

**2001**

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# Annual Report of the Irish Council of Churches

Submitted to the Annual Meeting  
of the Council  
March 2001





**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**  
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**INTRODUCTION FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

The Vatican Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, which was the subject of a Church Consultation in December and of remarks by the President at the Autumn Gathering, has been the source of considerable debate since its issue in September. Its emphases on the central uniqueness of Christ and the dangers of relativism have been overlooked in the ensuing controversy about how the Catholic Church views other churches. However, the Declaration has highlighted, particularly starkly, major ecumenical difficulties, particularly in the area of **ecclesiology**. There is challenge to other churches to clarify how they understand themselves and how they regard churches different to themselves. Further, in an increasingly pluralist and post-modern context all churches need to look at how the uniqueness of Christ is to be maintained and proclaimed in an environment where such a claim tends to be dismissed. In addition, we need to concentrate on what we can do, which is to develop relationships at whatever level we can. If we cannot be sisterly churches we can at least be neighbourly churches.

The limited reviews of the Council and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting have been making progress during the year and some of their conclusions have already been implemented (see Appendix One). Their emphasis has been on facilitating relationships between the churches, and making sure that the structures and relationships are appropriate for this.

During the year the Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project of the Irish School of Ecumenics held a Churches Consultation on Sectarianism. The nature and purpose of the Consultation were expressed as

*A Churches' Consultation on sectarianism is based on the conviction that a vigorous, comprehensive, and consistent challenge to sectarianism by the churches is a gift of great value, both to the churches themselves and to the broader society. For the churches, such a challenge can simultaneously enhance the vitality of their internal life as communities of faith (and our life together as one community of faith) and the integrity of the churches' witness to the gospel. For society as a whole, the churches' challenge to sectarianism will do much to determine whether we attain peace and especially the nature and quality of that peace: will peace take the form of a benign apartheid - merely separate development in the absence of violence - or will it truly merit the name of reconciliation?*

The Moving Beyond Sectarianism Project is drawing to a close and there will be a publication about its conclusions in 2001. It has done



distinguished work since 1995 and it is important that this work continues in some form, for the reasons outlined above.

One of the issues highlighted by the Consultation was the internal divisions **within** churches - North/South, liberal/conservative, pro-Agreement/anti-Agreement - and the lack of dialogue about them. We can too easily concentrate on the ecumenical task and forget about the churches we are coming from.

The Consultation also highlighted the deep sense of crisis in the Protestant/Unionist community in Northern Ireland. The sense of loss, alienation, anger, dislocation and numbness is palpable - 'An Unsettled People' was the sub-title of a book published about this community during the year. All this has significant consequences. The implosion on the Shankill during the year was another sign of it. It has consequences for our churches and for inter-church relations.

The theme of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, held in November, was 'Being Church in a New Millennium'. The statistics presented in Appendix Two make stark reading concerning the rapid decline of the mainstream churches (Protestant and Catholic). They also highlight the need for projects such as Building Bridges of Hope, which was also featured at the Meeting.

There are churches which are growing - some because of the presence of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. In this category are the Orthodox Churches and the black-led churches. The Greek and Coptic Orthodox Churches are now members of the Council; there is also now a Romanian and Russian Orthodox presence. We have been developing contacts with one of the black-led churches - the Cherubim and Seraphim Church based in Dublin. The New Churches - coming out of the house church/charismatic movement - have been growing, North and South. The LifeLink Network of Churches has become a member of the Council. During the year we had a dialogue with members of the New Churches in the Dublin area. We also had contact with a group of churches originating in Galway. We hope to continue the dialogue with this source of new Christian life.

#### **OFFICERS**

The Rev Canon Ian Ellis and the Rev Robert Herron became President and Vice-President respectively at the Annual Meeting. We express our thanks to the outgoing President, the Rev Edmund Mawhinney, for all the time and commitment he gave to the work of the Council during his term of office.

#### **MEETINGS**

The Annual Meeting was held in March at the Dromantine Conference

Centre, Newry. On the Friday evening there was a Presentation on the theme 'The Challenge Facing the Church in the New Millennium' by the Rev Dr Gary Mason and the Rev David Kerr of the Methodist Church.

