

# 1998

## **Annual Report of the Irish Council of Churches**

Submitted to the Annual Meeting  
of the Council  
March 1998



## **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES SUBMITTED TO THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL MARCH 1998**

1998 marks the 75th anniversary of the Council. The first meeting of the United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communion in Ireland (as it was then called - the name was only changed to the Irish Council of Churches in 1966) was held in January 1923 "when the member churches and communions were represented by a total of 23 delegates with the Bishop of Derry (Peacocke) in the chair" (Ian Ellis, 'Vision and Reality: A Survey of Twentieth Century Irish Inter-Church Relations', p.15).

The partition of Ireland had only just taken place and as Ian Ellis comments political developments were drawing the Protestant Churches even closer together. The comment also makes the point that the political context has been a constant reality (sometimes overt, sometimes hidden) in the Council's life and work. This has been most obvious in the last 30 years. The churches have been "prisoners of the cultural and political polarities of Irish life" (Ellis, *ibid*). Sometimes we have been happy prisoners, but latterly we have been increasingly unhappy ones, as the realities of sectarianism have been borne in on us.

This century has been marked by much improved relationships between many of the Protestant churches. The formation of the Council has both reflected this development and helped it. However, schemes of church union have run into the ground. There is simply no current enthusiasm for such activity. Most people are content with coexistence.

It also has to be said that this century has brought an increasing plurality of traditions within Protestantism and many of the churches that have grown have been conservative and anti-ecumenical in orientation. The century has also brought increasing differences between Northern and Southern Protestants, most clearly exemplified by responses to the events surrounding Drumcree 1996.

1998 also marks the 25th anniversary of the first Irish Inter-Church Meeting. Ellis comments: "the Irish Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches on the eve of the Second Vatican Council lived in total isolation from each other" (*ibid*). The Council was a key agent in creating some of the bridges that now exist: the Joint Group on Social Problems (formed 1970; became the Department of Social Issues of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting in 1983), the Irish Inter-Church Meeting process (first meeting 1973) and the formation of the Church Leaders' Group (tentative beginnings 1969) all came into existence as the result of ICC encouragement or initiative.

Vatican II created entirely new possibilities for relationships between the Protestant Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. These new possibilities were embraced by some and totally rejected by others. Hesitation and tentativeness have probably been the dominant responses in

Ireland, not helped by the violence and turmoil in Northern Ireland, which have served to polarise the communities. The new ecumenical possibilities and the present community conflict in Northern Ireland have almost exactly coincided.

Nevertheless, ecumenical progress has been made. It is fragile and its limitations can be cruelly exposed. The controversy round the President of Ireland taking communion in a Church of Ireland church made it clear how far we have to travel. However, we journey on and seek to develop new institutional arrangements. Proposals are currently before the churches which may mean far reaching changes to the Council and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

The 1960s mark a watershed decade in Irish society - both North and South. New cultural, political, cultural and religious realities became evident. Religious worlds which had remained basically unchanged for 100 years began to disintegrate and the implications are enormous - the things that have been solid have melted into air. There has been more change in Irish religion in the last 30 years than in the 100 years before that. How the gospel is to be proclaimed, nurtured and incarnated in a rapidly changing Ireland are major challenges for all our churches. This will relativise - but not remove - the differences between our churches.

Ecumenical bodies are not organisations that give one answer to the future of the church or the churches; they are places where different views interact. Churches are not part of an ecumenical body because they agree about everything, but because, hopefully, they are prepared to enter together into a learning and sharing process. In that process relationships will be established and commonalities will be discovered and recognised. It will also mean accepting each other and living with difference. Honest recognition of differences can be a source of strength, confidence and growth, not of failure or deficiency. And we have to recognise the limits and limitations imposed by our theological convictions and the contexts we come from. At the same time we are challenged to engage together and cooperate where possible.

