenical Charter for the Churches in Europe — published in 2001. It was the hope of the authors that this document would provide a framework for ecumenical encounter and current mission. CEC has been consulting member churches about the extent to which this document has impacted, and continues to influence, their work. At the General Secretaries' meeting CEC staff gave a summary of responses in relation to inter-faith work, highlighting the range of different initiatives and approaches across the member churches. The responses underlined the impact of local history and culture in shaping this work.

In October I had the opportunity to attend the inaugural convening of the Leadership Institute for Faith and Education (LIFE) at Harvard Graduate School of Education together with Dr Barbara McDade from Stranmillis University College and Fr Patrick White, Director of Youthlink NI. This arose out of the discussions on educational disadvantage that had taken place in the IICC and ICC Executive. LIFE has a particular focus on the sharing of best practice in terms of faith-based work to improve educational achievement among disadvantaged communities. We saw inspiring examples of partnership between local churches and schools based on a solid foundation of respect. The principle of separation of Church and State is significant in the US context and so clear communication around boundaries and management of expectations

was an essential foundation for these partnerships. In addition, there was much useful learning about strategic planning, advocacy and collective impact. Participants had a keen interest in learning more about the Irish context and further opportunities for exchange may develop.

In December the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation held its annual meeting and study day in Warsaw. Members had an opportunity to visit the Museum of the History of Polish Jews and hear from the Director about some of the challenges they face in this work in the current political climate. There was a visit to the monument of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising with a moment of reflection. Finally Cardinal Nycz of the Polish Catholic Bishops' Conference spoke about some of the challenges facing the Church in its outreach for reconciliation. It was a valuable opportunity to reflect on the challenges of dealing with the past in a very different context, as well as examining some of the challenges facing EU nations at the Union's eastern borders in terms of relationships and security.

### Deepening Relationships

Our member churches have continued to place particular emphasis on identifying opportunities that allow us to grow in our knowledge and understanding of one another. In addition to the usual invitations to attend the major meetings and celebrations of member churches, the World Meeting of Families in August 2018 provided a series of opportunities for engagement. Catholic participants were greatly encouraged by the interest shown by colleagues in this important moment in the life of the global church and ICC members were very appreciative of the opportunity to share in this celebration of family life and the historic Papal visit that accompanied it.



## PROGRAMME OFFICER —Report

WRITER  
*Dr Damian Jackson*

### Local Inter-Church Engagement

In 2018 we began a process of examining the role of the national ecumenical instruments in supporting and facilitating local inter-church engagement in Ireland.

I have been facilitating new and visiting established local inter-church groups and I have been encouraged and inspired by the impressive and exciting work going on. There is continuing appetite for further developing connections, but many groups are looking for refreshment and re-visioning.

In stepping back and looking afresh at this work it is important to reflect on our underlying motivation so we are asking ourselves some questions:

- Why should local churches work together?
- What is the role of the national leadership (ICC/IICC) in inspiring local inter-church engagement and helping to

overcome challenges to it?

- What would success look like for the national ecumenical instruments in this work?
- What should the priorities be for the ICC staff in this work in the medium term?

This has been an energising process and we are beginning to work out its implications. Part of the vision is that churches working and serving their communities together would become the norm, rather than something “special”. The national leadership has a role here in modelling this and bearing witness to the close working relationships that have been developed between them. The national ecumenical instruments can provide support through better communicating what is happening across the island so that groups can resource and stimulate one another.

### Societal Issues

The issues of climate justice and housing insecurity and homelessness have been identified by ICC as priorities. We have worked with member churches and NGO partners on these issues and have developed a set of common Climate Justice Affirmations which will be presented at the 2019 AGM. These affirmations will give us a solid

foundation for collaboration with partner organisations in Ireland and further afield through CTBI’s environment network. Member church congregations are engaged practically in actions to address climate change in many creative ways and there are a range of resources available through partner organisations for those who are concerned.

