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ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2017

	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 Rt Rev John McDowell

"And there shall be no poor among you". (Deuteronomy 14:5)

You will see from the General Secretary's Report just how busy life has been for ICC since our last AGM. It has been a challenge and of course a privilege to have been involved in much of that activity on behalf of the ICC.

In last year's report I spoke about trying to discern the role of churches working together in a pluralist society; to ask the question "Where is our vocation to work together in modern Ireland, North and South?".

In some instances this is very clear. There are a large number

of people in Ireland who have lost out over the past ten years. There are perhaps an even greater number for whom the system (particularly the economic system) doesn't work and never will work because it is not based on a clear moral principle at any point. To a degree governments and other institutions are as much prisoners of this system as any citizen.

Do the Churches have a vocation to say together that there are other values and principles on which a society can be based and then to play our part in doing the difficult task of first thinking about how the foundations of that society can be freshly dug? Is it possible to work towards an Ireland that we dreamed of rather than an Ireland we were landed with? I am not talking about a utopia, or as TS Eliot once said "dreaming of systems so perfect that no one needs to be good". I am thinking of a society clearly adumbrated by the Hebrew prophets as a living possibility. And grace has its place.

On St. Patrick's Day 1943 Eamon de Valera made what became known as the "comely maidens" speech which has been much derided since. In it he outlined the Ireland that "we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their lives to the things of the spirit - a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads and whose fields and villages would be joyous within the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youth and the laughter of comely maidens,

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whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age."

However in 1998, at a conference looking at the possibility of a society based on different values from those which were currently fuelling the Celtic Tiger, Professor Joe Lee noted that (the archaisms in language and the overly rural emphasis apart) what Dev dreamed of was a well populated country, with full employment, good housing, healthy children, an interest in playing sport, respect for the elderly, inter-generational solidarity; where giving was as important as taking and where rights were balanced with responsibilities.

In my view the first place to begin with that re-thinking is in the area of homelessness. Not just the homelessness of rough sleepers which is only the blood on the wound. But the many thousands who have nowhere that they can guarantee to lay their heads down for the night; they or their children. To do that we will need to face up to the possibility that homelessness is not caused simply by a broken housing market or by troublesome people but by a broken economic system in which home ownership plays such a large part.

In Northern Ireland sectarianism remains endemic in many forms –

subtle and not so subtle. In those circumstances we have a continuing vocation as Churches to say clearly that Christ is not divided, and at the very least to continue to work hard at a religious pluralism which is based not only on mutual respect but on mutual love.

Late last year Professor Marianne Elliott publish a book Hearthlands about the history of the White City Estate on the outskirts of North Belfast where she grew up in the 1950s. The White City and the Housing Trust which administered it was an early and serious attempt at integrated housing, the brainchild of an independently minded Unionist Minister for Local Government (Billy Grant). However the real actors in the drama were the people who lived there and who knew they had their part to play in making an integrated society work at the local level.

The experiment was swept away by the deluge which we call the Troubles. But the waters have now receded and we have our continuing part to play in ensuring that our steeples are not now seen as dreary landmarks but as signs of hope and not of division. We cannot go on blaming other people for our lack of cohesion or at least expecting politicians in particular to race on ahead of where we want to be. A divided society is a political problem but not necessarily a problem for politicians. It is your problem and my problem.

For that reason it may be that local inter-church activity can come into its own again by working as one element in local communities as we begin again to open up the hard conversations which have been avoided for so long. And that local involvement would begin with humility and continue with the constant repentance which is the mark of a mature Christian life.



HONORARY TREASURER —Report Year 2016

WRITER Jonathan Wilson

The accounts for 2017 show that both income and expenditure have been delivered in line with budget. The presentation of the accounts continues to follow the same format as last year when changes were introduced to comply with the requirements of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. As agreed, the current format of the accounts includes the full activities of both the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, represented as unrestricted and restricted funds as appropriate. The accounts for 2016 were submitted to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. We are awaiting feedback from the Charities Regulator (RoI) in relation to our registration and the documents and reports submitted last year.

The operation of the financial overview depicts a robust control environment with regard to financial control. In response to requests from member churches we have adjusted our timeline for preparation of the annual budget in order to give an earlier indication of the annual subscription amounts for the coming year. Due to underlying savings achieved in 2017, and in spite of unavoidable rising costs in some areas, we have been able to hold the member subscriptions for 2018 at the 2017 level.

For the past three years money has been set aside in the annual budget for an upgrade to the ICC website which would make it compatible with smartphones and tablets, and support the core aims of the organisation to support and facilitate inter-church engagement at regional and local levels. I am delighted to report that this work was completed within budget in 2017 and would like to thank Alison Meagher for her work in bringing this project to completion.

As part of our ongoing work on Risk Management, the Joint Management Committee (JMC) engaged Kerr Henderson to conduct a review of our pension provision for staff in 2017, and provide ongoing support in the form of a core governance report and re-certification annually so that trustees can be confident we are meeting our legal requirements while achieving value for money. ICC staff have undergone data protection training in preparation for the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018, and an audit of paper and electronic records is underway. The JMC regularly reviews detailed reports on income and expenditure as part of its oversight function. Where appropriate, risks are covered by insurance and insurance coverage was renewed with the current broker in 2017.

The level of reserves remains in compliance with the reserves policy detailed in our Internal Financial Procedures document and is subject to annual review to ensure sufficient reserves are available for future plans. Investments are also reviewed annually by the JMC, ensuring that we achieve the best available rate while adhering to the criteria stipulated in the Internal Financial Procedures, namely appropriate risk management with regard to ethical investment principles. Careful management has resulted in increased investment returns in 2017 and a similar return is foreseen for 2018 given the prevailing economic environment.

At the end of 2017 Karen Kelly left her role as ICC Finance Assistant after many years' dedicated service to the Council. I would like to pay personal tribute to the quality of Karen's work during her time with ICC and wish her every success for the future. I would like to welcome Claire Monaghan, who has taken over this crucial role at a very busy time. I wish her every success and look forward to working with her in the coming year.



