

Churches  
in Ireland  
Connecting  
in Christ

Irish Council  
of Churches



2019  
Annual Report

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## ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2019

	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



## PRESIDENT —Report

WRITER  
Rev Brian Anderson

In February ecumenism in Ireland lost a great servant in Fr Godfrey O'Donnell. I was privileged to represent ICC at his funeral service in Dublin, which was a deeply moving spiritual occasion. Lead by the Regional Bishop and Priests from his own denomination, a number of ecumenical guests were welcomed to share in the service. I felt it was the churches in Ireland giving thanks for a faithful servant. He was truly a man of God, full of wisdom, gentleness

and generosity. Many paid tributes to Fr Godfrey's Ministry where he made a difference to individuals' lives while bringing grace and insight to his beloved Romanian Orthodox church and then to the churches in Ireland. We remember his wife Ruth and family and the difficult days that are ahead.

Godfrey was President of ICC from 2012-2013 and in his 2012 President's Report he wrote

*"As Churches in Ireland we are working hard to be truly for one another in Christ, working together to make known that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1Tim 1:15), our 'God and Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1Tim 2:3-4). But, in this enterprise it is essential that*

*we have some awareness of the context in which we work, and what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today."*

This beautifully reflects the role of ICC. It is my opinion that ecumenism is in a healthy state in Ireland today. On many social issues troubling Ireland, we speak with broadly a common voice, and where we differ, so we disagree well. Mature relationships are important to the working of ICC and we are careful to maintain these. I am glad that our work together does not have a lowest common denominator approach, but we respect each other's theological stand on social and justice issues, yet speak often prophetically.

That said we still have work to do — the work to promote the Biblical narrative of inclusion captured in Paul's Words that in Christ *"there is neither*

Right at the heart with the people of the city is the Church of Christ, seeking to share in the issues people face. As it should be.

*Jew nor Gentile, neither is there slave or free, nor is there male and female, for you all are one in Christ”*

This was brought home to me while sitting with a group of local church leaders listening to the encouraging stories of ways in which local churches have supported their communities to welcome those seeking asylum in Ireland, while at the same time reflecting on the many challenges encountered in this work.

In Northern Ireland I fear that the term 'peace and reconciliation' has become a tired phrase. Maybe it is time to put new words around it, to help create a new narrative and energy. I believe there is a willingness of churches to shape these conversations. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland's contribution through the publication of *Considering Grace* is an important example and we have welcomed opportunities for other churches to join in these reflections. It has helped fill the space with new thought and I hope churches can bring in new, younger voices to help shape a society that is grace filled and not estranged from each other.

In both these areas the Church gives a strong voice to being enemies of none and friends to all. One of the challenges for ICC is to help support engagement with these issues at the level of local ecumenical partnerships.

Looking to the future, there are significant conversations about identity on the horizon, some of which will be captured, at least in part, by the forthcoming centenaries marking the establishment of the two jurisdictions on this island. As all-island ecumenical institutions, the ICC and IICM have an opportunity to approach these conversations in a way that facilitates and enables a sharing of Ireland today.

As I prepare to leave the office of President, I wish to thank all my colleagues and friends within Irish Council of Churches for their prayers, encouragement and wisdom, but particularly for their patience with me. I wish my successor Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson, every encouragement as he prepares to take up office. I hope he finds the role and engagement as fulfilling as I did.

On behalf of the ICC Management Committee and executive I would wish

to record the hard work that Nicola Brady, Damian Jackson and Megan Ross have brought this year. They have a considerable passion for social justice, they understand the place of the Church in Ireland today and they are respected ambassadors for the Council. It has been great to welcome Rebecca Schwindt to the team and she will bring a lovely spirit and talent to the team.

One profound memory I will take with me from my time as President is from Clonard Monastery. It's from the window overlooking west and north Belfast (it is featured on our Brexit document). Just below the window is one of the so-called "peace lines" and then as you lift your gaze you see figures of terrace housing surrounded by industry, roads and shops. Then looking higher are the steeples of the churches, and there are many. Right at the heart with the people of the city is the Church of Christ, seeking to share in the issues people face. As it should be.



## HONORARY TREASURER — Report Year 2019

WRITER  
Jonathan Wilson

The accounts for 2019 continue to track closely with agreed budgets for both unrestricted and restricted funds. The deficit for the year represents how the national inter-church structures undertook some significant new initiatives, continuing to increase the profile and expand the outreach of the work. This was made possible through a combination of grant funding and partnership working to maximise the return on the investment made by our member churches in this work. Further, we invested in the fabric of the Inter Church Centre to meet health and safety requirements and ongoing maintenance.

In particular, we are deeply grateful to Churches Together in Britain and

Ireland (CTBI) for the renewal of the funding that supports the work of the Programme Officer, allowing the ICC and the Catholic Bishops' Conference to continue this work for a further three years. This followed an evaluation of the work by the Inter-Church Committee which confirmed the need for continued investment in the coming years to build on the progress made to date. We continue to operate in a volatile environment for foreign exchange risk, given the macro economic situation brought about by Brexit. Whilst our accounts show a significant charge in 2019 we translate funds when received to match agreed budgets in the local currency.

In 2019 the Irish Inter-Church Committee agreed to invest funds from reserves in the development of a resource, and associated outreach initiative, on the theme of housing and homelessness. This was identified as a priority area of concern at the level of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting and provides an important opportunity to support and affirm the contribution that local churches and faith-based

initiatives are making in this area. The feedback to date has been encouraging and the project will continue to run throughout 2020.

Over the course of 2019 the Joint Management Committee (JMC) continued its review of financial planning and reporting in consultation with member churches. Once again, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the significant support from our member churches, both in terms of prompt payment of member subscriptions and in other contributions offered in support of the work, including venues for meetings and staff time and expertise. This makes it possible for a small staff team in ICC/IICM to coordinate cooperation on a wide range of issues and facilitate inter-church engagement across the island of Ireland.

We have updated our risk register in light of the potential challenges that may arise from the outworking of Brexit. Prominent among these risks are a challenging investment environment and the potential for exchange rate volatility. The JMC has taken steps to minimise the impact of these risks and will continue to pay close attention to these areas over the coming year.

The work plan for 2020 once again prioritises partnership working and the exploration of external funding opportunities to make the most efficient use possible of effective resources.