There are people and religious bodies who have traditionally been suspicious of, and even hostile to, ecumenical organisations but are increasingly prepared to reach out and cooperate. They will not 'buy' the old ecumenical 'package' but are prepared to link up with others outside their constituency, particularly on issues of common concern, e.g. peacemaking or combating sectarianism. This is a challenge to self-examination and to 'reinvent' ourselves, if necessary. Ecumenical bodies are in the business of helping to build relationships, not helping to maintain their own version of sectarianism.

Ecumenism involves not being separated from human concern in society. Last April the Department of Social Issues of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting organised a Poverty Hearing in Belfast which received significant publicity. Ecumenism involves a concern for peacemaking. The Churches' Peace Education Programme is expanding its cross-border

Protestant and Catholic Primary Schools project which was pioneered in 1997. Ecumenism involves the "calling of the whole church to bring the whole gospel to the whole world". 1997 saw the first jointly organised conference on mission, involving the Irish Missionary Union and the ICC World Mission Committee.

The ceasefires of 1994 have had the paradoxical effect of revealing the depth of sectarianism in Northern Ireland life. The churches have been forced to take the issue more seriously; the Church of Ireland has set up a sub-committee of the Standing Committee on the subject following a resolution at the General Synod. The Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project of the Irish School of Ecumenics - whose Phase Two the Executive has offered to support - has shown that sectarianism is a pathologising and idolatorising of things that are necessary and good in themselves: a concern for truth; the need for boundaries, firm identities, and differences between people. However, there needs to be traffic across boundaries and frontiers. That is a challenge to us all, politically and religiously. We need to have the courage to journey out in hope.

The Council came into being in the aftermath of the crisis in Irish society of 1912 to 1922. We celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Council at a time when the present crisis which began in 1969 reaches its crux. A moment of truth is upon us. We have the chance of a settlement, but a peace process brings fear, fragility, uncertainty, fantasy, disorientation and resistance. The old is passing away but the new is not yet come, or it is not clear that it will come. This is a time of opportunity, but there is real pain in finding an accommodation - and living with an accommodation, once found. Is the pain too much for many people? Are we willing to risk being healed?

Perhaps the great stories of journeying in faith in Hebrews 11 may be of help to us in our political and ecumenical odysseys. They tell us not to be afraid of a future we cannot fully imagine, for God is with us.

#### **DEATHS OF THE REV. DR. J. M. BARKLEY AND THE REV. J. RADCLIFFE**

The Rev. Dr. J. M. Barkley died in December 1997 and the Rev. J.G. Radcliffe in January 1998. Both were former Chairmen and Honorary Treasurers of the Council. We give thanks to God for their work and witness.

#### **MEETINGS**

The Annual Meeting was held in April in the Emmaus Conference Centre, Swords, Co. Dublin. The evening session continued the discussion on sectarianism commenced at the Autumn Gathering in 1996. It was facilitated by Dr. Joe Liechty of The Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project with an input from the Rev. Gary Mason.

The Autumn Gathering was held in Belfast and the Rev. Maurice Ryan, Secretary of the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum, spoke about non-Christian religious minorities in Ireland.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

An application from the Celtic Catholic Church of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, Malibar Rite, was rejected. The Seventh Day Adventists in Ireland have become observers. Discussions have been taking place with Life Link - a Network of Churches in Partnership - concerning membership. These churches have come out of the house church movement. A resolution concerning membership will be put to the Annual Meeting.

## **75th ANNIVERSARY**

The 75th Anniversary of the Council will be marked at the Annual Meeting. Professor John De Gruchy from South Africa will be giving a lecture.

## **THE ROLE, STRUCTURE AND FUTURE OF THE COUNCIL**

This has been an issue for the Council over the last number of years as the agenda of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting has grown. Following consultation with the member churches a submission was made to the Irish Inter-Church Committee at its September 1996 meeting outlining what the Executive Committee saw as the key issues in inter-church relations at the present time and proposing a review of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. The Irish Inter-Church Committee agreed to this and a Review Group was set up. It reported in January 1998. An ICC Review Group was set up which considered the position in the light of the IICM Review Group's recommendations. The two sets of proposals are being forwarded to the member churches for their comments by the end of October 1998, with a view to decisions being made by the churches in 1999.