GENERAL SECRETARY —Report

WRITER Dr Nicola Brady

It was a very busy year for the national ecumenical instruments in 2017. The ICC staff team has been greatly encouraged by the level of engagement from our member churches. As we marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation we were reminded of the great progress that has been made in inter-church relations and the important contribution Christian churches can make when speaking together on those issues that are of concern to the wider society, particularly in the defence of the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Church Conferences, Assemblies and Events

As ever, in 2017, ICC staff and trustees were very appreciative of

the invitations to attend the annual conferences and assemblies of member churches, as well as other special events. These gatherings provide an important opportunity to deepen understanding of our different traditions and build relationships, as well as helping to identify common priorities and set the agenda for the coming year.

A wide range of events was organised to mark the Reformation quincentary year, including symposia, seminars, lectures, exhibitions and services. Ecumenical engagement featured prominently in the planning of these events which provided opportunities for thought-provoking discussion and sharing.

ICC Executive Meetings

The ICC Executive met four times during 2017. We began with the annual overnight retreat in the Drumalis conference centre, from 9th-10th February. The purpose of the retreat is to spend time together in prayer, away from the pressures of our regular responsibilities, and reflect on the vision, values and future direction of the ICC. The retreat leader was Fr Gerard O'Hanlon, an Irish Jesuit who completed his doctoral studies in theology at Queen's University Belfast under the directorship of John Thompson of Union Theological College, while residing at the Presbyterian Chaplaincy from 1983-5. He was on the theology staff of the Milltown Institute in Dublin for many years and has published extensively on issues around the role of Christianity in the Public Square. As a former participant in the Ballymascanlon Inter-Church talks, he has a strong sense of the mission and objectives of the ICC.

The May Executive meeting was hosted by the Lutheran Church in Dublin and included a dialogue session with a visiting Lutheran delegation from Germany led by Pastor Karin Held, Provost of Starkenberg. There was a very interesting exchange about the current context for ecumenical dialogue in both Ireland and Germany, the significance of the Reformation quincentenary in both countries and reactions to Brexit.

The September meeting was hosted by the Jethro Centre in Lurgan and included a discussion with repre**IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**





sentatives of local churches and inter-church groups about challenges and opportunities for inter-church work in a community that continues to experience division and segregation. The discussion highlighted the remaining obstacles to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, particularly in those communities that experienced the worst of the violence during the conflict. Churches have an important role to play in creating the spaces where people can come together and begin to imagine and plan for a shared future.

The November meeting was hosted by the Salvation Army in Lefroy House in Dublin. In this facility the Salvation Army provides emergency accommodation for children. The Executive used this opportunity to learn more about homelessness and housing issues in Dublin with input from a range of faith-based charities providing different types of support to homeless individuals and families. It was particularly distressing to hear that these charities are not only facing increasing levels of need, but they are also seeing more people with serious mental health issues, including people who are feeling suicidal. It was encouraging to hear how the different organisations are working together across the faith sector, as well as the wider community and voluntary sector, to ensure the most efficient use of resources and maximise the opportunities to assist the vulnerable. Housing and homelessness was also a major item on the agenda of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting later that month and will remain a priority area of focus for ICC and IICC during 2018.

94th Annual Meeting of the ICC

The 2017 AGM was held in the Methodist Church's Belfast Central Mission on Thursday 30th March. In a keynote address titled 'Do the Churches have a place in a Post–

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Catholic Ireland?', Dr Gladys Ganiel, Research Fellow at the Senator George J Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice, outlined the challenges and opportunities in secularisation to over 100 delegates from Protestant, Orthodox, Reformed, Catholic, Independent and Migrant-led churches in Ireland. Dr Ganiel noted that the ICC could be seen as belonging to what she defined as 'extra-institutional religion', whereby 'new religious spaces ... are being created (or discovered) within Ireland's post-Catholic environment. These are spaces where people use various methods and strategies to keep their faith alive, outside or in addition to the institutional Catholic Church, or indeed, other 'institutional' churches'. Recognising that the ICC, as an organisation, has the potential to greatly engage with and contribute to public life, she stated that 'from a sociological perspective, sometimes the margins are the best place to be. While you may lack conventional power or influence, there is an important soft power in your ability to critique and offer alternative visions, and to move quickly to respond to pressing needs.'

In a subsequent presentation to the meeting, the ICC President noted that participants had been challenged in a critical but friendly way by Dr Ganiel's presentation to think about 'the God Space' that organisations like the ICC might begin to explore. We must think of ways of encouraging our member churches to reflect on what our role and contribution should be in an increasingly pluralist society, and – as ICC – whether there is a specific ecumenical dimension to that question.

We also took the opportunity to learn more about the history and present work of Belfast Central Mission, leading to a discussion about mission and social outreach in our churches today and whether there is a risk of our social action becoming separated from the worship life of the congregation.

Inter-Church Committee

The Inter-Church Committee met three times during 2017. In addition, a number of working groups were convened under the auspices of the IICC to facilitate sharing on a wide range of issues, including: communications, family, the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict, care of creation and climate justice, education and university chaplaincy.

The expanded meeting of the Committee in May was hosted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference in the Columba Centre, Maynooth, and provided an opportunity to learn about different aspects of the work of the Catholic Communications Office (CCO). Ms Brenda Drumm spoke about how the CCO promotes the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and Mr Martin Long, CCO Director, spoke about the role of his office in the public debate on the future of the 8th amendment to the Irish Constitution.

The IICC was engaged in a number of advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives during the course of 2017. Building on the work done by Dr Damian Jackson, Programme Officer, in bringing together church representatives working on issues relating to migration and asylum, the IICC Co-Chairs wrote to Minister for Justice Charles Flanaghan in support of the right to work of people seeking asylum.

An IICC delegation met with the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT) on 5 July in Castle Buildings, Stormont. The delegation took the opportunity to explain how the inter-church structures are seeking to model pluralism by simultaneously recognising the unique identity of each of the member churches, together with the common core of Christian faith. Our member churches fully recognise that they have been part of the problem in the past and still have issues to address in making their contribution to reconciliation in society. The meeting with the FICT Commission is reflective of that commitment to continue working through these issues together and with the wider society. IICC was invited to make a written submission to the Commission, outlining in more detail the experience of the churches with case studies from specific local contexts. This submission was approved at the Committee's September meeting and forwarded to the FICT Commission.