At the level of the staff team, we are delighted to welcome Rebecca Schwindt as our new Finance and Administration Assistant. I would like to thank all the staff for their contribution over the past year. Finally, I would like to thank colleagues on the ICC Executive, Inter-Church Committee and the Joint Management Committee for their commitment and support.

# GENERAL SECRETARY —Report

WRITER  
Dr Nicola Brady



In May 2019 I had the opportunity to undertake an Eisenhower Fellowship in the United States to support my work with ICC. The Eisenhower Fellowships programme was established in 1953 as a gift to then President Dwight D. Eisenhower to mark his first birthday celebrated in the White House. The Fellowship programme was to provide a legacy that reflected Eisenhower's desire to promote global peace and security through international cooperation. Each year the programme brings fellows from around the world to the US for a six-week leadership development programme and sends a cohort of US fellows to two different countries for a similar experience. In 1989 a special programme for the island of Ireland was established to help promote peace and cross-border cooperation by bringing a cohort of fourteen fellows, seven from each jurisdiction on the island, to the US for a programme that involved both individual leadership development and relationship-building as a group. The 1989 fellows founded an Irish chapter of Eisenhower Fellows and organised a further special programme for Ireland in 2019 to mark the 30th anniversary of the original Island of Ireland programme.

The central objective of my fellowship project was to examine the factors that contribute positively to building community and overcoming societal divisions — political, cultural, ethnic/racial, socio-economic — with an emphasis on leadership, and the faith sector in particular. There were two sub-themes: (i) Women's leadership; (ii) Mental health and wellbeing.

A major area of learning was around theories of collective impact, which have been gaining momentum in the US as a response to societal challenges, supported by researchers in the leading academic institutions. In an article by John Kania and Mark Kramer for the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2011), collective impact is defined as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem”. It is distinguished from informal collaboration by the existence of a formally agreed framework that allows partners to develop and maintain a common agenda and monitor progress towards achievement of objectives. On Fellowship I gathered case studies on collaborative responses to complex social problems — educational disadvantage, food poverty, gang violence — in different regions across the US.

On my return from Fellowship I have been examining how this learning might inform the work of ICC/IICM. On behalf of our member churches we facilitate collaborative responses to the kind of issues described by Kania and Kramer as “adaptive social problems”, meaning complex problems where “the answer is not known, and even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change”.

The question of resources (both in terms of finance and time pressure on staff and volunteers) is significant, not only for our member churches, but also across the community and voluntary sector. Grants to support community initiatives are increasingly targeted at collaborative initiatives which are considered to offer the best return on funding.

A distinguishing feature of collective impact responses is a focus on relationships. The starting point is to identify a body with the convening authority to get people in the room, then to facilitate a dialogue leading to the agreement of a common agenda and the development of an action plan that identifies where the necessary resources will come from and how success is to be measured. Clear and regular communication is required to keep all partners on board as the programme evolves and adapts in response to changing circumstances. Invariably, the most successful collective impact initiatives are those that allow people to build on their existing expertise and make the most of what they are already doing. There are clear parallels between this methodology and the working patterns developed by the national inter-church structures.

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meetings and spending time together in prayer and reflection.

Specifically, this year, at the request of members of the Irish Inter-Church Committee, our Programme Officer organised a meeting with the Orthodox churches, including those who are not currently members of our structures. This was a valuable opportunity to exchange perspectives on a wide range of issues and identify shared priorities. Members have requested that this be repeated in the future.

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Another area which is covered in more detail in the Programme Officer's report is the support for local inter-church work. The ICC and IICM aim to support and encourage collaboration and relationship-building between local churches and ensure that the work of the national inter-church structures is shaped and informed by experiences at local level. For example, the 2019 ICC AGM included a panel session with representatives of local churches in the Lurgan area. It was an opportunity to hear about the major social issues impacting the community and the unfinished work of peace and reconciliation. Church representatives shared their reflections on how inter-church cooperation and the forming of friendships across traditional boundaries supports and encourages them as they seek to bring Christian witness to the surrounding community.

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### Deepening Relationships

The primary function of the ICC and the IICM is to facilitate the deepening of relationships between our member churches and those relationships provide the essential foundation for collaborative action. As reflected in our mission statement 'Churches in Ireland — Connecting in Christ', we

seek to promote a unity that values the diversity of the different expressions of our Christian faith. We do this by providing spaces for both formal and informal sharing at meetings from the perspective of the different denominations. It is further developed by making visits to member churches as part of our Committee

### Climate Justice

The other major thematic focus at the 2019 AGM was climate justice. The keynote address was given by Professor John Barry, specialist in green political economy, responding to the publication by the Irish Inter-Church Meeting of a series of affirmations on climate justice. Professor Barry highlighted the unique role churches can play in the response to climate breakdown by providing a narrative

of hope, courage and creation to motivate people to both individual and collective change. Church representatives were challenged to have courage in the face of this crisis and to use their resources and credibility to promote changes, big or small, throughout their congregations. Professor Barry explored climate breakdown as a cultural and ethical, and not merely physical, phenomenon and began to draw on the rich frameworks found in faith communities for addressing this ethical challenge and opportunity of the ecological crisis. He presented the cardinal virtues as a guide to action with justice understood in terms of a 'just transition' to a more environmentally ethical way of living; fortitude and courage as the antidote to the feelings of despair that can inhibit responses; temperance as a challenge to the culture of materialism that fuels abuse of the earth's resources; and prudence as a reminder to exercise wisdom in the decisions we make about the future of our planet.

The address concluded with a call to action and an opportunity for participants to share ideas about practical initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns churches could undertake. In preparation, we had collated information from member churches' current activities in this space into a resource directory. The affirmations were drafted in a workshop which brought together some of those leading on these issues for our member churches, as well as representatives of Christian Aid, Trócaire and Eco-Congregation. They set out a common understanding of our approach as Christians to these issues. This was followed up with a series of articles on our blog to stimulate reflection and encourage action.

### **Peace and Reconciliation**

At the level of the ICC and IICM we seek to add value to the peace-building initiatives undertaken by our member churches by providing space where staff and volunteers working on these issues can exchange ideas and information. During 2019 the main areas of focus were on dealing with the legacy of the conflict, and tackling the enduring problem of sectarianism.