## **INTER-CHURCH CENTRE**

Plans have been drawn up for further work to be carried out in 1998.

## **COMMUNITY ISSUES**

### **Consultation Paper on Casinos and Gaming, Betting, Lotteries and Amusements, Northern Ireland**

A submission was made on this consultation paper.

### **Sunday Trading Legislation in Northern Ireland**

The position regarding legislation continued to be monitored in conjunction with Evangelical Alliance (Northern Ireland). A minor change in the draft legislation was achieved. The new legislation came into operation in December.

## **Peace and Political Developments**

Meetings of those people in the member churches concerned with peace and political development have continued through the year. The General

Secretary continued to meet with representatives of other Christian and community groups to monitor developments. He made comments to the Northern Ireland Victims Commission.

## **INTER-CHURCH AFFAIRS BOARD**

### **The Child in the Church Group**

During the past year the Group welcomed Miss Jill McVitty in place of Mrs Janet Unsworth of the Methodist Church. Mrs Unsworth's service as Hon. Secretary was greatly appreciated.

Canon Houston McKelvey has been succeeded by Rev. Ian McKee as Chairman, and Miss McVitty is the current Hon. Secretary.

In the autumn two events were hosted. Rabbi Jonathan Gorskey of the Council of Christians and Jews spoke on the Jewish roots of Christianity. Mrs Diana Murrie, Children's Officer of the Church of England General Synod Board of Education spoke on developments in children's ministry.

The Group continues to provide a meeting point between the churches to enable an exchange of ideas and discussion.

### **Women's Link**

The annual gathering in 1997 was held in Dublin in April when Dr. Cecelia Clegg of the ISE led us in an inspiring consideration of "Forward Together with Energy". There were also 'spotlights' on the Moravian Church, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church and the Women's World Day of Prayer to increase knowledge of each other's traditions.

Women's Link continues to be represented at the Women of Faith discussions and Mrs. Maureen Irwin - outgoing President - and Mrs. Marion Woods, of the Moravian Church, incoming President, have been involved in discussions with representatives from England, Scotland and Wales about the conference to be held in Durham in April 1998 to celebrate the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women.

A special meeting in February was held with leaders of the member organisations. Mrs. Maureen Irwin was at the 2nd European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in June.

### **Recent Ecumenical Developments**

The Rev. Dr. Colin Davey, Coordinating Secretary of CCBI for Church Life, spoke on recent ecumenical developments at the April meeting.

### **Evangelism**

The Moderator continues to attend meetings of the Four Nations Forum on Evangelisation.

## **OVERSEAS AFFAIRS BOARD**

### **World Mission Committee**

There was a meeting with the Irish Missionary Union in February to discuss possible cooperation. One outcome was a joint study day in November on the theme 'The Churches' Mission: Unity of Purpose, Varieties of Approaches?'. Over forty people attended.

The Committee continues to provide a forum for the member churches to exchange information and views on mission issues.

### **The Churches' Commission on Mission**

The Very Rev. David Godfrey and the Rev. Paul Kingston represented the Council at the Commission's seventh meeting which was held in September in Edinburgh.

### **Climate Change Petition**

The Northern Ireland signatures were posted to London to be part of the UK total. The petition was presented to the UK Government. A letter was written to the Minister for the Environment in the Republic.

### **Refugees in Ireland**

There is an increasing number of asylum seekers coming to Ireland and the Government of the Republic has ended the common travel area with the United Kingdom. Ms Nadette Foley, Director of the Irish Refugee Council, spoke to the May meeting of the Board about some of the issues arising. This continues to be an area of concern for the Board.