The Committee issued a statement in support of Community Relations and Cultural Awareness Week, organised by the Community Relations Council NI. This year's theme was 'Safe space, shared place' and the IICC statement noted that, for too many people in Northern Ireland, the local community is still not a safe space, highlighting the contribution that churches can make to overcoming the threats to peace and security in our society.

The IICC is keen to explore how it might support inter-church work at local level. The ICC President and I attended the December 2017 conference of the Connect network of local inter-church groups, supported by the Irish School of Ecumenics. Bishop John was invited by the conference organiser, Ms Eileen Gallagher, to give an address outlining priority areas of work for the national ecumenical instruments. It was a valuable opportunity to explore how the different levels of work - national and local - can support and compliment each other.



Church Leaders Group

The ICC President and General Secretary attend the meetings of the Church Leaders group. This year, the June meeting was hosted by ICC at the Inter-Church Centre. Following that meeting, Church Leaders decided to issue a statement appealing to political leaders "to go the extra mile" in the negotiations to restore the political institutions. Bishop John gave follow-up interviews to media. He also led the media engagement for a Church Leaders' statement on UN Universal Children's Day, 20 November, in support of a crosscommunity initiative calling for an end to paramilitary attacks in Northern Ireland, with a particular focus on the impact of such attacks on children and young people.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) network is an important forum for discussing issues that are of shared concern across the four nations. This year we had two meetings of the General Secretaries group (in February and November) and meeting of Moderators and General Secretaries on 26th September.

In August, Vice-President Rev Brian Anderson represented ICC on a CTBI delegation to visit the Church in China. This was an important and moving experience. Rev Brian was encouraged and inspired by the missional attitude of the Church in China. In December, the Vice-President, the Programme Officer and Executive Member Ms Gillian Kingston, were delighted to be able to welcome a visiting delegation from the Christian Council of Shanghai to Dublin, continuing that engagement.

Conference of European Churches

The European General Secretaries' meeting this year was hosted by the national ecumenical instrument of Wales, Cytûn (which translates as 'together'). The timing coincided with their AGM which we were invited to attend. This provided valuable insights into the Churches Together model for ecumenical engagement and how this operates in Wales. There were strong similarities in terms of the items on the agenda: supporting refugees, Brexit, and chaplaincy, for example. We were invited to attend a meeting of Cytûn's European Affairs Committee with the First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, to discuss the Welsh Executive's approach to the Brexit negotiations. The programme also included a visit to an NGO which provides English language training to refugees with professional qualifications to enable them to access employment in their areas of expertise in the UK.

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Alison Meagher was a delegate at a conference for church and ecumenical communicators hosted by CEC at the Maison du Protestantisme in Paris. The theme of this conference was titled 'Turn it up! Amplifying the Christian voice in a secular Europe' and it explored the journalistic, theological, and sociological aspects of Christian communication in an increasingly secular and multicultural Europe. Participants had the opportunity to network with colleagues from across the churches and ecumenical instruments in Europe, to engage with a range of speakers from church, academic and media backgrounds, and to visit the offices of La Vie, the main Catholic newspaper in France.

During a visit to Rome in October, the ICC President and I made a visit to the offices of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy to meet with the President and General Secretary and learn more about their work, particularly the important work they have undertaken with refugees through the humanitarian corridors initiative. We also discussed how they were preparing to mark the Reformation quincentenary.

Christian Aid

I currently represent ICC on the Board of Christian Aid. We began the year with a residential meeting at Corrymeela from 6th-7th February for the Board and senior leadership team. A major focus was Christian Aid's new strategic priority, From Violence to Peace, a global programme to address the root causes of violence and conflict, encouraging exchange across continents about learning on conflict resolution, peace and reconciliation. Christian Aid sought to harness the experience of the Irish Churches in this field through a churches consultation event in October, with a particular focus on the theological foundations for the work. We are currently exploring how ICC might assist Christian Aid in maintaining a regular dialogue with the churches as this project develops.

Brexit

Brexit has been a major item on the agenda of the national ecumenical instruments. As all-island institutions with a strong commitment to working for peace and reconciliation, our member churches have been concerned by the potential damage to relationships arising from Brexit. We have been seeking to explore how the churches could help keep a focus on the common good and the protection of the most vulnerable in this debate.

I took part in two plenary sessions of the All-island Dialogue on Brexit, organised by the Irish Government, on 17 February and 28 September. These events begin with a presentation of the Irish Government's priorities in the negotiation, before hearing from other political parties from both jurisdictions on the island, as well as other stakeholders including the business community, academic institutions and the community and voluntary sector.

The ICC President and I attended the "(Re)thinking Europe" conference organised by COMECE (the Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences from EU member states) which took place in the Vatican from 27-29 October 2017. It was organised in collaboration with the Vatican Secretariat of State because, in the words of Cardinal Pietro Parolin: "The outcome of the British referendum last year, and the tendency to fragmentation sweeping the continent, have led the Holy Father to consider the urgent need to promote a more wide-ranging and focused reflection on Europe as a whole and on its future direction, even beyond the confines of the European Union". The group of over three hundred delegates, from across the EU, included clergy, politicians, diplomatics, academics, directors of faith-based social services and ecumenical guests. There was a similar profile of speakers, providing input from across the member states and different areas of experience. The conference concluded with an address from Pope Francis

which drew together many of the key themes, emphasising the responsibility of Christians in the context of the European project: "To speak of a Christian contribution to the future of the continent means, before all else, to consider our task, as Christians today, in these lands which have been so richly shaped by the faith down the centuries. What is our responsibility at a time when the face of Europe is increasingly distinguished by a plurality of cultures and religions, while for many people Christianity is regarded as a thing of the past, both alien and irrelevant?"