In the early part of 2019 we continued our programme of local events in support of the Church Leaders' civil society dialogue initiative, bringing together a wide cross section of community leaders with a cross-party group of MLAs, to examine the impact of the political impasse and the role of civil society in supporting efforts to restore the devolved institutions. These events provided a unique space at a critical time. Church Leaders subsequently presented the findings to party leaders, the Secretary of State and the Tánaiste during the May 2019 negotiations. I was invited to discuss the process and learning at the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Forum in March.

This experience really underlined the role that local churches working together can play in creating the conditions for informed and respectful dialogue. During the year I had several opportunities to support this kind of work by local inter-church groups and individual churches: I gave an address on the theme of forgiveness at the closing event of the Four Corners Festival; I facilitated a discussion on responses to sectarianism at an event in the Duncairn Centre, North Belfast, for International Day of Peace and I chaired the plenary discussion at the Faith and Life Convention of the Diocese of Down and Connor

on the theme of 'Faith in a Better World', where I later presented a workshop with Fr Martin Magill on the theme 'The Church: A Voice for Peace'.

Our working group on legacy met with representatives of the Northern Ireland Office in January to discuss interim findings from their publication and share key points arising from member churches' individual consultation responses. The legacy working group has also been reflecting on the learning arising from the research conducted on behalf of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland by Dr Gladys Ganiel and Jamie Yohanis of Queen's University Belfast. I was invited to give a response, reflecting some of this inter-church engagement, at the launch of the publication arising from that research, *Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles*.

In July we were invited by the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs to partner with them in organising a seminar to examine the response of the churches and the business community to the findings of the report *Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: A Review* commissioned by the Sir George Quigley Fund. We later prepared a written response to the report.

Over the coming year we will continue to collaborate to ensure available resources and expertise are used to best effect to promote the Christian vision for peace and reconciliation.

### **Brexit**

We have continued to support our member churches in engagement on the issues arising from Brexit. The framework for an exploration of the pastoral dimensions of Brexit, elaborated in the dialogue project

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funded by the Community Relations Council in 2018 remains relevant. I continued to attend the meetings convened by the Irish Government as part of its Civic Dialogue on Brexit and, in October, we hosted the trustees of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, to consider issues arising from Brexit in a four nations context.

### Communications

As highlighted in the theme for this year's Irish Inter-Church Meeting (see separate report) how we can best collaborate in the area of communications to amplify the Christian voice in the public square is a recurring theme in our work. The bi-annual meetings of Church Communications Officers remain an important element of the work plan. This has supported collective engagement in other areas, notably in the Church Leaders' meetings with the Public Service Broadcasters on the island. A meeting with the Director General and senior staff at RTÉ took place in September 2019 and provided an opportunity for a wide-ranging and very encouraging conversation.

### Tackling Poverty and Disadvantage

In our reflections on the collective Christian witness we seek to bring to the public square, the protection of

the most vulnerable members of our society, and the promotion of the common good, will always be to the fore. The Programme Officer's report outlines the process that led to our initiative on housing and homelessness, which arose out of the 2017 Irish Inter-Church Meeting examining pastoral issues impacting the family across the island of Ireland. It is vital that the work of the inter-church structures builds on, and complements, the work that is already being done by member churches and the wider faith-based sector. Similarly, in relation to the impact of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit in Northern Ireland, we were able to contribute to a submission by the Church Leaders' group to the Joint Inquiry by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee at Westminster in July. We drew on the learning and contacts from our working group on welfare reform to include case studies from member churches and faith-based services illustrating the impact of these policies on vulnerable people.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank Committee members, and the President and Joint Management Committee in particular, for supporting me to un-

dertake an Eisenhower Fellowship and for the interest shown by Committee members in implementing the learning and building on the contacts to enhance the work of the ICC and IICM. It has been a great encouragement to me, and to my colleagues. I am very grateful for the work of our Communications Assistant Megan and our Programme Officer Damian and for all they have contributed to raising the profile of our inter-church engagement during the year. As we begin 2020 I am delighted to welcome Rebecca Schwindt to the team as our new Finance Assistant. Together we look forward to building on the work completed during 2019 to maximise the collective impact of our member churches in the public square.

### CAPTIONS (P8-10)

- 01 Members of the IICC Expanded Meeting with representatives of Orthodox Churches in Ireland
- 02 Fr Mikhail Nazonov with Rev Anderson at their Bi-lateral meeting in February
- 03 Church Leaders meeting political leaders at Stormont talks in May
- 04 Prof. John Barry (QUB) speaking on Climate Breakdown at the AGM in April 2019
- 05 Members of the Irish chapter of Eisenhower Fellows



## PROGRAMME OFFICER —Report

WRITER

Dr Damian Jackson

I was employed at the end of 2016, funded by ICC, the Catholic Bishops and CTBI, as Programme Officer on a three year contract with the objectives of supporting local inter-church engagement through building capacity, developing networks, linking local to national ecumenical work, building connections with non-member churches and partners in Britain, and facilitating action on issues of priority to the national ecumenical instruments. In a review of the role in 2018 the IICC identified the following priorities:

- produce resources for local inter-church engagement
- write up accounts of local inter-church initiatives
- continue visits to border/remote areas
- bridge communications gap between local and national
- expand social media presence
- promote meetings between established churches and new churches

### Conference on local-inter-church engagement

One of the highlights of the year was the first island-wide conference on local inter-church engagement which we organised in Benburb with the aim of building capacity in this area. It was co-sponsored by the Irish School of Ecumenics with the support of the Community Relations Council NI.

Seventy people from Cork to Coleraine, Sligo to Rosslare gathered to form connections, network and exchange ideas, practices and stories with one another.

Rev Johnston McMaster provided a provocative foundation for subsequent round-table conversations, which can be read on the ICC blog at <http://bit.ly/ICCMcMaster>

### Key questions for ecumenical engagement today

In his analysis, Rev McMaster highlighted societal trends that point to two questions that I believe are now of imminent importance for the churches in Ireland. Firstly, we will need to ally with others who are also engaged on the issues with which we are concerned. Have we the courage to work with people where we have a common cause, even if we (perhaps strongly) disagree with them on other matters? The difficulty is that the pushback against such collaboration often comes

from without our own traditions. Therefore the public leadership and witness of national church leaders is much needed and appreciated here, and the support of the ICC members for ecumenical work is so valued.