The Autumn Gathering was held in the Mount Oliver Pastoral Centre, Dundalk and the theme was 'Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Republic of Ireland'. The main speaker was Mr Jerome Connolly of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace and there were inputs from the Rev Noel Fallows of Sutton Methodist Church, Dublin and Mrs Agnes Aderanti of the Cherubim and Seraphim Rock of Ages Church, Dublin.

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

Following the decisions of the Irish Inter-Church Committee regarding restructuring the Irish Inter-Church Meeting and the report of the ICC Review Group, the Executive Committee has been implementing changes - see Appendix One. One change that has already been implemented is the standing down of the Board of Inter-Church Affairs.

#### **STAFFING**

Mrs Florence Pyper, Administrative Secretary of the Council, retired at the end of August. Mrs Pyper had worked with the Council since the mid-1970s and had made an enormous contribution to the efficient working of the Council. We wish her a happy and long retirement. A review of the ICC's and IICM's administrative needs was carried out and it was decided that a part-time Administrator for the ICC/IICM Secretariat was required. It was further agreed that it was necessary as a consequence to make the current secretarial assistant/bookkeeper, Ms Doreen Stevenson, redundant. Mrs Joyce Williams took up appointment as Administrator at the end of August.

#### **MEMBERSHIP AND RELATED MATTERS**

The Executive Committee drew up guidelines to help the Council consider new applications for membership. The Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Dublin has made an approach regarding closer links with the Council.

#### **DISCUSSION WITH NEW CHURCHES**

The Executive Committee met members of some of the New Churches in the Dublin area for purposes of information exchange. It has been agreed to continue the discussion. Contact was made with the Galway Christian Fellowship which has a number of churches in the Republic.

#### **INTER-CHURCH CENTRE**

Further work was carried out to the Inter-Church Centre. Damp has been detected in the building which will require remedial work. Christian Aid moved out of the building at the end of March and the Irish School of



Ecumenics took over most of the vacated space.

### **COMMUNITY ISSUES**

Meetings of those people in the member churches concerned with peace and political developments have continued through the year. The General Secretary has continued his active involvement in the Church Initiative Group which brings together, on an informal basis, people from the churches and Christian groups concerned with political developments.

A seminar was convened in September to discuss the proposed Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. Professor Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, took part. A Briefing Paper on the Bill was produced for the churches, the substance of which was submitted to the Commission.

The General Secretary helped facilitate the process of appointment of the two places from the ICC member churches on the Northern Ireland Civic Forum.

The European Union Directive on Equal Treatment in Employment was kept under review for its implications for church employment. Representatives from the four major churches met the Taoiseach in October to express their concern. Many of the concerns of the churches appear to have been met.

Mr Rob Fairmichael continues to attend meetings of the Churches' Asylum Network.

### **BOARD OF OVERSEAS AFFAIRS**

#### **World Mission Committee**

A joint Study Day with the Irish Missionary Union was held in November on the theme of 'Fundamentalism - the Rise of Fundamentalism in Christianity, Islam and Hinduism'. The speakers were Dr John May and the Rev Michael Iprgrave and upwards of 60 people attended.

The Committee continues to provide a forum for the member churches to exchange information and views on mission issues. Representatives of the IMU are now observers at Committee meetings.

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

Mrs Maureen Irwin represented the Council at the tenth meeting held in Durham in September.

#### **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: the Maluku Islands, Sri

Lanka, Sudan and the Middle East. The Board continues to hear reports about the work of Christian Aid in Ireland. The Rev Victor Launder, Moderator of the Board, continues to attend meetings of the CTBI International Affairs Liaison Group.

### **WOMEN'S LINK**

Omagh Methodist Church was the venue for the Fellowship Day held on 8 April 2000 at which the keynote speakers were the Rev Norman and Mrs Margaret Taggart. The Committee were very encouraged at the number that travelled from the Republic of Ireland. The Fellowship Day for 2001 will take place in the McCracken Presbyterian Church, Malone Road, Belfast, on 28 April. The focus of the day will be on Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

At the November Committee meeting Denise Wright of the Lifelink Group of Churches was appointed President-Elect.