We held a workshop in Spring on housing insecurity and homelessness at which member church representatives identified several ways the inter-church bodies could facilitate action and build capacity for Christians in Ireland to respond to the systemic injustices in both jurisdictions. We have prepared a small group study resource to enable church members to equip themselves. It is informed by analysis of policy and economic decisions that have led to the current issues, and includes quotes from people who have been impacted by homelessness, as well as church leaders who have taken action in response. Additionally, scripture brings us to self-examination, causing us to ask how we are complicit in these issues and how we might respond.

One way to respond is to use the canvassing information sheet we have prepared if a prospective



candidate calls to your door. This has three facts about housing, three questions to ask yourself, and three to ask the candidate.

We hope that these resources will develop capacity at local level for people to act for a more just housing system.

### **Migration and Asylum Matters**

We have continued our engagement with member churches, NGOs and government bodies in these areas. Unfortunately progress on the fulfilment of the government's promise to introduce a community sponsorship scheme has been delayed but we trust that it will soon offer an opportunity for local churches and communities to make a practical and powerful difference in the lives of those affected by war and persecution. I had the opportunity to update the Quaker Yearly Meeting on developments and the likely structure of the programme in July. In October I attended a conference on community sponsorship hosted by the International Catholic Migration Commission in Brussels which was very useful to make connections with people working on this issue in other countries and to find out the strength and weaknesses of the various approaches taken.

A highlight of the year was the opportunity to visit Washington D.C. courtesy of the Social Change Initiative's Migration Learning Exchange Programme. I travelled with representatives from other UK and Irish faith-based organisations working on migration issues to learn from similar organisations in the U.S. It was hosted by the Church World Service which is the service-provision branch of ICC's sister body in the US. Much of their work is on issues affecting refugees and undocumented migrants and involves "ethical spectacle" to highlight injustice to those in power and energise and activate Christians to support refugees. I learned a huge amount, particularly about communications and advocacy, whilst also building connections with the other participants who work in Britain and Ireland.

A significant development that we have been advocating for for many years was the long-awaited introduction of a scheme enabling asylum seekers to join the labour market. This was welcomed by the IICC and is well-designed in many respects, with no restriction in terms of a minimum salary, no fee for a work permit, and virtually no categories of employment

excluded. However, those who have already had a first instance decision and are awaiting an appeal are not eligible and the permit has to be renewed every 6 months so many employers are reluctant to hire someone in that situation.

The Churches' Refugee Network facilitated by CTBI has been a very useful meeting, not only as a source of inspiration and ideas for our work in this area but most importantly as a space to get to know others who have working together advocating and resourcing churches to respond effectively in support of refugees and asylum seekers. We look forward to developing these connections further, working with Richard Reddie, CTBI's new Director of Justice and Inclusion.

### **Finally**

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to work with you in all of these areas. It's an exciting and varied role with so many opportunities, only a few of which have been touched on here. Please do get in touch with me if I can offer any encouragement or support in your local inter-church work. I look forward to the next year.

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## IICM —Report

### Preface

The 29th Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) took place from the 18th-19th October at Dromantine Conference and Retreat 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 15 denominations in Ireland, bringing together the broad spectrum of Roman Catholic, Reformed, Migrant-led, Independent and Orthodox traditions. The theme chosen for the 2018 meeting was **“Realities are greater than ideas? Reflecting on the common good in divided communities.”**

WRITER  
Dr Nicola Brady

The opening question is inspired by Pope Francis’ reflection in *Evangelii Gaudium* where he considers the tension that can exist between realities and ideas, and the need for constant dialogue between the two so that ideas do not become disconnected, truth is not distorted and the work of evangelisation is grounded in works of justice and charity that bear witness to the values of the Gospel (EG 231-233).

The timing of this particular meeting was significant as we were prompted to look back by the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, as well as looking to future challenges arising from Brexit.