A delegation from the Irish Council of Churches made a study visit to the EU institutions from 28-30 November 2017. The visit included meetings with officials from the European Commission, Members of the European Parliament, the Northern Ireland Executive Office, representatives of the Task Force on Article 50 negotiations with the UK, and the Irish Permanent Representation. The visit was organised and facilitated by the EU Commission office in Belfast. Speaking at the conclusion of the visit the ICC President said: "We were acutely conscious that our visit was taking place during a critical phase in the Article 50 negotiation process. We were encouraged by the level of interest in, and awareness of, the particular needs and circumstances of Northern Ireland. Those involved in the negotiations from the different EU institutions have clearly devoted considerable time to the study of these questions, and that concern was greatly appreciated by our delegation. What we heard underlined the considerable investment made by the EU in the Peace Process. Not only has there been a significant financial investment through the creation of a unique peace funding model for Northern Ireland, but great attention has been devoted to creating the context in

which new relationships can develop, bringing communities together. We cannot allow these achievements to be undermined by the current political challenges, notwithstanding the complexity of the issues currently being negotiated. Our local church communities have experienced first hand the effort that has been required build new relationships of trust in a post-conflict society. Considerable care must be taken to avoid language that threatens to weaken social cohesion and exacerbate divisions. Regardless of our political allegiances and national identity, we can all agree that the protection of peace and stability in Northern Ireland is in the best interests of the UK. Ireland and the rest of the European Union."

International Peace and Reconciliation Work

I took part in an International Workshop on the theme of 'Dealing with a past burdened by violence, hosted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Colombia from 18th-25th March. There have been a significant number of exchanges between Colombia and Northern Ireland as the Colombian peace process has gathered momentum. Participants in this workshop - from over 25 different countries - gained a unique insight into the work of the Catholic Church in Colombia in support of the peace process, in solidarity with victims, in outreach to prisoners and ex-combatants, and in the care of those who have been displaced by the conflict.

Alison Meagher took part in the annual Auschwitz workshop of the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation in August. This initiative brings together people of different European nationalities to explore the learning from the Holocaust and the implications for the challenges currently facing European society. In December I took part in a study visit organised by the Maximilian Kolbe Foundation to the Lindenstrasse memorial site, Potsdam, This site was used a prison by the Nazi regime, then the Soviet forces, before becoming a detention centre for the Stasi from 1952-1989. In this place that had seen so much terror and torture, shaped by ideologies that appear so vastly different from each other, we were challenged to think about the factors that leave societies vulnerable to totalitarianism and threats to democracy past and present.

Other Social and Community Issues

The ICC continues to participate in the Community Faiths' Forum. This is a space for dialogue facilitated by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action and funded by the Department for Communities NI. Forum meetings cover a wide range of social issues and give faith-based charities an opportunity to shape government policy in areas that directly impact their work. In addition, through the Forum our member churches are able to access training in a range of areas including data protection, fundraising and governance.

I am one of the faith sector representatives on the Department of Justice Human Trafficking Engagement Group. This network brings together senior Department of Justice officials, PSNI and community and voluntary sector representatives. The PSNI continue to discover new cases of human trafficking for both forced labour and sexual slavery across Northern Ireland. Churches can play an important role in awarenessraising and signposting of supports for potential victims.

Karen Kelly has been representing ICC at several important Mental

Health initiatives throughout 2017, as well as helping to promote the Flourish! suicide prevention initiative. Mental health and suicide are priority concerns across our member churches, recognising the need to build on the churches' pastoral experience to help identify the gaps in service provision that leave people vulnerable to mental health problems, as well as ensuring that those in pastoral leadership have the training they need to help them deal with the range of situations they may encounter.

Staffing

In December we said farewell to Karen Kelly and Alison Meagher after many years' dedicated service to ICC. Both are moving on to exciting new phases in their careers having made an outstanding contribution to the work of the national ecumenical instruments in Ireland. This was acknowledged by the Co-Chairs of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting who took the opportunity of the IICM to pay tribute to their work and express our appreciation. They will be greatly missed. We are delighted to welcome Claire Monaghan to the ICC team as Finance and Admin Assistant. Claire brings to the role a wealth of experience in the community and voluntary sector, and will be a wonderful addition to the ICC staff. A new Communications and Admin Assistant is soon to be recruited.

As a staff team we have felt very supported by our Committee members and would like to thank all those who have shared their time and expertise with us over the past year. Particular thanks are due to the ICC President and the members of the Joint Management Committee who help us keep things running smoothly and are always available to give advice and guidance.





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CAPTIONS

- 01 ICC Executive Committee members at Annual Retreat in Drumalis.
- 02 Irish Inter-Church Committee meeting in the Columba Centre, Maynooth in May.
- 03 Delegates at the ICC AGM in Belfast City Mission in March last year.
- 04 Most Rev Dr Anthony Farquhar and Rev Trevor Gribben at the IICC in May.
- 05 Mrs Joyce Bond and Lady Evangelist Shade Abinmbola and the ICC AGM last year.
- 06 Professor Gladys Ganiel giving the keynote address at the last ICC AGM
- 07 The Church Leaders Group: Rt Rev John McDowell, Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, Most Rev Dr Eamon Martin, Rt Rev Dr Noble McNeely and Rev Dr Laurence Graham.
- 08 Dr Nicola Brady and Rt Rev John McDowell meeting Pope Francis.
- 09 Rev Brian Anderson, Mrs Gillian Kingston and Dr Damian Jackson with a delegation from the Shanghai Christian Council and the East China Theological Seminary
- 10 Rt Rev John McDowell, Dr Damian Jackson, Dr Alison Meagher, Mrs Karen Kelly, Dr Nicola Brady and Bishop Brendan Leahy at the 2017 IICM.



PROGRAMME OFFICER —Report

WRITER Dr Damian Jackson

It has been a privilege to work with the churches this past year as ICC Programme Officer. My work broadly falls under three areas: building capacity for inter-church initiatives and facilitating development of sustainable local inter-church connection, broadening connections with churches within and outside the formal inter-church structures, and facilitating churches' work on issues of migrant integration.