The news-sheet 'Newslink' continues to be published twice yearly and contains items and articles covering the activities of the members of the affiliated Churches.

The Women's Desk continues to operate twice weekly on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. This is staffed by a very faithful bank of volunteers and Women's Link wishes it to be noted how much their dedication is appreciated.

### **CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

The Rev Desmond Bain was appointed to the Four Nations Forum on Evangelisation. The Churches Commission on Racial Justice had a fact-finding visit to Ireland in March; the Commission also had one of its meetings in Northern Ireland during the year. The Rev Michael Iprgrave of the Churches' Commission on Inter-Faith Relations spoke at the World Mission Conference and also visited Dublin to make contacts in the inter-faith scene there.

### **CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES**

Dr Kenneth Milne attended the second meeting of the new CEC Church and Society Commission in May in Moscow.

### **INTER-CHURCH RECONCILIATION FUND FOR IRELAND**

(The fund was set up in 1973 to channel monies given by churches outside Ireland for Peace and Reconciliation purposes in relation to Northern Ireland. A Committee appointed by the Council and the Roman Catholic Bishops administers the money.)



The following grants were agreed in 2000:

	£stg
NRJ Café, Derry - equipment for youth work	1,000
First Step Drop In Centre, York Road, Belfast - for equipment	1,500
Dromore Youth Council, Co Tyrone - towards equipment for their youth club	500
The Edge, Ballynahinch - towards equipment for new youth centre	2,000
Greater St James Ex-Prisoners Association, Belfast - for materials and training in relation to youth work	500
Trojans Boys Club, Creggan, Derry - for equipment	1,200
Larne Youth - towards fencing to make their centre safe and secure	1,200
Sea Court Women's Action Group, Larne - towards equipment for a new drop-in centre	800
Sydenham Cross-Community Group, Belfast - towards equipment for their centre	1,500
Cavanacarragh Community Association, Co Fermanagh - towards equipment for the extension to their centre	1,700
Sion Mills After School and Homework Club - seeding grant	400
Moneyneena Afterschool Club, Draperstown - for equipment	600
New Lodge Housing Forum, Belfast - towards essential security provision	700
John Paul II Youth Club, Ardoyne, Belfast - towards summer scheme	750
Fintona Development Association - for a cross border youth exchange with a reconciliation focus	300
Home Mission Society (Ballymena) re Ballycraigy, Antrim - for equipment for their youth work in Ballycraigy Estate, Antrim	800
Frontier Youth Trust, Belfast - for library resources for this agency supporting youth work with marginalised young people	1,400
Pop Bar Drop in Centre, Ardoyne, Belfast - towards summer scheme	546
Conway Youth Centre, Belfast - towards summer scheme	500
Saints Youth Club, Twinbrook - towards summer scheme	750
Alliance Ardoyne Playscheme, Belfast - towards summer scheme	640
St Teresa's Youth Centre, Glen Road, Belfast - towards summer scheme	700
Zero-8-Teen, Brownlow - towards summer scheme	750
St John Vianney Youth Club, Ormeau Road, Belfast - towards summer scheme	500
ECONI (Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland) - towards 'Seek the Welfare of the City' conference	800
Foyle Women's Information Network - once off grant for special purposes	700
Grosvenor Youth Project, Belfast - towards summer scheme	400