The reference to “divided communities” brings to mind immediately the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict, and the unfinished work of reconciliation, and these issues undoubtedly featured prominently in our discussions. We were reminded, however, that division arising from socio-economic inequality is damaging the life chances of individuals, families and communities across the island of Ireland. This is most evident in the increasing numbers of families becoming homeless and living with long term homelessness or

housing insecurity in the Republic. What these cases have in common is the suffering experienced by those who feel left behind and forgotten by the rest of the society. The Church has a responsibility to journey alongside those who find themselves at the margins and give prophetic leadership in pointing to the failings in our past that have brought us to this point, while advocating for the changes required to protect those who are vulnerable.

Participants at the meeting shared their experiences of seeking to give leadership and promote the common good in divided communities. Often this requires us to be present with people when the prospect of healing seems remote, such as those bereaved through violence who live with daily reminders of that injustice in the form of an empty seat at the family table. There can be a temptation to seek to *do* something, to try to *fix* the situation, to avoid our own feelings of insecurity and helplessness. In those situations where no words can ever suffice sometimes the most supportive thing we can do is just listen and show people that we are there for them, that we care for and respect them.

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The Church has a responsibility to journey alongside those who find themselves at the margins.

There can also be a need to respectfully challenge those who are at risk of becoming imprisoned by their inability to let go of suffering. Participants discussed times when they faced criticism for their engagement in peace and reconciliation work because engagement with the perpetrators of violence was perceived as a betrayal of the victims. Sometimes clergy in particular can become the targets for people's anger at God for their suffering and loss and are called to be understanding and forgiving in those painful situations. The responsibility of providing pastoral care in divided communities can take its toll and the importance of church leaders practising self-compassion and seeking help for their

own experiences of trauma was emphasised.

An important contribution to the Meeting was made by a panel of young adults from Youthlink's Apprentice Peace Programme. They shared about the challenges and pressures they and their friends have faced growing up in a divided society. We were struck by the significant pressures young people are dealing with today, where they continue to face problems of sectarianism and lack of opportunity, but the challenges are magnified under the relentless spotlight of social media. In these circumstances, coupled with the increasing availability of prescription and non-prescription drugs, it is unsurprising that struggles with self-esteem and

mental health are at the top of the list of their concerns, as more and more young lives continue to be lost to suicide.

In spite of this, however, our youth participants inspired us with great hope. The honesty and resilience they displayed challenged and encouraged all of us as they made an impassioned plea for young people who have made bad choices in the past to be given another chance. There is a lesson in that for us all as we reflect on our hopes, and our failings, as we seek to give leadership and provide pastoral care in divided communities.



## EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE —*Report*

WRITER  
*Dr Kenneth Milne*

The European Affairs Committee has met throughout the year to discuss varying issues and interests of an international level. Naturally, discussing Brexit has often been on our agenda.

Given the current uncertainty around Brexit, this Committee has taken the appropriate time to talk about the possible implications of any deal on a local, regional and international scale. Alongside the Irish Inter Church Committee, we have produced two resources and held two conferences in the Presbyterian Assembly Buildings that brought representatives together from local church groups to discuss these very issues.

As a committee, we met with James Temple-Smithson, Head of Office in the European Parliament Office in September where he spoke on the

European Parliamentary Elections, where UK parliament seats will be re-allocated to other member states (including Ireland). Whatever the situation, and whether or not elections take place in both Northern Ireland and Ireland, the Irish Churches have a considerable interest in what are regarded as possibly the most significant elections in the parliament's history. During this meeting it became clear that the electorate should be encouraged to exercise its franchise, and in doing so to examine closely the major issues at stake and ascertain the views of those candidates who are looking for support.

I attended an Article 17 event in Brussels in December, held by First Vice-President of the Parliament, Mairead McGuinness (who had hosted our visit there in 2017). These events are organised regularly under Article 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon which guarantees meaningful liaison between the Churches of Europe and the agencies of the European Union. There were well over one hundred participants and this dialogue seminar discussed 'Religion and Human Rights within the EU — A Shared Responsibility'. Contributions were made by international human rights organi-

sations, a wide range of Christian Churches, and other world faiths (including a member of the Irish Muslim Peace and Integration Council).