In the first area a particular highlight has been organising a workshop of representatives from member churches to develop a common foundation for churches' engagement on climate change and care of creation. After presentations on theological approaches to the issue, and on the effects of climate change on vulnerable populations, participants discussed possible responses for churches, local and institutional. They then collaboratively agreed principles to underlie future collaborative church engagement which I developed into proposed joint affirmations on climate change and care of creation.

In local inter-church activity, I learned much from visiting Waterford and learning about several initiatives begun by churches but also involving non-faith organisations, for example the Waterford City of Sanctuary project. Despite their (inter) church origins these initiatives were not recognised as ecumenical but nevertheless are a testament to the fruitful relations between churches in Waterford.

I have applied this learning in Monaghan where I have been coordinating an inter-church clergy group. This group has been discussing models for sustainably developing interchurch relations and serving the local community. A clergy prayer group has begun in Carrickmacross and an information and social evening around the theme of clergy support and supervision is planned.

In the second area I have been speaking to a range of churches newer to Ireland, primarily from Orthodox and Pentecostal traditions. We have discussed possible ways that ecumenical engagement could be mutually beneficial and whether membership would be appropriate for them. Other models of ongoing involvement are being considered which might be more appropriate for smaller churches and church networks. I also attended the annual meetings of the Religious Society of Friends, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Cherubim and Seraphim and the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

My membership of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum provides the opportunity to inform them of the work of ICC where there is mutual interest, which is particularly the case in the work we are doing on chaplaincy. The other faith communities are very supportive of ICC efforts to retain and protect the faith-centred nature of chaplaincy. DCIF is also undertaking two projects that may be of interest to ICC: a project funded by the Irish Human Rights and equality Commission to map faith communities in Dublin city, and another to increase awareness and promote the use of the iReport.ie racist incident reporting system.



In migration work, the international connections and learning I gained on the CTBI trip to Lampedusa and Palermo in Italy has been invaluable in developing the inter-church engagement on migration issues here. The Mediterranean Hope project of the Italian Federation of Evangelical (Protestant) Churches and the Sant' Egidio community provides alternative pathways to protection for vulnerable refugees from Syria and sub-Saharan Africa. So far Italian churches have joined together to provide protection for 1000 refugees, 500 further have similarly been provided for in France, and recently Belgian churches have committed to sponsoring 150 more.

I have fed learning from this engagement back to member churches through articles in denominations' magazines and through the church migration representatives' group that I have been coordinating. This meeting enables connection and information sharing between member churches on migration developments in Ireland and on the churches' work with each other. It has provided the capacity for the churches to communicate their perspective in discussions with other NGOs and the government on the announced community refugee sponsorship scheme amongst other concerns.

This scheme was announced in September by the Irish government. I have since been collaborating with other civil society organisations including the Irish Refugee Council, the Red Cross, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, Amnesty International and the Irish Refugees and Migrants Coalition. Together we have been researching other countries' schemes and developing a model appropriate for Ireland. Encouragingly, the Department of Justice are open to utilising the sector's expertise in this area, so we are hopeful that the system introduced will be well-designed.

Finally, the Supreme Court in May ruled that the administrative ban on asylum seekers working was unconstitutional. We have been advocating by correspondence that the Department of Justice respond by introducing a non-restrictive employment scheme once the process of opting into the European reception conditions directive is complete, so that asylum seekers' dignity would be respected as the Supreme Court judge demanded in his ruling. It has been a privilege to be involved with this work, which is demonstrating that through mutual collaboration, and in engagement with other civil society actors, the churches can and are making an impact for the most vulnerable in our society and for their own enrichment. I would be delighted to hear from member churches and congregations who would like to hear more about this work and explore ways of working together effectively in their area.

CAPTIONS

Anniversary Celebrations at the Cherubim and Seraphim Church 13th July. 01



IICM Report—

Preface

The 28th Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) took place from the 23rd-24th November 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 2017 meeting was **Proclaiming Christ to Families** Today.

> WRITER Dr Nicola Brady

Families are the heart of the life and mission of the Church. The World Meeting of Families, which will be hosted by the Catholic Church in Ireland in 2018, provides a significant opportunity for us, as Christian churches in Ireland, to reflect together about how best to respond to the many and varied needs of families across the island of Ireland today. This year's Irish Inter-Church Meeting combined many different layers of reflection, drawing inspiration from different academic disciplines and different areas of work. It was a dialogue, not just between churches, but between churches and the wider society. We are deeply indebted to all who gave the time to share their expertise and experience.

In our pastoral care of the family we are also caring for society. This was underlined in the keynote address by Gordon Harold, Professor of Child and Adolescent Mental Health, who presented evidence from different international contexts showing how the inter-parental relationship affects youth mental health. Professor Harold went on to outline how these findings can be translated into effective public policy aimed at improving outcomes for vulnerable parents and children in a way that is long term, sustainable and improves the life chances of the next generation.

Representatives of organisations working to support vulnerable individuals and families, from both faith-based organisations and the wider community and voluntary sector, highlighted some of the most urgent challenges for families in both jurisdictions in Ireland today. Delegates heard about the importance of emotional wellbeing and a secure family home. Practitioners identified areas where churches could build on successful initiatives to provide further support through pastoral care, service provision and advocacy to Government.

There was a strong focus throughout the meeting on our communications, both internal and external. We were encouraged by successive speakers to think about the ways in which families experiencing difficulties are prevented from getting the help they need because of stigma and shame. As Christians who believe in a God of compassion, we are well placed to provide a safe space for those who are struggling. We should not underestimate the value of simple 0

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he family is the hope for the world and the wellbeing of families is critical for the future of Church and society.

gestures of compassion, kindness and acceptance.

At the same time, it is important to remember that for some people the family is not a safe place. We heard from those working on the frontline about the impact of physical, emotional and sexual abuse in the family and its devastating consequences. Churches can contribute to reducing this harm by communicating a strong message that the family needs to respect the human dignity of every individual member, and protect them from harm. People at risk need to know that the church community is there to support them.