The Moderator and Secretary of the Churches' Commission on Racial Justice of CCBI met some people from the member churches in October and issues arising in relation to asylum seekers and racism in Ireland were discussed. These are being taken up further by the Department of Social Issues of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

### **CCBI International Affairs Liaison Group**

The Moderator continues to attend meetings of the Group. Mr. Paul Renshaw has been appointed Coordinating Secretary for International Affairs of CCBI in succession to the Rev. Dr. Keith Clements, who has become General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches.

### **Partnership and Twinning**

A leaflet on some guidelines for local churches was produced (see Appendix One).

### **Exchange of Information**

One of the functions of the Board is to provide a forum for an exchange

of information on various international situations and issues of church interest. During the year these have included Sri Lanka and the Sudan.

### **Christian Aid**

The total income raised for Christian Aid in Ireland for the year ending March 1997 was £826,686 + IR£672,518. Included in this sum are IR£436,237 from the Department of Foreign Affairs, £111,410 from the Church of Ireland Bishops Appeal, £170,000 from the Presbyterian Church Christmas Appeal and £19,609 from the Methodist 1% Appeal. During 1997 the Moravian Church, the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church and the Religious Society of Friends undertook a special scheme to raise funds for CEPAD in Nicaragua, and it is likely that the target of £5,000 will be exceeded.

Christian Aid Week in Northern Ireland in May 1997 raised a record £381,593, up 11% on the previous year. In the Republic as many churches as possible were encouraged to run coffee mornings, using Bewley's fairly traded coffee, and there was an encouraging response. The generosity of so many individual donors and church congregations is a sign of widespread support for the work being supported overseas. All who so support our overseas partners deserve our thanks.

In addition in 1997 for the first time the Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian churches combined to plan joint action in support of the "Change the Rules" campaign. Churches are being asked to save till receipts and write to their local supermarkets, encouraging them to adopt a code of conduct to ensure that those who grow our food are more fairly treated. In general there appears to be a growing feeling in the churches that while giving money is important it needs to be supplemented by action which will really change the systems which keep some people poor.

This campaign was taken up by Development Education for Youth in Dublin and became the focus of the Irish One World Week. So far 7 out of the largest 10 UK supermarket chains have indicated their support for adopting a code, and in Dublin Senator Feargal Quinn has committed himself to gathering the supermarket chains together early in 1998 with a view to joint action.

What is listed here is only a summary of Christian Aid's total programme, designed to tackle poverty. It is only possible because of the work of a multitude of volunteers who make Christian Aid what it is and of the continuing support of the churches.

During 1997 Christian Aid's Mary Purcell resigned from her post as part time staff member in Dublin dealing with the government and employee third world funds. Ian McDowell retired from the position of National Secretary in January 1998. Maire Garvey has been appointed to work mainly in churches and church schools in the Republic, while Michael Begg has taken charge of dealing with the Department of Foreign Affairs. Centred in Belfast, Tim Magowan has continued his work as youth officer



making useful contacts with many church and other youth groups and events. Margaret Boden has been appointed to take over as Team Leader in Ireland, with the title of General Secretary, and Jenny Orr has been appointed as Area Coordinator for Northern Ireland. The essential but sometimes unnoticed work of the administrative staff must also be commended, and those who served in any temporary capacity for part of the year deserve thanks for their contribution.

The Irish Committee representing the sponsoring churches in Ireland continues to meet and welcomed renewed participation by the Salvation Army after a gap of a few years. Rosemary Calvert continues to represent the ICC on the Christian Aid Board, where the other Irish representatives are the Rt. Rev. Roy Warke, Rev. S. J. Campbell and Mr. Alf McCreary. She is chairperson of the Irish Committee and was one of the panel which interviewed for a new Director after Michael Taylor offered his resignation. Daleep Mukarji from India, who will become Director during 1998, is no stranger to Ireland, having paid an extended visit here some years ago.