At a time when in much of Europe the power, even the influence, of Churches is greatly reduced, there are those who question what impact we can make in such highly politicised bodies as the European Union. Yet at the same time there is an awareness in many quarters that, in the various economic and monetary crises of recent years the EU may not have given to its basic values the attention that they require. That, in short, is what this 'Article 17' seminar was about.

A briefing document provided to the seminar by the European Parliament Research Service put it like this: 'although on the EU agenda for decades, recent events, such as the migration crisis and the issues with the rule of law in some Member States, have brought the issue of values back into focus. EU values are those of inclusion, freedom and respect for diversity, including religion. Freedom of religion and belief has significant protection in the EU under the international legal framework ... It is important to maintain that all human rights have equal worth.'



## WOMEN'S LINK —Report

WRITER  
*Joyce Bond*

This year the members of Women's Link have enjoyed various events in their own churches and together.

The 75th Anniversary Service for Women's World Day of Prayer Northern Ireland — a service of thanksgiving and celebration — was held at Assembly Buildings, Belfast in May. The guest speaker was Dr Heather Morris and the worship was led by musicians from the New Irish Arts Orchestra. Methodist Women Ireland President Elizabeth McWatters attended an Irish Council of Churches Conference on homelessness and MWI have agreed to highlight the position and lobby politicians to take action to help resolve the situation.

The Mothers' Union held an Exhibition — 'Souls of our Shoes' — in Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin, during the 9th World Meeting of Families, drawing attention to gender violence by way of shoes and signs. Conversations with families from South America, India, Africa, revealed each family had their own story to tell saying "domestic abuse is endemic in our country too".

The new Mothers' Union Constitution ensures that governance of MU is truly worldwide, only 2% of members are in Ireland and UK, the rest are spread worldwide. The new Worldwide President is Sheran Harper (Guyana) and the new Provincial All-Ireland President is June Butler.

A Triennial Thanksgiving service held in Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin, with the Mother's Union Choir, was a memorable occasion. Archbishop Jackson celebrated Holy Communion while the Address was given by the Primate Archbishop Richard Clarke.

At Women's Link Autumn meeting, Dr Nicola Brady spoke to committee members on the 9th World Meeting of Families in Dublin last August. Pope Francis' chosen theme was 'The Gospel of the Family, Joy for the World'. Following opening ceremonies in various dioceses an international three-day Pastoral Congress was held at the RDS. Families shared their experiences and participated in a programme of events, panels and workshops which celebrated the spiritual life of the family and addressed issues affecting family life. The culmination of the Meeting was the visit to Croke Park by Pope Francis.

In November the Consecration of the Rev. Sarah Groves as a Bishop of the Unitas Fratrum (Moravian Church) brought joy to members of the Moravian Women's Association and members of the Church worldwide.

Women's Link would like to acknowledge the help and support of ICC staff during the year.

# CLIMATE JUSTICE AFFIRMATIONS



## Climate, creation, Christian values and discipleship

- We recognise the preciousness of creation that God called good. God’s continuing love for all that he has created is shown in his promise to restore all things.
- We acknowledge the overwhelming scientific evidence for human-caused climate change and the consequent need for action both to mitigate its effects and adapt to them. We are called to change our behaviour collectively and as individuals in order to achieve this.
- Christian discipleship involves addressing injustice and working for the good of all, especially the poor: “by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35). Therefore the injustice that those most affected by climate change have contributed least to it calls us to respond, and to work for the protection of our common home.
- The richness of scripture and the history of God’s work with his people provide us with values and principles to challenge societal narratives that are drivers of climate change.
- As we intentionally practice thankfulness for God’s provision

we choose contentment over the greed inherent in consumerism.

- Solidarity with all people, created in God’s image, sharing the finite space of our common home, awakens us to the fallacy of capitalism’s myth of unending economic growth.