For our churches, as for society, the family is much more than a recipient of pastoral care and social outreach. Families are the building blocks of strong church communities. Examining this theme with input from theologians of different denominations it is clear that there is much more that unites us than divides us. Delegates reflected on the findings from a research report from Care in the Family, *Faith in our Families*, which highlighted challenges and opportunities for faith formation in the families.

In the family we learn the values that shape and inform our approach to living in society. It is where we develop our sense of solidarity and interconnectedness with the wellbeing of others. Where families are under pressure, parents struggle to find the time to invest in their children's education and faith formation. New technology and social media, while bringing many benefits, can also be a significant obstacle to families spending quality time together, listening to each other and developing strong relationships.

Delegates came away from this meeting feeling both challenged and inspired. The family is the hope for the world and the wellbeing of families is critical for the future of Church and society. Churches and faith-based organisations are having a positive impact on the lives of families, but much more needs to be done to reduce the factors that leave families marginalised and at risk of harm. This requires us to work effectively together as churches, and in partnership with other sectors of society, to ensure that a positive vision for the family shapes and informs public policy.



EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE —Report

WRITER Dr Kenneth Milne

When the European Affairs Committee was established in 2013 there was no anticipation of Brexit, and the committee's terms of reference were drawn up on the assumption that both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland would retain their membership of the European Union. While the Churches of ICC will continue to minister both inside and outside the EU, Brexit means that from March 2019 a majority of their congregations will no longer reside in a member state, though a minority will continue to do so. This being so, the Committee will continue to follow its original remit while at the same time identifying its role in the pre-Brexit and post-Brexit situations. The British and Irish governments and the other EU member states have acknowledged that Brexit has huge implications for both political jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, not only economically, but also in light of the provisions of the Belfast Agreement relating to citizenship.

The committee was advised by MEPs that a visit to Brussels would be the most effective way in which to gain a better understanding of the European Union and its procedures and we are grateful to Ms Colette Fitzgerald and her team in the Belfast Office of the Commission for arranging an 'Information visit' that took place on November 28-30. Our programme included a visit to the European Parliament, hosted by Vice President Mairead McGuinness, as well as meetings with representatives of the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, the Directorate for Communication, the Policy Advisor of the Parliament's Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula,

the Commission Cooordinator for the Rights of the Child, the Irish Permanent Representation, the Northern Ireland Task Force, the Northern Ireland Executive Office in Brussels, and the Intergroup on Freedom of Religion and Belief. We are particularly grateful to the Head of Unit of the Task Force on Article 50 Negotiations and her colleagues for meeting us when their work was at a critical point, not least where matters relating to Ireland were concerned.

In fulfilment of our terms of reference we maintain liaison with the Roman Catholic Church and the agencies of the European Union in Dublin and Belfast. We continue to benefit from the publications and proceedings of the Institute of International and European Affairs in Dublin. Both the Queen's University of Belfast and Dublin City University have established Institutes for the study of issues relating to Brexit and we are making contact with both Institutes. 02



WOMEN'S LINK —Report

WRITER Joyce Bond

Women's Link welcomed new representatives to our committee: Catherine Loney (Quakers) and Elaine Barnett (WWDay of Prayer N.I.)

Our spring meeting in Dublin was cancelled as our Hon Secretary Eilis O'Malley sustained an injury on the morning of the meeting. Sadly her husband became seriously ill and died a few weeks later.

June Butler (Down & Dromore Diocese) represented Mothers' Union at the 61st session of the United Nations' Conference on the Status of Women in New York which focussed on Economic Empowerment of work, one of the subsets of the UN (United Kingdom and Northern

Ireland have one member). Their Millennium Development Goals are similar to the Mothers' Union targets. There were 600 events, 6 MU members went to NGO's. There were empty chairs at every meeting because of new visa regulations in the USA. Very few faith bodies were represented at the conference. Some of the issues explored were: Women's difficulty with labour, modern day slavery, ID at birth issued to prevent children disappearing, domestic violence, and sex education for all children. There is still no age limit on marriage in the USA. We need to lobby politicians on women's issues and women need to 'Move from Reflection to Action'. MU held Vigils focussing on 16 Days of Activism in every diocese in Ireland October/ November highlighting domestic violence, abuse and FGM.

Elizabeth McWatters, MWI committee member, was installed as President of Methodist Women Ireland in September and chose 'Journey with Jesus' as her theme. In November Elizabeth and other MWI committee representatives went to Myanmar to provide leadership training for women, to lead worship and to visit Church projects. The Methodist and Uniting Church Women will hold their European Area Seminar in Belfast in 2018.

In September, Dr Nicola Brady facilitated a workshop for Women's Christian organisations to share ideas, discover how each organisation desires to create a community that shares God and faith as well as seeing different perspectives and helping others. Nine organisations were represented and there was much conversation and exchange of ideas and perspectives, with agreement that better links could be developed between organisations. Decreasing membership remains a concern prompting questions such as: What is women's ministry today? What is needed for today and what is its place in the broader church?



CHURCHES TO-GETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND —Update

WRITER Bob Fyffe A Middle East consultation was held in December 2017 in partnership with Christian Aid and St. George's House, Windsor. It was a theological consultation on language pertaining to the Holy Land and the Israel-Palestine conflict. There were six main contributors, including Dr Munther Isaac, a young Palestinian theologian from Bethlehem, and a total of 30 participants in all with a diverse ecumenical spread from across the four nations. Following the consultation, a study guide is being prepared by CTBI which will include the text of the papers given as well as study material and additional resources.

Working on the theme of reconciliation, Invest in Peace is a partnership with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, which engages local churches and synagogues that focus on supporting reconciliation projects between Palestinians and Israelis. This has so far featured "Parents Circle" which works with parents bereaved as a result of the conflict. We have held events in London, Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow, and plan further events around the four nations.

Continuing on the Inter religious theme, there are new Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group resources. IFTAG has completed a study guide on the document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" from the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance. This is now available as a download from the CTBI website.

The resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018 were made available in all the usual formats, including English-Welsh bilingual booklet, English only booklet (both available in hard copy and as a download), with downloadable Irish translations and ROOTS material. The materials take up a theme from the Caribbean Churches and reflect upon the inheritance of transatlantic slavery and contemporary challenges in ecumenism. The theme for 2019 has been developed by the churches in Indonesia and will explore the call



to be one amidst a world of injustice. The character of this is influenced by the context of Christian ecumenism in a majority Muslim situation. The four nations CTBI Writers Group have already commenced work on these materials. Again resourcing local churches through Lent, the resources for 2018 have been prepared by HOPE on the theme "50 Stories of Hope" featuring stories of transformation in the lives of people serving prison sentences. The Lent course is available as a book or as a downloadable resource. BBC Radio 4 are also sharing the themes through their Sunday morning worship.

There was a very successful Church leaders visit to China in the summer of 2017. Further theological work is being discussed with particular interest in the development of contextual theology and possible links to theological colleges in China. There is a clear opportunity to link this work with theological colleges here in Britain and Ireland. At the same time we are sharing in the WCC Network on Korea, where CTBI staff continue to be involved in the WCC Network on Korean Reconciliation on behalf of the CTBI constituency. The main outcome desired by the Korean Churches is for a peace treaty to be established. There is also the clear need at this time to express solidarity with the Korean Churches in their work for reconciliation.

The Churches Refugee Network now has oversight of all aspects of shared work being undertaken. Recent CTBI sponsored visits by a group of young men to Lampedusa, and a women leader's visit to refugee camps in southern Greece were very successful, with significant engagement across social media. Reports are available on the CTBI website.

CTBI continues to engage with partners across the Middle East, especially the Middle East Council of Churches. Staff continue to share in the management group of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel programme. The wider concerns of the region continue to be monitored and a new programme of ethical pilgrimage is being worked on.

In partnership with the National Council of Churches in Sri Lanka, support is being given to reconciliation work especially through staff capacity in Colombo. The partnership will include work on Theology of Land, Gender and Environment. Links will be made with the Sri Lankan community in the UK and Ireland to continue the necessary work of reconciliation.

CTBI Trustees are looking to increase work around Racial Justice and associated justice issues in the coming year. This work may well include aspects of hate crime. The new Centre for Theology and Justice has now been established and the work is moving ahead. Various projects are in process including exploring theology through the arts. Poverty issues, spirituality and justice, and work around embodied theology are all possibilities.

Significant effort went into preparing a potential bid document and process to host the 2021 General Assembly. The eventual outcome of a consultation with the Churches in early 2017 meant that the proposal was not taken forward, however we were grateful for the effort and assistance of the City of Glasgow.

Web and Social Media resourcing and outreach continue to be central to the way CTBI works. Some eleven websites and associated groups now come under the CTBI banner. Many resources and free downloads are available at <u>www.</u> <u>ctbi.org.uk.</u>

CAPTIONS (P16-17)

- 01 IICM Co-Chairs, Rt Rev John McDowell and Bishop Brendan Leahy.
- 02 Fr Tim Bartlett speaking about the upcoming World Meeting of Families.
- 03 Noeline Blackwell, CEO of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and Fr Peter McVerry SJ participating in a panel discussion.
- 04 Prof Gordon Harold delivering the 2017 IICM keynote address.
- 05 IICM delegates in discussion during a panel session.

CAPTIONS (P18-19)

01

- European Affairs Committee: 01 Rev Dr Livingstone Thompson, Rev Dr Donald Watts, Mr Gavin Norris, Rev Brian Anderson, Dr Nicola Brady, Mr Robert Cochran, Dr Markus Grimmeisen, Ms Colette Fitzgerald, Margrit Grey, Dr Kenneth Milne, Ms Maxine Judge, Dr Alison Meagher, Rt Rev John McDowell, 02 Canon Adrian Empey, Dr Fergus O'Ferrall.
- 02 Women's Link: Front L-R: Dr. Nicola Brady (ICC), Karen Kelly (ICC), Elizabeth McWatters (Methodist Women Ireland), Lorna McKee (Women of Faith), Kathy Kitson (Women's Link). Back L-R: Joyce Bond (Women's Link), Phyllis Grothier (Mothers' Union), Elizabeth Moore (Women's League Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church), Eunice Hoey (Moravian Women's Assoc.), Elaine Barnett (Women's World Day of Prayer), Isobel Patterson (Women in Faith), Rosemary Castagner (Quakers), Louise Wilson (WFM & Uniting Church Women).

CAPTIONS (P20-21)

- CTBI Group including Damian Jackson on a visit to Lampedusa to see the work of the Italian churches' Mediterranean Hope project speak with a staff member and hear a refugee's story of her horrific journey across the Sahara and the Mediterranean.
- The CTBI group visit the pier in Lampedusa where thousands of refugees have arrived in Europe. Mediterranean Hope offer a welcoming face and support before they are transferred to the island's "hotspot" holding centre.



CHRISTIAN AID —Update

Preface

In spite of relative calm in the area, Rosamond Bennett, CEO of Christian Aid Ireland, reflects on the suffering of the people of Aweil, South Sudan, because of the ongoing war in the country. Christian Aid Ireland's "Enough for Everyone" appeal highlights the injustice of hunger when others have such wealth.

> WRITER Rosamond Bennett

It's early in the morning in Aweil, South Sudan. The sun has risen, as I sit with a group of women, many holding small, crying babies; children who have not eaten yet today and mothers, who will have just one small meal of sorghum.

I am looking at the faces of looming famine. And the gender dynamics of this are obvious. Nursing and lone mothers, elderly women and the sick.

The women, despite being weak with hunger, are keen to talk. With rains failed and harvests destroyed, they know that they need help from other people. A woman called Reisa (pictured) tells me that she's worried about her 18-month-old baby because he is malnourished. While her older child has resigned himself to hunger, her baby can't understand his stomach pangs. If he doesn't get the food he desperately needs, he could be stunted or worse.

Next, I speak to a blind lady. She's a widow and mother of six, but two of her daughters have died. Her ten-year-old daughter, who helps to run the household, is now sick and because they have no food, she can't get better as her immune system is depleted.