Eskra Development Association, Co Tyrone - towards summer scheme	400
Holy Trinity Youth Club, Turf Lodge, Belfast - towards summer scheme	750
St Oliver Plunket Youth Development Scheme, Belfast - towards summer scheme	400
St Macartan's Youth Club, Augher - for equipment	500
REACH Across, Derry - towards cross-community residentials	750
History Makers - towards project involving 19 different religious-based youth organisations	1,000
Lisburn YMCA - towards equipment for new group work rooms	1,000
Wishing Well Family Centre, Belfast - towards summer scheme	500
Beragh Youth Club, Co Tyrone - towards summer scheme	600
Ardoyne Youth Club, Belfast - towards summer scheme	700
Ballynafeigh Community Development Association, Belfast - towards summer scheme	450
Lisanelly Regeneration Group, Omagh - towards summer scheme	500
Pax Christi Britain - towards the cost of bring people from NI to conference	500
Kids Club, Carrickfergus - for equipment	1,000
Rasharkin Community Association, Co Antrim - for equipment for resource centre	500
Ballymac Friendship Trust, Belfast - for equipment for their centre	1,500
Columbanus Community of Reconciliation, Belfast - towards computerisation of its ecumenical library	1,000
Corrymeela Community - towards resources for children and youth at their Centre at Ballycastle	1,000
Clooney Hall Centre, Waterside - towards furniture/equipment costs for the community end of the Centre	1,500
Point Programmes, Belfast - for Donegall Pass/Strabane programme	1,000
Forestside Christian Centre, Belfast - towards equipment for youth work	1,200
Glenavy (Church of Ireland) Parish, Co Antrim - towards peacebuilding programme	1200
Think Again - Reconciliation (Church of Ireland) Diocese of Down and Dromore - towards reconciliation programme	800

Declining income has forced the Committee to review the criteria for funding and to reduce the annual amount available to be given out. Mr Serge Fornerod of Swiss Inter-Church Aid visited Northern Ireland in July to visit projects and assess the agency's continuing support for the Fund - this was secured.

The Rev Canon P J Early (Chairman), Elizabeth McElnea and the Rt Rev Dean R Murphy all resigned from the Committee. They were replaced by



Mrs Margaret Hutchinson, Mr Aidan Hart and Rev Sean Larkin.

### **IRISH ECUMENICAL CHURCH LOAN FUND**

The Fund provides low interest loans to peace and reconciliation, church and community projects. The Committee agreed the following loans in 2000:

Churches' Voluntary Work Bureau, Londonderry - £20,000 for 5 years at 4%

Ballynahinch Regeneration Ltd - £25,000 for 5 years at 4%

In the light of a reduced demand for loans the Committee repaid its loan of £25,000 from the ICC Special Projects Fund and returned a total of £15,000 in capital to ECLOF Geneva for use in Eastern Europe.

The Committee was saddened during the year by the death of one of its members - Mr R W Jess. Mr Jess had been a founder member of the Committee and Honorary Treasurer of the Council 1991-1994. Dr M Downes also resigned 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 to encourage their social and community outreach.)

Funding for the post of Development Officer was terminated at the end of March by Making Belfast Work and new funding has been sought from other sources, so far without success. In the meantime the ICC Special Projects Fund has been used to keep the post of Development Officer going, at least until September 2001 when it is hoped European Union funding might be available.

Two publications were produced during the year: *Protestant Churches in Areas of Disadvantage - a Series of Case-Studies* and *Churches and Community Involvement - The Theological Issues*. Both publications were extensively circulated and received significant interest.

The Development Officer, Mr Eddie McDowell, has worked intensively with a limited number of local churches, and christian bodies, particularly in the north and the east of the city. Two projects in east Belfast, which the Development Officer had given substantial support to over the years, had official openings in 2000.

Members of the Committee had a meeting with the Government Voluntary Activity Unit to highlight the work of the churches in the community.

Mrs Margaret Hutchinson has become Chairperson in succession to the Rt Rev James Moore. The Rev Kenneth Robinson has become 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 (Roman Catholic) Irish Commission for Justice and Peace.)

During the year Ms Elaine Hall, the Peace Education Officer with responsibility for primary schools, continued her promotion of the Pathways Programme for Key Stage 2 in the primary school and of the first two modules of the Little Pathways Programme for Key Stage 1. Between September 1999 and June 2000 186 schools in Northern Ireland were using both Programmes.

There remains two modules to be completed in the Little Pathways Programme. One for Year 3 in the Primary School, which is concerned with the development of friendship skills, is currently being piloted and it is hoped that it will be printed in time for September 2001. The other module is planned for Year 4 in the Primary School and will look specifically at conflict resolution. When this module is complete there will then be a comprehensive set of materials in Education for Mutual Understanding/Personal Development for the Primary School.