A concluding word from Ian McDowell: "I wish to thank the Council and all its member churches for their encouragement and support. With a changed team of staff in place working under a new Director, the scene is set for more progress. Over the 24 years I have been in post there has been not only an increased income but also a growing awareness of the need for campaigning work involving large numbers of church people. All the signs are that the time is ripe for more action in order that things may really change for some of the poorest in the world. The Council can support Christian Aid as it seeks to act with and for the sponsoring churches in this area of social justice."

## **COUNCIL OF CHURCHES FOR BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

The Rev. Canon Desmond Sinnamon was appointed to represent the Council on the Churches' Commission for Inter-Faith Relations.

## **EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL COMMISSION FOR CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Samuel Hutchinson and Dr. Kenneth Milne attended the Annual Meeting of the Commission held in Antwerp in September. EECCS will become the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches as from September 1998. This integration raises issues concerning the best way of guaranteeing future Irish Church participation in European issues. It is planned to hold a consultation of relevant people in the member churches in 1998.

## **CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES**

### **Second European Ecumenical Assembly**

The General Secretary represented the Council at the Assembly held in

Graz in Austria in July with Mrs. Maureen Irwin representing Women's Link.

### 11th Assembly of CEC

The General Secretary represented the Council at the 11th Assembly held in Graz following the Second European Ecumenical Assembly. There will be no Irish representation on the CEC Central Committee this time around.

### INTER-CHURCH RECONCILIATION FUND FOR IRELAND

The following grants were agreed in 1997:

	£
Kids with Artitude, Belfast - towards summer scheme	500
Christian Fellowship Church, Carrickfergus - towards drop-in centre	1,200
Greysteel Community Enterprises, Co. Londonderry - towards job creation project	1,000
The Centre, High Street, Omagh - towards drop-in centre	1,000
Killycurragh Youth Club, Co. Tyrone - towards equipment	300
Gortalowry House, Cookstown - towards cross-community youth centre	1,200
Harmony Community Trust, Glebe House, Co. Down - towards building work	1,200
Dungiven Community Resource Centre, Co. Londonderry - towards cross community adult education	500
Ardoyne Youth Club, Belfast - towards summer scheme	400
Pop Bar, Ardoyne, Belfast - towards summer scheme	597
Fintona Development Association, Co. Tyrone - towards summer scheme	400
Zero-8-teen, Brownlow, Co. Armagh - towards summer scheme	750
Footprints Women's Centre, Poleglass - towards after-schools club	1,000
Family Caring Centre, Rathenraw, Antrim - towards resource materials for after schools club	800
Cookstown and Dungannon Women's Aid - towards educational courses	750
Conway Youth Club, Belfast - towards computer equipment	500
Ballynafeigh Community Development Association, Belfast, - towards summer scheme	750
Meadow and Armagh Road Women's Group, Newry - towards self development classes and activities for children	1,000
Newry and District Tenant and Resident Federation - seeding grant	300
Kilkeel Development Association - towards cross-community activities	750

Ballywalter Youth Club, Co. Down - towards resource library	500
Colin/Forfar Youth Project, Belfast - towards cross-community work	800
Go-Kidz, Belfast - towards equipment for youth club	350
Roden Street Festival Committee, Belfast - towards summer festival	750
Department of Social Issues, Irish Inter-Church Meeting - towards costs of poverty hearing	2,000
Committee on the Administration of Justice - towards equipment for new office	1,000
Alliance Ardoyne Playscheme, Belfast - towards costs	688
Wishing Well Family Centre, Belfast - towards summer scheme	500
REACH Across, Londonderry - towards summer programme	715
Corpus Christi Youth Centre, Ballymurphy, Belfast - towards summer scheme	750
Grosvenor Youth Project, Belfast - towards summer scheme	481
St. Oliver Plunkett Youth Development Scheme, Belfast - towards summer scheme	500
Drumellen Community Association, Craigavon - towards kitchen equipment	800
Tullysaran Youth Club, Co. Tyrone - towards equipment	600
Benburb Centre, Co. Tyrone - towards relocation costs	2,500
Corrymeela Centre, Ballycastle - towards fitting out of new house	2,500
PAKT, Lurgan - towards computer system	1,800
Railway Community Development Association, Belfast - towards community development work	1,000
Dunanney Centre, Rathcoole, Belfast - towards display area	500
Unity Outreach, Rathcoole, Belfast - towards computer system for drop-in centre	1,000
Carnagat Area Community Association, Newry - seeding grant	750
Lamb of God Community, Belfast - towards cross-community work	1,200
Sion Mills Community Association - towards essential rewiring	1,200