Their only way of getting food is to gather firewood and sell it, but the young girl is too ill. They're in such desperate need that their neighbours, even though they have nothing themselves, are trying to do their best for this family. I don't know how people cope in this situation.

South Sudan, the world's newest nation, has been gripped by conflict since December 2013. Famine, declared in two counties in February 2017, contributed alongside the war, to an exodus of over 1.8 million people.

Aweil is the capital of Northern Bahr El Ghazal state. Despite brutal fighting and tension in the country, Aweil has remained relatively calm, yet the knock on effects of the war are everywhere. The area is cut off, food prices have sky-rocketed, there is no work beyond the drought-ravaged land.

At Christmas, Christian Aid launched our 'Enough for Everyone' appeal to highlight the gross injustice that in our world of plenty, people are suffering from hunger.

For every pound given to our Christmas Appeal in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the UK Govern-



ment will also give a pound towards our work in South Sudan.

Our work there includes providing families with vouchers to buy food and essentials, distributing seeds and tools, so people can prepare for the next growing season and supplying fishing gear. We have also repaired water points and handed out sanitation supplies.

It was difficult to leave Aweil, knowing the suffering people are enduring. But it redoubled my efforts to inspire people to support this fledgling country, where the food crisis is crippling people.

Knowing that our church partners are with us as we endeavour to reach people with aid is tremendously heartening and I want to thank each and every person, minister, congregation and parish for supporting our Christmas appeal. As I write, we are on track to meet our targets, which will make an enormous difference to our work in South Sudan.

Enough food will be crucial to strengthen the ordinary people of South Sudan. But what is needed above all is peace and an international focus to bring their country away from war. Through our From Violence to Peace programme, we are working with churches to help them to have a voice in the peace process and bringing people together to build peaceful solutions from the ground up. People need to feel safe. Their children deserve a childhood.

At the heart of Christian Aid Ireland's work is our striving towards justice and a fair distribution of the world's resources. In South Sudan people are on the brink of starvation, while there is so much wealth in the world. Meanwhile, rich multinationals are exploiting loopholes to avoid paying their fair share of taxes that could fund vital social services in poor countries.

In November, we re-examined the Irish Government's own assessment 01 of the impact of its corporate tax arrangements on developing countries and concluded that it is likely to be more significant than found in their study. Our report was the front-page story in the Irish Times and was covered extensively in media across the country. It was also discussed in the Dáil and Seanad.

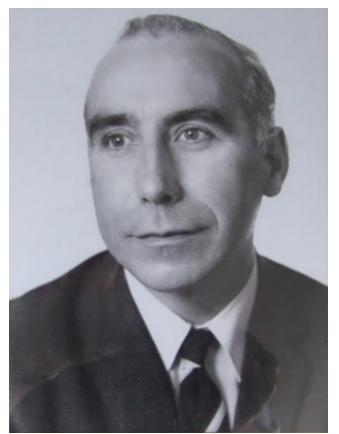
Christian churches across the island have long campaigned with us against the structures that keep the most vulnerable people in poverty and have given generously to enable life-changing aid. In South Sudan, I described to the mothers what our supporters were doing to help raise awareness and funds. They were amazed that people they had never met would do this to help them.

We are blessed to have such wonderful church partners and we look forward to our Christian community continuing to work as one to bring about an end to poverty and justice for all.

To find out more about Christian Aid Ireland visit <u>christianaid.ie</u>

CAPTIONS

- Reisa from Aweil in South Sudan, whose family and community are living through a severe food crisis. Christian Aid is supporting communities through this crisis with emergency aid such as vouchers to buy food and seeds and tools.
- Rosamond Bennett with representatives from All Saints Cathedral, The Episcopal Church of South Sudan, Aweil.



IN MEMORIAM

David Bleakely

January 11th 1925 - June 25th 2017

Former General Secretary of the ICC (1980-1992), Mr David Bleakley, died on 25th June 2017. A former MP and Minister of Community Relations, he was a person of deep faith and brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the work of ICC. The members of the ICC and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting wish to acknowledge his inspirational leadership in the work of peace and reconciliation.

Dr Norman Richardson, a contributor to the Churches Peace Education Project, shares some personal memories of Mr Bleakley's leadership and contribution during his time with the ICC. Although he was best known for his political service and other public involvements, I had the opportunity for eight years to get to know David Bleakley as an ecumenical Christian leader, a colleague and an encourager.

David's time as General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches coincided with the involvement of some of the really significant ecumenical Protestant clergy who were exercising a difficult prophetic role during the worst days of the Troubles – not least Jack Weir, Eric Gallagher, John Barkley and others. My sense of how David saw his role was that of an enabler, encouraging the ICC to be engaged with and in the interactions between the Churches, providing opportunities for new encounters and improved relationships across the Protestant-Catholic divide. He was the first lay person to hold this position in the ICC, and this perhaps suggested to him the role of a background enabler, with a keen and informed eye on a range of developments, providing opportunities for others to give more public leadership. Despite his political pedigree, I don't remember David for big public speeches or symbolic gestures, and yet his time at the Council, coinciding with all the political and ecclesiastical developments of the 1980s, was one of opportunity and change.

Under David's leadership the Churches' Peace Education Programme developed and became an important focus in the life of the ICC. No doubt this was in part due to David's own experience as a teacher and also a reflection of the fact that his wife, Winnie, was also a teacher. The Peace Education Resources Centre - based in and around the top-floor office - was launched in 1984 and attracted many people to the Inter-Church Centre. David suggested and approved the financial support for converting these under-used spaces and the range of resources available to schools and other educational institutions was much expanded.

David continued to give his full support to the joint ICC/ICJP programme at a time when the Department of Education was taking significant initiatives in community relations education. The ICC became a significant player in these developments, and its work was acknowledged and acclaimed publicly. David's enabling background role was undoubtedly highly significant in this, and I know that I owe him much appreciation for his confidence and continuous encouragement.

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Design, Layout and Editing by Damian Jackson Printed by Print Library

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Submitted to the 95th Annual Meeting of the Council March 2018