Mrs Brigid Lenane continued her work with the cross-border Primary Schools Project. Twelve schools (3 groups of 4, two Protestant schools with two Catholic schools, two from Northern Ireland and two from the Republic) were involved in the Fermanagh/Donegal and Cavan/Leitrim areas working together on a cultural heritage programme. The topics the schools worked on included 'Farming Traditions', 'Wedding Customs in the Past' and 'Emigration'. There were also parents' evenings. An evaluation of the Project was commissioned, the outcome of which was very positive. The research undertaken by Andy Pollak and published as 'North-South Co-operation in Education' (May 2000) described our project as an 'outstanding initiative' and showed it to be unique in the Primary Sector.

The cross-border Project is funded by the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. Further funding has been received for a programme involving schools in the Monaghan/South Armagh area for 2000-2001.

The same cultural traditions approach has been used with Primary Schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board area. Three schools were involved in 1999-2000 and the theme was 'Visiting Our Churches'. Further schools will be involved in 2000-2001.

Discussions about future grant aid took place during the year with the Department of Education. Grant aid was only continued to the end of March 2001 with Mrs Lenane's post being reduced to 75% time. We have re-applied, like other voluntary groups, for funding beyond March 2001.

The Resources Centre Catalogue was reprinted during the year and the Resources Centre has continued to receive a considerable number of orders. 'What the Bible Says About Peace' and 'What the Bible Says About Reconciliation' were reprinted during the year.



The Most Rev Michael Dallat who was co-chairman of the Trustees died during the year. We are grateful to God for all he contributed to the Programme. He was replaced as co-chairman by Sister Lucina Montague and as a trustee by the Most Rev Dr John McAreavey. Mr Michael Arlow resigned as a member of the Management Group.

### **THE IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING (IICM)**

(The IICM 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, the Vice-President is Joint Secretary and the General Secretary is Executive Secretary).

The Seventeenth Meeting took place on 10 November 2000 when the theme was 'Being Church in a New Millennium'. In the morning the Department of Theological Issues report 'Being Church in a New Millennium' was discussed and in the afternoon there was a presentation on the Building Bridges of Hope Project for local parishes and congregations.

### **Irish Inter-Church Committee**

The Committee met four times during the year. Work on a limited re-organisation of the IICM proceeded - see Appendix One.

National millennium services were held in Dublin and Belfast on the afternoon of 2 January 2000. There was also much local inter-church activity during the turn of the year and some during Pentecost.

*Ministering to Inter-Church Couples: Help for Clergy* has been reprinted with some updating.

### **Department of Theological Questions**

The study document *Being Church in the New Millennium* was published by Veritas during the year.

A Seminar on the Vatican Declaration *Dominus Iesus* was held in December. The document was introduced by the Rev Bernard Longley and there were Methodist, Presbyterian and Church of Ireland responses. A Seminar on the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Agreement on Justification is planned for June 2001. A re-organisation of the Department is currently being looked at.

### **Department of Social Issues**

The Department provides a meeting point for social responsibility (or equivalent) people from the member churches. Information sharing is an important part of the Department's role. Issues of genetic modification of food, the plight of farmers, victims of violence, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, Sunday trading, racial equality, infertility and domestic violence have been under consideration. Speakers have included Ms Patricia Gilbert, Independent Counsellor to Regional Fertility Centre in

Belfast, Ms Fee Ching Leong on racial equality issues in Ireland and Ms Angela Courtney of the NI Women's Aid Federation and NI Forum on Domestic Violence (following publication of a Churches' Guide to Responding to Issues of Domestic Violence). The Rev David Clements was appointed to represent the Department on the Trauma Advisory Panel of the Eastern Health and Social Services Board in Northern Ireland.

### **Local Ecumenism**

A successful training course was held for those working with groups in an inter-church context during the winter and spring. Another course commenced in the autumn. This is a joint initiative of the Irish School of Ecumenics, the Mediation Network for Northern Ireland and IICM. A conference for local groups is being planned for May 2001.

The news-sheet *Irish Ecumenical News* continues to be sent out to local groups.

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

Material for the 2001 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was produced together with the Churches in Britain on an experimental basis.