*The following monies were designated by donors:*

From Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland - Youth Link:NI 723

In the twenty-four years since the Fund has been operating in its present form over £500,000 has been allocated by the Committee to nearly 750 projects and an additional £344,000 passed through to designated groups.

## **IRISH ECUMENICAL CHURCH LOAN FUND**

The Fund provides low interest loans to peace and reconciliation, church and community projects. The Committee agreed the following loan in 1997: Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre - £15,000 at 4% for 5 years.

Mr. A. Connolly and Mr. R. Sherwood became members of the Committee during the year.

### **BELFAST CHURCHES' URBAN DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

The Committee operates in association with the Council, but is appointed by member churches in the Belfast area, in order to encourage their social, community and economic outreach. It is funded by Making Belfast Work. The current Development Officer, Mr. E. R. McDowell, took up his appointment on January 1, 1997, for an initial period of two years. He has spent much time seeking to facilitate church involvement in the emerging Partnership Process in Belfast. A Churches' Forum has been set up in East Belfast. Mr. McDowell also devotes considerable time to individual parishes and congregations which are seeking to undertake projects. The Development Officer is finding that funding constraints, both with ACE and Making Belfast Work, are having a significant effect on his work. Some churches are struggling to maintain their current level of involvement in their neighbourhoods.

A mailing was sent out to clergy at the end of September which gave a brief account of three different churches working in diverse ways within their respective communities, and highlighting issues which churches have to face in developing community projects. The Development Officer has also given lectures in a number of the theological colleges.

The Rev. Jim Rea is now chairman of the Committee, with the Rt. Rev. Jim Moore, vice-chairman.

### **THE CHURCHES' PEACE EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

(The Churches' Peace Education Programme is the legal entity which runs the joint peace education programme of the Council and the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace)

During the year Mrs. Brigid Lenane, Peace Education Officer with responsibility for Secondary Schools, developed a pilot cross-border primary schools project. Four primary schools on the Co. Donegal/Co. Fermanagh border were involved in a cultural heritage programme with a very successful concluding concert in June. The project was developed in conjunction with the Western Education and Library Board and Co-operation North and funding was obtained under the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

Following the success of this pilot project the initiative has been expanded and there are now four groups of four schools involved on a crossborder/cross-community basis. There are eight schools on the Londonderry/Donegal border (two sets of four) and four schools in the Cavan/Fermanagh border plus the original four on the Donegal/Fermanagh border. The expanded project is continuing with the cultural traditions emphasis and with both curriculum and contact elements.

During the year Ms Sarah Bennett, the Peace Education Officer with responsibility for Primary Schools, began efforts to get the recently completed Pathways Programme for the Upper Primary age group used in schools. Sarah left at the end of August to return to teaching. She has been replaced by Ms Elaine Hall who began work with the Programme at the beginning of January. She will continue the work begun by Sarah Bennett and also commence work on materials for the Lower Primary level.

The Resources Centre catalogue was distributed during the year to schools, both North and South. A considerable number of orders continue to be generated.

The Department of Education for Northern Ireland is in the process of establishing a new funding scheme for voluntary bodies. Criteria for this scheme have been established. Applications for grant aid are being invited from voluntary bodies such as the Programme. There is, thus, considerable uncertainty about future funding for the Programme which is only secure until the end of March 1998. Uncertainty about funding has been a feature of the Programme's life during the 1990s. It is to be hoped that the Programme can find a secure place within the Department's new scheme of grant aid.