## Reimagining our spaces, practices, words and messages

- We undertake to respond creatively and courageously, beginning with ourselves, by adapting the ways we use our spaces, how we behave, and the way we speak about climate change.
- We will use our spaces to tangibly effect and communicate a transition to lower-carbon and creation-sustaining lives. (1)
- We will reimagine our annual events to encourage self examination, consideration of our environmental impact, and to express our thankfulness for the gift of creation. (2)
- With our words we will try to explain to ourselves and others why we are doing this. We will pray and discuss together how we can continue on this counter-cultural journey of transition to greater simplicity and practiced contentment. (3)
- In our public conversations with media and government we will

endeavour to speak truth to power, holding the interests of those most affected by climate change uppermost in our advocacy. With government we will explicitly support positive initiatives and hold them to account to act justly in the interests of all people and future generations. (4)

1: For example: beehives in churchyards, planting practices that encourage pollinators and produce food, solar panels on church roofs, improving building insulation.

2: For example: an annual harvest service could augment traditional thankfulness for God’s provision with lament for damage resulting from exploitative agricultural practices.

3: For example: thinking ethically together about our choices in production and consumption, and our investment and disinvestment decisions.

4: For example: acknowledging positive progress, telling others what we are doing and asking for specific, achievable actions in conversations with canvassing politicians. Church leaders can together provide a credible and compassionate voice in direct communications with Government. Resources such as those developed by our partners in Christian Aid and Trócaire can help equip us for such conversations.



## 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, Cytŷn (Churches Together in Wales), Churches Together in England and the Irish Council of Churches. Bob Fyffe is the General Secretary.

WRITER  
*Bob Fyffe*

I'm always grateful for the opportunity to share in ICC meetings and always find a warm welcome. There are times though, when a particular meeting remains at the front of my mind and none more so than the Brexit discussion held last autumn. The conversations were rich and the

input was of a very high calibre. I was especially struck by Bishop Noel Treanor when he spoke about "talking in the continuum of remembering". He was of course meaning that in the context of our wider European history and how we understand ourselves and our identity in this wider context.

Bishop Noel urged us to interpret, discriminate and decipher the times we are living through, and that is important for so many issues confronting us today. On a recent pilgrimage to Egypt to express solidarity with Christians in that country, what was most remarkable is the way in which persecution has strengthened the Church through a nonviolent response. The growth of the Christian religious life in that country emphasises the importance of a spirituality that underpins everything that we do together as Christians. And then the realisation that the revolution of 2011 which we witnessed on our television screens prompted the creation of The Egyptian Council of Churches. Not an ecclesiastical structure for its own sake, but a recognition by Christians and Church leaders that we are stronger when we stand together, through good times and bad. The continuum of remembering.

The excellent relationship between CTBI and ICC staff continues to underpin the mutual learning and shared resources. CTBI Trustees were especially keen to support the ICC work around Brexit and made appropriate grants to give substance to their words. Shared work on refugee issues and racial justice will continue to grow over the next year as our new colleague Richard Reddie settles in. Alongside this is the development of our Sanctuary programme with Inderjit Bhogal which we hope will find opportunities in Ireland. We are also looking forward to deepening the relationships and the work with those addressing Spirituality and Conflict. There is also much more that we can be doing together around inter religious work and the development of the Invest in Peace programme with the Jewish community. Having begun with a reference to Brexit, it might be appropriate to end by saying that more intentional opportunities will be developed to explore the ways in which we can develop resources to deepen dialogue and engage in reconciliation. It is part of that journey along the continuum of remembering.



## CHRISTIAN AID —Update

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

In early September I travelled to South Sudan. It was my second visit in just under a year to a place that is now never far from my thoughts; the resilience of its people, their hopes for peace and their determination to survive unimaginable violence and hunger.

I met Rev James Oyat-Latansio, from our partner, the Sudan Council of Churches. He told me: “We in South Sudan are wounded, traumatised, full of pain; if we can heal, then we can reconcile. Our people are longing for peace”.

This deeply-troubled country marked its seventh anniversary last summer, but had little to celebrate. Another peace deal had been rejected and the painful memories

of war and violence continued to haunt its people.