Secondly, and related, is the question of identity. Rev McMaster pointed out that our identity is multilayered and complex. Our tendency to elide that complexity and regard identity as monolithic makes it more difficult to collaborate with, or have empathy for, other excluded groups as they are identified discursively as “other”. The challenge for us here is to open our identity to enquiry, seeking to plumb our deeper understandings of ourselves and the “other” as both being beloved children of God to effect our unity (not uniformity) in Christ with one another, and in humanity with all.

### Inter-church engagement on the ground

I have seen how these questions have come into play in much of my work this year. During the year I have met people working together in Donegal, Drogheda, Dun Laoghaire, Carlow, Sligo, Monaghan and Dublin. In each place, people are working out how they can be salt in their communities.

For example, in Monaghan, the church leaders and I have met with the county council’s project managers of the new Peace Campus which will be built with European funding over the next few years, to make sure that the role of churches in local history is acknowledged, and the future programme of the centre provides for the involvement of churches and faith communities in its activities.

In another context, the Rathmines-Terenure fellowship initiated a process which has led to the establishment of the HomeFromHomeD6 community sponsorship programme, which involves many people not connected with the churches. This has led to the welcoming of a family from Syria into their community in December.



Dr Damian Jackson, Fr Peter McVerry Rev Ása Björk Ólafsdóttir, William Blackall and Rev Brian Anderson at the Launch of the IICM Housing and Homelessness Resources at Christ Church Dun Laoghaire in September

### Migration and Asylum work

The ICC is very concerned at the increase in anti-immigrant sentiment apparent in some of the protests against proposed new direct provision or emergency accommodation centres for asylum seekers and we are therefore developing a workplan for engagement on this issue. I have been asked by the Irish Network Against Racism to explore how churches can play a role in challenging racist and anti-immigrant discourses in Ireland.

As a member of the steering group of the Churches' Refugee Network, I have been involved in organising a series of symposia on different aspects of migration policy and practice, seeking to provide a space in which churches can learn from policymakers, each other, and other NGOs active in the area, to build capacity and networks so that their work can be more effective. So far we have organised events on the decision-making process of asylum applications, and on refugee integration.

### Broadening Connections with Orthodox Churches

I was delighted to be invited to speak at the Coptic Orthodox Church in St. Maximus and St. Domatius in Drumcondra, as well as meeting with rep-

resentatives of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, and speaking in a wonderful celebration of the incarnation at the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox church carol service. In November, the ICC met for the first time in the Russian Orthodox Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and St Paul in Harold's Cross.

The expanded meeting of the IICC in May hosted a round-table discussion on Orthodoxy in Ireland which the leaders of the Antiochian, Greek, Coptic, Ethiopian, Russian, Syrian and Indian orthodox churches attended. It was the first time such a broad representation of orthodox churches had been gathered together and provided a template for future such gatherings which we will facilitate periodically.

### Housing Insecurity and Homelessness

Finally, a major project for us in 2019 was the development and promotion of our resources on housing insecurity and homelessness. These can be downloaded from [irishchurches.org/homeless](http://irishchurches.org/homeless) and comprise:

- A joint statement of pastoral concern from the Irish Inter-Church Committee
- A small group study resource which examines the meaning of

home in the history of God's interactions with his people and seeks to stimulate discussion exploring how we might therefore respond as Christians to the societal and political contexts we inhabit today

- A one page resource with questions on homelessness and housing insecurity to ask politicians canvassing at election time
- A liturgical resource for use in church services

The study resource focuses thematically on the meaning of home in scripture; the implications for our mental and societal wellbeing if that is threatened; how our economic and housing policies render systemic housing insecurity unavoidable, how we as Christians should respond, and what we may need to give up for a more just structure to pertain.

### Looking forward...

I'm delighted that my contract has been extended for a further three years, thankful for the faith placed in me by CTBI, the Catholic Bishops and ICC member churches in providing the funding, and look forward to developing the role to focus on the priority areas identified by the ICC/IICC for the next three years.

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## IICM —Report

### Preface

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.

### WRITER

Dr Nicola Brady

The 30th Irish Inter-Church Meeting took place in Dromantine Conference Centre, Newry, from 21st to 22nd November 2019. Choosing the theme ‘Church in a Changing Public Square’, the Inter-Church Committee sought to focus participants’ attention on the common themes underlying many of the challenges facing Christian churches in Ireland today, and explore how we can work together to bring a Christian witness to a society in need of hope and healing.

At the outset, the IICM Joint Secretaries, Very Rev Kieran McDermott and Dr Nicola Brady, gave an introduction to the IICM and its theme. Fr Kieran reminded participants that the IICM follows a tradition that dates back to the Ballymascanlon talks of the 1970s and, since that time, has provided a safe space for the Irish churches to come together and build relationships as they discussed some of the most challenging issues facing the churches and wider society. Dr Brady explained that the focus on ‘Church in a Changing Public Square’ provided an opportunity to build on the work that had been done in recent years — notably the ongoing collaboration between the churches’ Communications offices, engagement with the two Public Service Broadcasters on the island (BBC and RTÉ) and the churches’ joint public initiative to raise awareness of issues of housing insecurity and homelessness across the island of Ireland.

The preparatory group which helped shape the programme for the meeting highlighted three critical questions to be addressed in the sessions:

- What are the models of relationship that define how churches currently relate to society?
- What is distinctive about the voice Christian churches bring to the public square?
- How might we best support each other and make best use of resources in this engagement?

Speaking on the theme of ‘Engagement and Outreach in a Post-Digital World’ Ryan Feeney spoke about his experience working with major public institutions: the GAA, Queen’s University Belfast and now the PSNI. He outlined the current media landscape and the crisis of trust that impacts all major institutions. Sharing examples of effective community engagement initiatives in different sectors, he challenged the churches to think collaboratively about the key messages they want to communicate to society, notably a focus on the church-community connection, and how they could work together to ensure this message is replicated across the churches to help shape public discourse.