During the year 'What the Bible Says About Peace', 'What the Bible Says About Violence' and 'What the Bible Says About Reconciliation' were revised.

## **IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING**

(The Irish Inter-Church Meeting is a relationship between the Irish Episcopal Conference of the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the Irish Council of Churches. The President of ICC is co-chairman and the General Secretary is Joint Secretary).

The 15th Meeting took place in November 1997. The Friday evening dealt with a number of topics including Church Renewal and the New Millennium; a reflection on the Second European Ecumenical Assembly and an introduction to the report 'Unemployment and the Future of Work'. The Saturday morning dealt with the report 'Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today' produced by the Department of Theological Questions. There are to be further Meetings in May 1999 and November 2000.

## **Irish Inter-Church Committee**

The Committee met five times during the year. A review of the structures, functions, legal status, membership of the IICM commenced in November 1996 and reported to the IICC in January 1998. Proposals are being sent to the member churches for their comments by October 1998 with a view to final decisions being taken by the churches in 1999.

A document on Inter-Church Marriage Services and Baptisms of Children of Inter Church couples was finalised. It was circulated to the

churches and relevant organisations. It is also planned to look at other issues related to inter-church marriages, for instance pastoral care.

A letter was sent to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment regarding religion as an exam subject in the Republic.

In 1994 the Committee endorsed the idea of an Irish dimension to the Developing Missionary Congregations Project of the Churches' Commission on Mission. There were exploratory visits to Ireland in 1995. The Project has been renamed Building Bridges of Hope and five parishes and congregations, both Protestant and Catholic, are participating in its next phase. A meeting of the Irish participating parishes and congregations was held in October.

Another meeting between members of the IICC and representatives from British Churches took place in April. Meetings normally take place every couple of years.

A meeting of church delegates going to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly was held in May. A hearing on 'The Churches and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland', organised by church representatives, was held during the Assembly, which took place in Graz, Austria, at the end of June. A follow-up meeting of Irish people who were at the Assembly was organised in September.

Further meetings continue to be held of people from the churches concerning plans for the millennium.

Plans are being made to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the first Inter-Church Meeting which took place on September 26, 1973.

### **Department of Social Issues**

The Department provides a meeting point for social responsibility (or equivalent) people from the churches.

A very worthwhile Poverty Hearing was held in Belfast in April with 400 people attending. A report was produced and work continues on follow-up.

A one-day conference was held in Dublin in June in conjunction with the (Roman Catholic) Council for Social welfare to discuss the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland report 'Unemployment and the Future of Work'. Bishop David Sheppard spoke at the event.

The Department is seeking to produce educational material on racial justice in the Irish context. Issues of community development remain on the agenda. A leaflet on the work of the Department is being produced.

### **Department of Theological Questions**

'Freedom, Justice and Responsibility in Ireland Today' was published by Veritas in January 1997. The Department was reconstituted and a planning meeting held in December. As a result of the meeting it was decided to embark on a project with the title "Called into the Unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit" and a provisional sub-title "Christ in/and the Church Today".

It is intended to start with a discussion document.

The issue of inter-communion has come into focus following the President of Ireland taking communion in a Church of Ireland church. The Irish Inter-Church Committee has asked the DTQ to study the question of inter-communion; to prepare a statement on different church practices based on doctrinal positions and developments; and to assess the implications for ecumenism.

### **Local Ecumenism**

A weekend for local groups and Christian communities was held at the end of February 1997 at the Dromantine Conference Centre near Newry, with the theme 'Together with Purpose'. A newsheet 'Irish Ecumenical News' continues to be sent out to local groups twice a year.