Under our From Violence to Peace programme, we launched a major research report about the complexities of peacebuilding in South Sudan. ‘In It For The Long Haul? Lessons on peacebuilding in South Sudan’, reflected interviews with 50 long-term peacebuilders with experience from across South Sudan, and with members of communities affected by violence.

It stated that: “Peace is made and broken every day in South Sudan by chiefs, youth, women and commanders, under trees, in offices, in person or by mobile phone. Yet, the countless peacemakers at the local level are obscured by the tendency of international and higher-level actors to put themselves towards the centre of analysis.”

Securing long-term peace in South Sudan will require much more than deals between political leaders. Work towards such national-level political agreements must be complemented by local and regional

peacebuilding and owned by the people of South Sudan.

My trip coincided with the UN International Day of Peace on 21st September, when Christian Aid, alongside 83 peace-building organisations, signed a statement calling the international community to embrace commitments to peace ahead of the United Nations General Assembly.

This call could not be more urgent. In 2016, more countries experienced violent conflict than at any time in 30 years. If current trends persist, more than half of the world’s poor will be living in countries affected by high levels of violence by 2030.

Christian Aid Ireland funds peacebuilding work in 20 conflict-affected countries. Thanks to the prayerful solidarity and donations of our sponsoring churches, alongside the Irish Government, we are supporting counselling, reconciliation, trauma healing and peacebuilding initiatives in countries like South Sudan, Colombia and Zimbabwe.



Northern Ireland has emerged from a long history of violence and the peace enjoyed today is the fruit of work carried out by church leaders, politicians, trade unions and civil society. During the Troubles, Bishop Trevor Williams was an active member of Corrymeela community and worked tirelessly to foster understanding and peace.

For the past eight years, we have been honoured to call Bishop Williams our Chair and his expertise in peacebuilding was pivotal when we undertook the global lead for Christian Aid of its From Violence to Peace programme.

Bishop Williams' term came to an end last year and at our AGM in October, we were blessed to welcome Rev Dr Liz Hughes of the Presbyterian Church, as the new Chair of the Christian Aid Ireland Board.

We thank Bishop Williams deeply for his warm and intelligent leadership. His insight and wisdom has inspired us to be a better, stronger organisation. We look forward to working with Dr Hughes, who brings with her a wealth of experi-

ence in peacebuilding and Global Mission.

Our sincerest gratitude also extends to our steadfast supporters who reached new heights in 2018, some quite literally. In September, 22 courageous people took part in our inaugural skydives, jumping out of planes at 12,000ft in aid of Christian Aid projects in Latin America and Africa. Every £1 raised was worth £5 thanks to EU match funding of our Harvest appeal.

In the same month, we held our tenth anniversary and biggest ever Sheep's Head Hike. Thanks to the dedication of its wonderful volunteer committee, over 200 people walked this famed West Cork route, under sparkling sunshine.

During May, Christian Aid Week focused on our work in Haiti, a country vulnerable to natural disasters. In 2010, a devastating earthquake in Port-au-Prince razed the city to the ground. And in November 2016, Hurricane Matthew destroyed homes and lives. Christian Aid helped to evacuate 5,000 families and provided

urgently-needed shelter, hygiene materials and food.

We told the story of Vilia, a widow and mother, who lost her home during the earthquake. Our partner, KORAL, built a new disaster-resistant home for Vilia, where she then sheltered over 54 people from Hurricane Matthew.

She prayed: "To the people overseas Lord give them strength and courage. Place compassion in their hearts... You can guide us. You can protect us. And we know with your faith, with our strength, with courage, we will be able to find what we are looking for."

This year, we pray that our world can find peace, that we can protect the most vulnerable, and that everyone can live a dignified life that is free from suffering.

We are incredibly grateful to churches, communities and congregations who inspire and encourage this work towards justice. Your prayers and generosity are truly transforming lives.