Theological reflection is central to the shaping of the churches’ engagement in the public square. In a panel discussion entitled ‘Reimagining Public Theology’

we heard perspectives from different areas of work and from both jurisdictions on the island. Rev Abigail Sines, from the Church of Ireland's Christ Church Cathedral, reflected on the biblical principles that underpin the opening of that space as a place of community and encounter. Karen Jardine, Public Affairs Officer for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, spoke about the responsibility of the churches to think creatively about how to communicate



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hat is distinctive about the voice Christian churches bring to the public square?

biblical principles that speak to the complexity of the cultural moment in a way that will be accessible to the wider society.

When we think of the public square the role of the media in shaping public discourse will feature prominently. At this IICM we wanted to recognise that this is also an area where Christians are giving leadership, and one where journalists face increasing challenges as a result of the evolution of the digital space and the threat posed by “fake news”. Sam McBride, Political Editor with *The Newsletter*, shared some of the challenges from his work in seeking to hold elected representatives, in particular, to account. Judith Hill from UTV described how she seeks to give voice to local communities impacted by violence and injustice in her work, as well as highlighting the examples of courageous leadership that can give hope, citing the response of church leaders in East Belfast to paramilitary violence as a recent example.

The second day opened with a training session from media consultant Angelina Fusco on effective communications, outlining the factors to be considered when deciding how to respond to media enquiries, and where to allocate

resources. This was followed by an opportunity for church representatives to share questions arising from their own media engagement and some of the challenges they face in communications and public engagement.

Following a very impactful youth session at last year's IICM it was agreed that future meetings should allocate a session to youth perspectives. This year youth workers and young people working in church communications shared their reflections on the impact of the digital space on the lives of young people. There was a strong challenge for churches to think critically about how they communicate with a generation that responds to engagement rather than authority, and how they create space for young people's leadership.

The final session addressed another major area of public engagement — advocacy to Government. Dermot McCarthy from the Irish School of Ecumenics shared some of the learning from his distinguished career with the Irish Civil Service, with a particular focus on the Irish Government's framework for Church-State dialogue, encouraging churches to be pro-active in shaping the agenda for these encounters.

At the conclusion of the IICM participants were agreed that the programme offered rich and varied material for reflection and that there were real practical implications for how we work together. The Irish Inter-Church Committee will now reflect on the measures that might be adopted to integrate this learning into our future work. This was only the beginning of a conversation that needs to continue and develop with a focus on anticipating future challenges, but it provides a solid foundation for that work.

#### CAPTIONS (P13-14)

- 01 Group discussion at the IICM in Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre, Newry
- 02 Angelina Fusco speaking one the Challenges and Opportunities for Churches in the Digital Space at the IICM
- 03 Church Youth Representatives panel at the IICM.
- 04 IICM evening Worship led by Castlewellan Inter-Church Choir

# EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

## —Report

WRITER  
Dr Kenneth Milne



This, the final report of the committee appointed in 2016, covers a period during which we have been preoccupied with the implications of Brexit for the Irish Churches, having, in association with the Irish Inter-Church Committee, as reported last year, provided our member Churches with *Brexit and the Irish Churches*, a consultation paper on the pastoral dimensions of this historic development.

It seems clear that the European concerns of our Churches in the future fall into two categories: (i) those that are Brexit-related and (ii) those arising from the policies pursued by the newly-appointed European Commission.

(i) Brexit is far from done, and while the United Kingdom has now left the European Union the terms of a new relationship will engage the attention of both parties for at least the remainder of 2020. A period of intense negotiations is anticipated where the Northern Ireland protocol will be a major issue. The fact that the ultimate ‘Withdrawal Act’ was rejected by the Assembly in Northern Ireland (as it was by the devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales) is an indication of the complexity of the negotiations that lie ahead. There seems little doubt that the issues at stake will impinge on society in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, but particularly on Northern Ireland. The Churches need to acknowledge that they may well have a pastoral role

to play, both in promoting informed discussion of these matters among their congregations and by seeking to assuage any negative impacts that emerge.

(ii) (a) While post-Brexit developments are likely to be of most relevance to those of our members resident in the Republic of Ireland they are likely to have consequences for all. The EU has adopted as top of its agenda for ensuing years environmental issues (with which are closely related those arising from mass migration), the ‘digital revolution’, and reform of the Commission’s Institutions. The question of ‘values’, including such human rights as freedom of speech and of religion, will doubtless arise under these headings, and call for vigilance on the part of the Churches.

(ii) (b) It is widely acknowledged that if the Christian voice is to be influential it must be evidence-based and well-informed, and to this end we have availed ourselves of the opportunities presented by events organised by the European Parliament (under Article 17 of the Treaty of Lisbon) and which included a conference held in Brussels in January 2020 to promote ‘The European Green Deal — preserving our Common Home’, and have also been represented at events arranged by the Brexit Institute at Dublin City University.

(iii) As our term of service approached its end, the IIC Executive Committee consulted us as to how best the Council’s responsibilities in European (not simply EU) affairs might be discharged. Our response was that the ICC needed to ensure that the contacts established by the Committee, not least by our visit to Brussels and our discussions with the European Parliament’s office in Dublin and with MEPs should be fostered. Furthermore, we would hope that the ICC would encourage its member Churches to promote their relations with their continental equivalents.

Our final meeting was held (in Belfast) on 10 February 2020. It was chaired by the President of the ICC and attended, at our invitation, by Bishop Noel Treanor who represents the Irish Episcopal Conference on COMECE (the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community). At the conclusion of the meeting the committee agreed to recommend that the ICC and/or the Irish Inter-Church Committee should organise an in-depth consultation with member Churches on the broad area of European relations which would draw on the Committee’s experience and allow member Churches to identify priorities and appropriate structures for the next phase of this work.

## WOMEN'S LINK —Report

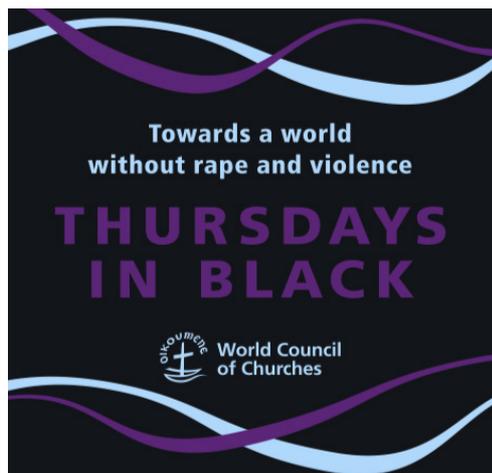
WRITER  
Joyce Bond

Women's Link enables representatives from Women's Church Organisations/ Churches that are members of Irish Council of Churches to meet as a forum to discuss and exchange ideas working on matters concerning the teaching of Christ relative to life in the home, the Church, the community and the world. Contact is made with Christian women's groups inviting them to participate in events when possible to raise awareness and address social justice issues.