### **Building Bridges of Hope Project**

There were five local churches in Ireland involved in this Britain and Ireland project which seeks to focus on what it means to be a missionary congregation. The Project has come to the end of Stage B and is seeking to move to a new stage. A small group has been working on the continuation of the Project in an Irish context. Contact has been made with the churches, with parishes and with some individuals to see if they would be willing to be facilitators.



## APPENDIX ONE

### RE-ORGANISATION OF THE IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING

#### PROGRESS REPORT

#### BACKGROUND

All the churches of the IICM voted to accept the proposed Constitution of the Conference of Churches in Ireland in 1999 except the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Discussion took place in the Autumn of 1999 in the Irish Inter-Church Committee about how to find a way forward. The member churches were also consulted.

The conclusion was that it was not possible to proceed with the setting up of the Conference of Churches in Ireland at this time although many of the churches would have liked to move in this direction.

Following that conclusion, discussion has concentrated on what changes it might be possible to make to the ICC and IICM while accepting that radical change is not possible at this time. There have been two parallel but interlinked discussions, one within the ICC and the other within the IICC. The outcome of these discussions to date is as follows:

#### 1 SECRETARIAT OF ICC AND IICM

It was agreed that the existing central secretariat of the ICC and IICM could be better organised, including its secretarial and bookkeeping arrangement, and that there needed to be a fairer sharing of financial burdens as between the churches. This had particular implications for the Roman Catholic Church which would have to pay more. This was accepted by the Irish Episcopal Conference.

Book-keeping for the IICM, which the ICC already does to some extent, was moved to the Inter-Church Centre at the end of 2000.

A part-time Administrator took up post at the end of August to do the secretarial work and book-keeping for the two bodies, following the retirement of Mrs Florence Pyper.

A protocol between the ICC and the IICM has been drawn up that clearly sets out the duties and responsibilities of staff to the two bodies.

#### 2 IRISH INTER-CHURCH MEETING

##### a) Involvement of the Smaller Churches

It was agreed to create another smaller churches' place on the IICC to bring the number up to two. A rota and procedure for the appointment of these two places has been agreed.

Those smaller churches who do not currently have a person on the IICC have been asked to nominate a person who will:

- (i) receive the papers for the IICC meetings
- (ii) attend an annual agenda setting IICC meeting, and
- (iii) act as a smaller churches' alternate on the IICC.

In the nomination of these people it has been suggested that it would help co-ordination between the Irish Inter-Church Meeting and the Irish Council of Churches if they were members of the ICC Executive Committee.

It was agreed to have a meeting of the Irish Inter-Church Committee once a year to which all the churches involved in the Irish Inter-Church Meeting would be invited. This meeting would look widely at the work of the IICM, the current priorities, the concerns of the churches, etc. Such a meeting would be agenda setting for the work of the IICM. (The ICC Executive Committee would meet later that day.) The first meeting took place on 31 January, 2001.

##### b) Project Work

It was agreed that there was work that could be done on a project basis, eg following through some of the work in the Bridges of Hope Project of the CTBI Churches Commission on Mission.

##### c) Theological Discussion

It was agreed that this needed to be a priority over the next few years, following up on the successful 'One Bread One Body' Seminar.

##### d) IICM Memorandum

A Memorandum has been drawn up outlining the IICM's structures and practices.

##### e) International Affairs

It has been agreed to hold a consultation of interested parties in the churches in the area of international affairs to see what the possibilities of co-operation might be.

##### f) Promoting Local Inter-Church Activity

As part of the re-organisation of the Secretariat, and in order to give it a better outward focus, it was agreed that it might make sense to employ a part-time person to further local inter-church activity, rather than to make a direct replacement for Sister Roisin Hannaway, the former Administrative Officer. Discussion about this possibility is proceeding in the IICC.



### 3 IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The Executive Committee has sought to (i) provide answers to what the role and tasks of the ICC might be in the period ahead, (ii) simplify the ICC structures; (iii) respond to the decisions made by the IICC; and (iv) suggest ways of making the meetings work as well as possible.