**CAPTIONS (P8-10)**

- 01 ICC Executive meeting in May at Rathmines.
- 02 Rt Rev John McDowell and Rev Brian Anderson at AGM
- 03 Church Leaders meeting with leaders and representatives of the five main political parties in Northern Ireland in September at the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’s Assembly Buildings in Belfast.
- 04 Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube and Rev Dr Tom McKnight at the Irish Inter-Church Committee Meeting in Dundalk Pastoral Centre, September.
- 05 Discussion Panel on Educational Disadvantage at ICC Executive Meeting at the Duncairn Centre, Belfast.
- 06 Fr Patrick White, Director of Youthlink NI, Dr Barbara McDade from Stranmillis University College Dr Irvin Scott, Founder and Director of LIFE and ICC General Secretary Dr Nicola Brady at the inaugural convening of the Leadership Institute for Faith and Education (LIFE) at Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- 07 Kevin Conmy, Joint Secretary at Belfast Secretariat of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade speaking at the AGM.

**CAPTIONS (P13)**

- 01 Adrian Cristea, Sr Sheila Curran (AMRI) and Dr Damian Jackson outside the United Methodist Building in Washington.

**CAPTIONS (P14-15)**

- 01 Bishop Brendan Leahy speaking at the Irish Inter-Church Meeting at Dromantine Retreat Centre in October.
- 02 Rev Brian Anderson, ICC President, welcoming those attending the IICM.
- 03 Philip Orr delivering an address to the attendees of the 29th IICM
- 04 Youthlink panel discussion — Representatives of YouthLink shared their thoughts on Youth and the future in Northern Ireland.
- 05 Sr Concilio Rock contributing to discussion.
- 06 IICM delegates during a panel session.

**CAPTIONS (P16-19)**

- 01 European Affairs Committee in the European Parliament Office, Dublin.
- 02 Mothers' Union 'Souls of our Shoes' Exhibition, Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin.
- 03 CTBI’s Invest in Peace programme with the Jewish Community.

**CAPTIONS (P20-21)**

- 01 In September 2018, 22 brave people took part in Christian Aid Ireland’s first ever skydive, including 66-year-old Rachel McCormick, (front row second from left) who manages Christian Aid Ireland’s charity shop, The Changing Rooms, Garvagh, Co Armagh. The skydive managed to raise a massive £70,000 thanks to EU match funding — every £1 raised was worth £5. Donations went towards the charities ‘Breaking the Barriers’ campaign for Harvest, 2018. This project aims to increase rural women’s involvement in sustainable energy in places like Ethiopia.
- 02 Christian Aid Ireland’s Chief Executive Officer, Rosamond Bennett, speaking to villagers in Aweil, South Sudan in December 2017. Christian Aid has been working in the region since the 1970’s.

## ICC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2018

### **President**

Rev Brian Anderson

### **Vice-President**

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

### **Immediate Past President**

Rt Rev John McDowell

### **Hon Treasurer**

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Dr Nicola Brady

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Mr William Hunter

### **Cherubim and Seraphim Church**

Most Senior Apostle Olusola  
Obube

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Pastor Stephan Arras

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Rev Lorraine Kennedy-Ritchie  
Rev Trevor Gribben

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Pastor Tunde Adebayo-Oke

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Rachel Bewley-Bateman

### **Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland**

Rev Fr Godfrey O'Donnell

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Vacant

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Rev Brian Anderson

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Dr Nicola Brady

### **Joint Secretary**

Very Rev Kieran McDermott

### **ICC Past President**

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### **ICC Vice-President**

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### **Methodist Church**

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### **Salvation Army**

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### **Cherubim and Seraphim**

Most Senior Apostle Olusola  
Obube

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Rt Rev Dr Charles McMullen  
(Moderator PCI)  
Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke (Col  
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### **ICC Vice-President**

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### **Joint Secretary IICC**

Very Rev Kieran McDermott

### **ICC Hon Treasurer**

Mr Jonathan Wilson

### **General Secretary**

Dr Nicola Brady

### **Co-opted**

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