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

MULOA - (Mothers' Union Listening, Observing, Acting) a global process designed to develop a strategy to take MU beyond 2020s explored how members can contribute to making a real difference to people's lives. Based on biblical teaching, the programme explored in various sessions the essence of what it means to be Mothers' Union. June Butler All-Ireland President and Iris Suitor attended the Worldwide Council in Rwanda, and MU explored how members could aspire to making a difference in people's lives through gender justice, peace and safety, self-reliance, restored relations with God, the environment, the stigmatised and with each other.

Mothers' Union members attended various events this year covering issues on food provision for children during school holidays and gender justice. MU attended the Church of Ireland seminar on Gender Justice and the PSNI's Domestic Abuse Disclosure Scheme, and a weekend retreat led by Bishop Ken & Helen Clarke



on the theme of "Words of Wisdom" (Proverbs) held in Armagh. Members also participated in prison outreach including the "Read Together" project scheme for prison inmates and their children. MU members funded the material to make Dignity Bags, manufactured by prisoners which enable prisoners to leave prison with more dignity.

On "Black Thursday" Methodist Women Ireland, Mothers' Union and Moravian Women's Association join with others globally to raise awareness of practices that permit rape and violence against women and vulnerable people and call for an end to gender based violence in all forms, in all societies and in our own community for those who are resilient in the face of injustice and violence. N.I. has the highest Domestic Abuse rate in the U.K.

Moravian Women's Association continue fund raising for their Dignity Bag Project and charities. The Away Day was held in Birmingham and the MWA Retreat was held at Shallowford House. Gracehill MWA continues to share fellowship with other organisations locally.

Methodist Women Ireland structure has changed with three districts instead of previous eight, cutting down on duplication of work and meetings. The new, larger areas will each have

different issues. Elizabeth McWatters, MWI President, covered over 35,000 miles worldwide during her time of office overseeing projects, conferences and taking services. The three year Myanmar project is supporting small businesses for women. There have been Women's Conferences in England and Ireland. Mrs Joan Strong became President in June and her inauguration service together with commissioning for Area representatives took place in Glengormley

World Day of Prayer 2019 service theme was "Come - Everything is Ready". Voices of people, refugees, migrant workers and women of Slovenia were heard. Elaine Barnett and Judith Anderson (NI Executive Committee) attended the Link Day Service in London in preparation for the 2020 service prepared by Christian women of Zimbabwe. Funds have been set aside to assist candidates from N.I. who wish to attend the Y-Pray Conference 1-3 May 2020 in Northampton. Four representatives from N.I. are on the writing group for the 2022 Order of Service.

This year the Women's Link Fellowship day will take place on Saturday 30th May from 10:30am. The venue for this meeting is Newry Methodist Church where Rev Annie Deche will be the keynote speaker on the theme 'Our true identity with Christ'.

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## 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

Partnership working has continued to deepen between our two organisations at various levels. This is at both a grass roots level but also at Board level where information sharing and a CTBI Trustee visit to Belfast has deepened understanding and support for the work of the Irish Council of Churches.

The grass roots work includes several different strands, with a particular focus on asylum, refugees and migration. The participation of the ICC Programme Officer in the Steering Group of the Churches' Refugee Network (CRN)

ensures there is an Irish dimension to its work. Damian spoke at the CRN's meeting in London on asylum on 30 September 2019. He highlighted the way asylum issues are handled in the Republic of Ireland. He then arranged for Dublin based Salvation Army Captain Ashley Progdgers to speak at the CRN's event on 30 January 2020 in London. The CRN plans to meet in the Republic of Ireland in 2021 (no date has been agreed) and we will work closely with the ICC to deliver this.

CTBI and ICC have been collaborating in the promotion of the Church of Sanctuary (COS) movement. On 23 June 2019, Church of Sanctuary held a service in Christ Church Cathedral where the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal OBE, was guest preacher. COS worked closely with Damian Jackson to plan and deliver this. COS has been working with the ICC to plan a Church of Sanctuary Conference on Saturday, 25 April 2020 from 10:30 to 16:30 at Dublin Central Mission, Dublin with both Richard Reddie, CTBI's Director of Justice and Inclusion, and Inderjit Bhogal in attendance.

The ICC have been asked to contribute material for a proposed book looking at racial justice issues over the last 25 years. The ICC contribution will look at Ireland.

In July 2019, the ICC facilitated a visit to Belfast on the theme of serious youth violence (SYV) which included an

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opportunity to meet with Youth Link: NI where Director Fr Paddy White outlined their work with young people to steer them clear of SYV. This initiative is cross community based, ensuring that it addresses the obvious sectarian issues at play in this region.

In October 2019 CTBI Trustees made a 24 hour visit to Belfast. The purpose was to hear at first hand the effects of the Brexit process on communities across Ireland, with a particular focus on cross border communities. They also heard a range of stories about aspects of reconciliation which remain inspiring and humbling. The speakers, along with briefings by Nicola Brady and Damian Jackson, meant that CTBI Trustees left with a clear sense of what continued support for ICC work really means, along with the need to continue listening closely to needs and aspirations of fellow Christians as we seek to work more closely together.

At this time we would also want to pay a special tribute to Fr Godfrey O'Donnell. During his time as President of ICC he showed a great desire to welcome, but also to listen to what other churches and councils are saying. His warmth and his humanity will long be remembered and valued.



## CHRISTIAN AID —Update

WRITER  
Rosamond Bennett  
Chief Executive Officer  
Christian Aid Ireland

From time to time, you meet someone who makes a huge impression, someone whose story stays with you. In October 2018, while I was visiting our projects in South Sudan, I met Asunta Aduong.

Asunta was tall, strong and vocal. Speaking through a translator, she told me that she had been displaced from her home by conflict. She and her seven children were getting by on one meal a day, bulked up with foraged leaves and a paste made from groundnuts. But it was her determination that struck me, the certainty that her life and the lives of her children couldn't continue like this.