#### a) Proposed Role and Tasks for the ICC in the period ahead

- be a Forum and Meeting Place for the member churches
- work on matters which it is not appropriate or possible for the IICM to deal with
- develop and pass on issues for consideration to IICM
- run meetings/events, etc which can help/inspire/encourage/be of interest to the ICC constituency
- where appropriate, seek to develop relationships with churches outside the IICM member churches, and with groups and constituencies with whom it might be possible to engage (particularly those that have been traditionally suspicious or hostile to inter-church bodies)
- management of the Inter-Church Centre

#### b) Specific Recommendations

##### (i) Board of Inter-Church Affairs

It has been agreed that (i) the Board of Inter-Church Affairs be stood down as there is significant duplication of agenda between the Board, the ICC Executive Committee and the IICC, and (ii) the Executive Committee deals with issues looked after by the Board (see (iii) below).

##### (ii) Board of Overseas Affairs

If the consultation of interested parties in the Churches in the area of international affairs leads to setting up an IICM International Affairs Liaison Group of an acceptable nature it has been agreed that the Board of Overseas Affairs be stood down and any purely ICC Overseas Affairs business be transferred to the Executive Committee.

##### (iii) The Executive Committee

It has been agreed that

- the Executive Committee's agenda be re-organised to allow for occasional reports from a variety of different committees and groups, and that it explicitly allows time for discussion and sharing

of concerns at meetings, ie the Executive Committee is a place where some business is done, but also where churches meet. Implicit in all of this is that the Executive meetings need to work as well as possible.

- persons be appointed who attend Executive Committee meetings to alert the Committee to important issues in the fields of social issues and overseas affairs (if the Board of Overseas Affairs is stood down) that need to be considered. They should have links with the IICM Department of Social Issues and the IICM International Affairs Liaison Group. Mr Rob Fairmichael, Secretary of the Department of Social Issues, has been appointed the Link Person on social issues.
- the member churches be allowed and encouraged to appoint occasional alternates to Executive Committee meetings (particularly important for smaller churches).
- there be a sharing of papers between the ICC Executive Committee and the IICC.
- in the light of the above changes that the Executive Committee might meet four times a year and meetings would have different styles and emphases; two primarily business, one primarily thematic, and one to be held in conjunction with a meeting of the IICC. There should be some flexibility in this pattern.

#### (iv) Autumn Gathering and Annual Meeting

It has been agreed to experiment with the format of the Annual Meeting, for example to try a one-day meeting. It has also been agreed to drop the Autumn Gathering. Instead occasional meetings/events will be held around a speaker, on a particular theme of interest to the member Churches, which might be open to a wider audience.

#### (v) Roman Catholic Observers

Women's Link has had Roman Catholic observers for a long time and now also the World Mission Committee. It has been agreed to continue to encourage as much interaction as possible, at whatever level is possible, between ICC member churches and the Roman Catholic Church in these areas.

#### (vi) Appointments

- (a) It has been agreed to affirm the current practice of the IICC making appointments in particular circumstances (eg on social issues) to CTBI Commissions, etc.
- (b) It has been agreed to recommend to the member churches to appoint as far as possible the same people to the ICC Executive and the IICC so that there can be close harmonisation between the two bodies.
- (c) It has been agreed that as changes are implemented the member



churches be encouraged to review their appointments to the Council and the Executive Committee (see (b)).

**APPENDIX TWO**

**STATISTICAL SNAPSHOTS ON THE STATE OF RELIGION IN IRELAND**

**1 Census Data Northern Ireland (non-Catholics)**

	C of I	PCI	MCI	Other Denom.
1926	338,000	393,000	49,000	52,000
1961	344,800	413,000	72,000	71,000
1971	334,318	405,719	71,235	87,838
1991	279,280	336,891	59,517	122,448

**2 Church of Ireland Population**

1947	457,000
1965	403,500
1996	346,015

(Source: Report of the Commission on Episcopal Needs in Church of Ireland General Synod Report, 1998)

**3 Presbyterian Church - Persons of all Pges**

1968	399,807
1975	379,000
1995	305,000
1999	284,704

(Source: Presbyterian Annual Reports)

Note: Most PCI statistics regarding persons hit their all time high in the mid-60s.