### **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

A sub-committee produces the Irish Order of Service every year. The 1998 Order has prayers in relation to the 25th Anniversary of the first Irish Inter-Church Meeting in 1973 and to the 75th Anniversary of the Irish Council of Churches.

## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **PARTNERSHIP AND TWINNING; Some guidelines for local churches**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Board of Overseas Affairs of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) has discussed linkages between churches and church groups with local churches and groups abroad, particularly in the 'third world' or 'two thirds world'. It was decided to produce a short leaflet with some thoughts on the matter. However as the World Church Office of the Methodist Church in Britain had already produced such a leaflet it was decided, with their agreement, to adapt their text for an inter-church audience.

The following advice is recommended for consideration by the ICC Board of Overseas Affairs.

Before any linkage is pursued, it would be wise to make contact with appropriate bodies in your own denomination dealing with overseas churches. They may be able to offer helpful suggestions and warn of possible pitfalls.

It is very important to be clear about the purpose, possible nature and outcomes of any linking scheme.

### **1. Purposes - good practice**

- \* to learn from each other
- \* to develop understanding and friendship with Christians in a different culture
- \* to share faith and insights
- \* to share in prayer
- \* to assist each other in mission where each church is set.

### **2. Possible problems which need to be addressed at the outset**

- \* Money  
The main reason for setting up a partnership should never be money; overriding needs to either raise money, or receive funding for a particular project, will inevitably distort the nature of the partnership.
- \* Narrow focus  
If a church's world focus is narrowed on one particular church link, other aspects of world mission can be excluded.
- \* Involvement  
Everybody in the church needs to feel involved, and not just a few enthusiasts.

### **3. Some principles of partnership - good practice**

- \* Be very clear from both sides about the purpose (see 1 above)
- \* Clearly state who will be responsible for the organisation - this need not be the minister
- \* Clearly state, at the outset, how long the proposed link will last - at least build in a review to monitor the situation.  
If exchanges are envisaged, both sides will need to be clear about:
  - ▲ how many people will be involved?
  - ▲ who would benefit most?
  - ▲ how long the exchange should be?
  - ▲ when the exchange will take place?
  - ▲ cost implications for individuals and the church?
- \* Budgets should be worked out in advance - for travel, correspondence, administration, etc.
- \* A report should be submitted regularly to the partner church (denominational church offices may also welcome a copy).

### **4. Developing the partnership - good practice**

- \* Personal contacts are often the reason for the partnership beginning, and friendships will certainly enable the partnership to flourish. Wide circulation of the following will help:
  - ▲ letters



- ▲ photographs
- ▲ exchange of cassettes or videos
- ▲ church newsletters
- \* Provide up-dated displays and news
- \* Try and learn each other's language
- \* Exchange of personnel
- \* Remember also to build on existing local links - civic, diocesan, ecumenical etc. - and also mission partners that are known.

## 5. Keeping a balance

- \* In some partnerships it may be easier for one church to raise money for an overseas visit, than for its partner church to do likewise
  - ▲ this could distort the partnership
  - ▲ how should money be raised - and shared - by the partner churches for exchange purposes?
- \* Sensitivity will be needed in all financial matters
  - ▲ will one church be the 'giver'?
  - ▲ will the 'receivers' assume a junior role?
- \* Be prepared to see the wealth of the partnership in terms such as hospitality, enthusiasm, challenge and friendship
- \* The partnership should help people to share in not just each other's situations, but also raise awareness that there are many different needs in the world, all deserving our interest and prayers.

## 6. The review

- \* State at the outset when the review will take place
  - \* not too soon
  - \* allow time for the partnership to develop
- \* Similar questions should be asked of both partners, but allow cultural differences to enrich the review process too!
- \* A good review will both assess the past and look forward to future developments.

Produced by the Board of Overseas Affairs, Irish Council of Churches, 48 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ. Phone 01232 - 663145. Adapted from the document 'Partnership/Twinning - Guidelines for Churches/Circuits' produced by the Methodist Church, World Church Office in Britain.

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