A year later, in October 2019, I returned to the same remote village to see how Asunta's life had changed for the better, thanks to a Christian Aid project tackling malnutrition. The project provides tools, seeds and training to allow people to grow vegetables and eat a more balanced diet.

Asunta had grown enough maize and sorghum to feed her family. She was especially proud of the bananas and tomatoes she'd grown and brought me an armful to illustrate her achievement. She also showed me the money she's made from selling her surplus produce at the local market. Gone is the tense woman from last year and in her place a smiling, successful farmer. She told me: "I am very happy to see you. I am very happy now. Come and see me again in January and you will see my tomatoes and my eggplants."

In one of the most food insecure countries on earth, the generosity of our supporters enables me to tell you that in 2019, this project did not see a single case of malnutri-

tion among the under-5s and their mums.

Elsewhere too it is infants and their mothers who are among the most vulnerable. During Christian Aid Week in May, we told the story of our work in Sierra Leone, the most dangerous country in which to give birth. Ten women die there in childbirth every day and one child in every nine will die before reaching their 5th birthday. But Christian Aid is bringing hope to women like Jebbeh Konneh who was pregnant when we first met her and feeling anxious. She had already lost two babies and her sister Fatmata had died in labour. But with the help of a new health centre and a dedicated maternity nurse, Jebbeh gave birth safely. And when I met her on a recent trip to Sierra Leone, she was carrying her baby boy whom she had named Asumana. She told us: "I feel relieved with joy and happiness. With the help Christian Aid gave me, my child and I are healthy."

This is our Christian belief in action, helping people from all faiths and none. The prayerful solidarity and



financial support of our sponsoring churches, alongside the Irish and UK governments, is enabling us to tackle poverty among some of the poorest people on earth.

Our work to reduce suffering has been shaped by the warmth and wisdom of our Board Chair, Rev Dr Liz Hughes. Her experience of peace-building and global mission is guiding Christian Aid Ireland and inspiring us to be a better, stronger organisation.

But Christian Aid doesn't just work to reduce poverty; we also challenge its structural causes - the unequal power relations that keep people poor - like gender inequality, caste discrimination and first-world tax policies that deprive poor countries of desperately needed revenue. And one of the biggest causes of poverty in today's world is climate change, a problem which is experienced most by those who have done least to cause it.

Last summer's monsoon season brought flooding, misery and death to south-east Asia. And in March, Cyclone Idai devastated lives and livelihoods across Mozambique, Zimba-

bwe and Malawi. You have responded generously to each call for emergency relief.

You have also supported our long-term development work, building resilience to a changing climate. In Kenya, your donations have built sand dams to prevent the evaporation of water from river beds during the dry season, allowing farmers to irrigate their crops. And in Bangladesh, your support is enabling us to protect the homes most vulnerable to flooding by elevating them on earth banks.

But we also need to respond to the causes of this climate emergency - by minimising our carbon emissions, ensuring that our pensions funds are not supporting the development of fossil fuels and raising our voices to demand large-scale action by government. This year, we pray that world leaders will find the courage to make deep cuts in our carbon emissions to tackle this climate emergency.

We are incredibly grateful to the churches, congregations and communities who inspire and enable our work to end poverty and injustice. May we

all continue to work together for a new climate of hope, a brighter future in which everyone can live a dignified life, free from suffering.

God bless.

#### CAPTIONS (P15-19)

- 01 World Council of Churches Thursdays in Black logo
- 02 CTBI staff and trustees marking Thursdays in Black during their visit to Belfast
- 03 Moderator of CTBI, HE Archbishop Angaelos with Dr Katy Hayward during the CTBI visit to Belfast
- 04 South Sudan: Asunta Aduong (centre), a participant in a Christian Aid farming project. Asunta and her friend (left) showed Rosamond Bennett her harvest of bananas and tomatoes – and the cash she's earned selling the surplus produce at the market.
- 05 Sierra Leone: Jebbeh Konneh gave birth to a baby boy named Asumana with the help of a Christian Aid funded health centre and a dedicated maternity nurse

## IN MEMORIAM

**Rev Dr John Stephens, BSc, BD, MSc, DMin**

May 26th 1961 - May 7th 2019

*Rev Dr John Stephens, a former member of the ICC Executive, Inter-Church Committee and the Joint Management Committee sadly died on 7th May 2019. Before his retirement on health grounds he made a significant contribution to the work of the national inter-church structures through his gentle wisdom and constant words of encouragement.*

John Stephens, BSc, BD, MSc, DMin, was born in Belfast on 26th May 1961. He was the second child of John and Kathleen Stephens and was brought up on the Shankill Road, Belfast, with a strong sense of family and community. In 2016 he particularly appreciated the opportunity to return with ICC colleagues to the area where he was born and baptised when the Executive met in the Lower Shankill area to connect with local clergy and community representatives. He was passionate about supporting and encouraging churches in the outreach to those who find themselves marginalised or vulnerable.

His early academic career took the form of a BSc in Statistics. The Methodist Church in particular, and other Christian churches by extension through ICC/IICM, would benefit immensely from his keen analytical mind and his focus on the hard facts of realities that were often challenging.

His faith journey was shaped by family life and early professional experience in Dublin Central Mission, where he served as Assistant Circuit Steward and undertook Local Preacher training. Whilst in Dublin, he met Gillian McCormick and they were married in 1987. Their first thought was to serve God in the Gambia and it was there that he felt the call to ordained ministry. Upon their return to Ireland, he took the position of Evangelist on the Charlemont and Cranagill Circuit.



Accepted as a candidate, he entered Edgehill College in 1990 and during this time, Sara and Laura were born. His first appointment was to the Portlaoise Circuit and the family was completed with the birth of Rachel. In 1998, he was stationed to student Chaplaincy in Dublin and he undertook a Doctorate of Ministry from Fuller Theological College, completing it in 2005. He was appointed to Dublin Central Mission in 2005 and spent 14 very happy years leading a multi-ethnic church, and creating a place of welcome and encouragement for all.

Dr Stephens' experience, both national and international, in seeking to shine the light of the Gospel on the major challenges facing individuals and communities and discern how the resources of the church could be used to best effect in this context greatly enriched the work of the ICC and IICM.

In 2014, Dr Stephens was appointed Secretary of Conference for the Methodist Church in Ireland and he undertook a Master's degree in Executive Management to equip him for this role. His wisdom, energy and insight made a considerable impact in the short time that he held this position. The national inter-church structures benefitted from this experience and leadership through the Joint Management Committee where he was unfailing in his support to the staff team, regularly taking time to assist and advise, helping to ensure that the work was consistently relevant to the priority concerns of member churches.

In December 2017, he was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour which he faced with a quiet determination that inspired many. He died on 7 May 2019, in the fifty-eighth year of his life and the twenty-sixth year of his ministry. His body was laid to rest in Shanganagh Cemetery, County Dublin.

## IN MEMORIAM

### Rev Fr Godfrey O'Donnell

November 9th 1939 - February 14th 2020

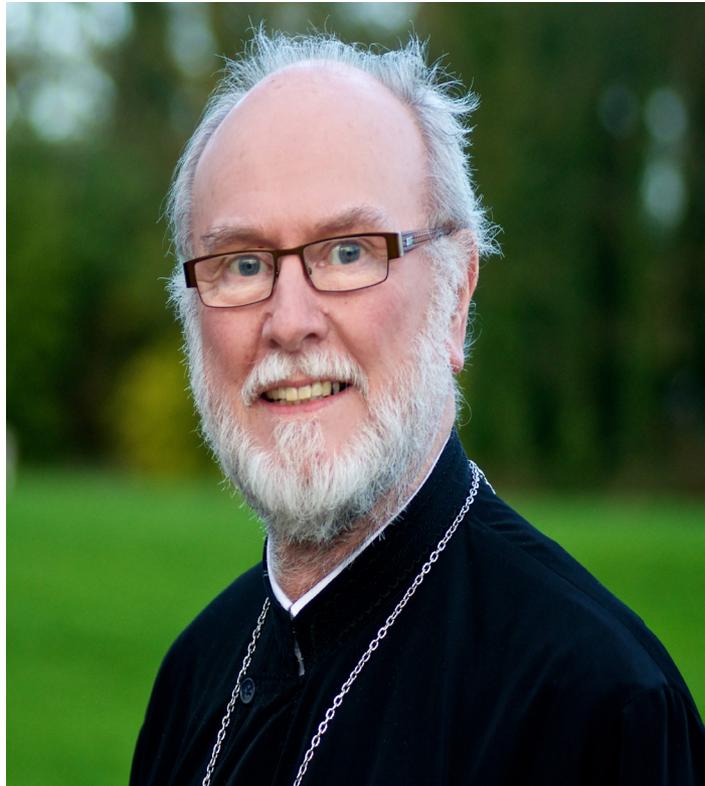
*Rev Fr Godfrey O'Donnell, former President of the ICC and Co-Chair of the IICM, passed away on Friday 14th February, in his home in Swords. He is remembered with great fondness by all who worked with him, across the Irish churches and further afield, because of his generosity, gentleness, welcoming nature and dedication to church unity.*

Born in Co. Derry/Londonderry, Fr Godfrey served as a Jesuit priest for 28 years before leaving the order. He married Ruth and later joined the Romanian Orthodox Church, becoming instrumental in its establishment in Ireland. In 2004 he became the first Irish-born person to be ordained priest in the Romanian Orthodox Church.

In 2013 his work to establish the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland, and his service to the Romanian Orthodox community, were recognised in the awarding of the accolade of 'Stavrophore', the highest award bestowed upon married priests in the Romanian Orthodox tradition. It conferred on him the right to wear a cross as a special honour and symbol of this service.

Before taking up the Presidency of the Irish Council of Churches in 2012, the first representative from the Orthodox traditions to do so, Fr Godfrey was an important contributor to the national ecumenical instruments, as well as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the Dublin Council of Churches.

As the Orthodox community in Ireland has grown in recent years Fr Godfrey



played a critical role, both a source of information and support, and as an advocate for inter-church collaboration and relationship-building. His contribution has helped the national structures to respond to the needs of the Orthodox churches and reflect their contribution to the religious landscape of Ireland.

As President of the Irish Council of Churches and a member of the Joint Management Committee, his unfailing pastoral support for the staff team was greatly appreciated. He never missed an opportunity to speak a word of encouragement and give guidance.

As a Chair of Committee meetings his leadership was highly valued. His gentle and welcoming nature set a tone for dialogue that made all participants

feel included and valued. During this time the ICC and the IICM made important contributions to significant developments in the public square and Fr Godfrey was pro-active in representing the Irish churches at major civic events.

Reflecting on Fr Godfrey's contribution to inter-church work, current ICC President Rev Brian Anderson (Methodist) expressed that: "Godfrey was generous to all he met. He had that lovely ability to make you feel welcomed. He also gave so much to his own church and the ecumenical community in Ireland. He will be greatly missed."

## ICC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2019

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### **Vice-President**

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

### **Immediate Past President**

Rt Rev John McDowell

### **Hon Treasurer**

Mr Jonathan Wilson

### **General Secretary**

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Mr William Hunter

### **Cherubim and Seraphim Church**

Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube

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Rev Lorraine Kennedy-Ritchie

Rev Trevor Gribben

### **Redeemed Christian Church of God**

Pastor Tunde Adebayo-Oke

### **Religious Society of Friends**

Rachel Bewley-Bateman

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

Vacant

### **Salvation Army (Ireland Division)**

Major Paul Kingscott

### **OBSERVERS**

Syrian Orthodox Church in Ireland

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### **Immediate Past President**

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Rev Brian Anderson

### **General Secretary**

Dr Nicola Brady

### **Joint Secretary**

Very Rev Kieran McDermott

### **ICC Past President**

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### **ICC Vice-President**

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

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Major Imogen Stewart

### **Cherubim and Seraphim**

Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube

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Rt Rev Dr William Henry (Moderator PCI)  
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### **ICC Vice-President**

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

### **Joint Secretary IICC**

Very Rev Kieran McDermott

### **ICC Hon Treasurer**

Mr Jonathan Wilson

### **General Secretary**

Dr Nicola Brady

### **Co-opted**

Rev Trevor Gribben  
Rt Rev John McDowell

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