**4 Methodist Church - Total Community**

1968	65,064
1984	61,099
1995	59,669
1999	55,839

(Source: Methodist Annual Reports)

**5 Methodist Church - Adult Membership**

1955	33,000
1960	32,000
1970	28,000
1980	24,000
1990	19,400
1999	17,000

(Source: Methodist Annual Reports)

Note: Methodist membership peaked in 1958.



**6 Churches that have been growing significantly in the period 1980-2000 in Northern Ireland**

	1980	2000
New Churches	100	3,800
(the LifeLink Network of Churches is classified under New Churches.)		
Pentecostal Churches	8,700	16,800
Free Presbyterian Church	9,700	14,700

(Source: Christian Research: Church Trends: Northern Ireland and Scotland, March 1998)

**7 Growth by Transfers**

Those churches that are growing are growing primarily by transfers from other denominations.

The analysis of the 1993 Belfast Churchgoers' Survey (F. Boal, M C Keane, D N Livingstone, *Them and Us?*, Institute of Irish Studies, 1997) finds that only 17% of Church of Ireland attenders and 18% of Presbyterian attenders have ever been members of another denomination, but 67% of 'Pentecostal/Charismatics' (people belonging to the New Churches and Pentecostal Churches) and 68% of 'Other Presbyterians' (people belonging to the Free Presbyterian and Evangelical Presbyterian Churches) have come from other traditions.

**8 Churches that have been growing in the period 1980-2000 in the Republic of Ireland**

	1980	2000
New Churches	150	5000 in the Dublin area alone (estimate from one of the leaders of these churches)
Orthodox Churches	100	Several thousand and perhaps upwards of 10,000 (estimate of the Rev Dr I Craciun)

(Source Irish Christian Handbook, 1992)

Note also the presence of several black-led churches.

**9 Young People and the Church**

**Baptisms - Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

1959	7,115
1999	2,221

**Sunday School numbers - Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

1959	67,490
2000	34,291

**Sunday School numbers - Church of Ireland Diocese of Connor**

1966	14,858
1985	7,852

The 1991 Social Attitudes Survey found the following for church attendance for the 18-34 age group:

Protestants		Catholics	
once a week	26%	once a week	77%
never	22%	never	4%

A 1999 Church of Ireland Diocese of Down and Dromore survey confirmed the absence of the 18-30 age group from church.

The conclusions of a survey of 10 Presbyterian Churches in Belfast (*Reconnecting with a Missing Generation*, November 2000) speak of "evidence of major decline in the number of those aged 25-44 involved in any core activity of the church between 1997 and 2000" (core activity is defined primarily as Sunday morning attendance) and "the most significant decline has taken place in the 25-34 age group".

Those claiming to have no religion tend to be of Protestant background, young and male.

There is some evidence among Southern Catholic young people and Northern Protestant young people that there are two trends: a tendency away from religion and among those who remain religious a tendency to be conservative in matters of identity and belief (see *A Profile of Irish Religion* in Irish Council of Churches Annual Report, 1995, and the report and discussion of the conclusions of the 1998 International Social Survey in *Doctrine and Life*, December 2000).

**10 Number of Vocations in Catholic Church in Ireland**

1965	1375
1994	201
1998	92



(Source: Council for Research and Development, Maynooth)  
 Note: Vocations in the Catholic Church started to decline from 1961. The prospect is a long-term decline in personnel and hence an alteration in the relatively high rate of clergy and religious per head of population which has existed in Ireland since the 1850s.

### 11 Mass Attendance Republic of Ireland

		%
1974	Nic Ghiolla Phadraig Survey	91
1984	Breslin & Weafer Survey	87
1989/90	MaGreil Survey	82
1990	European Values Survey	85
1992	AGB Adelaide Survey	78
1995	IMS Survey	64
1996	IT/MRBI Survey	66
1997	Catholic Church/IMS Survey	65
1998	RTE/MRBI Survey	60
1999	IMS Survey	57

When two or three times a month is the standard the decline is noticeably less than when weekly mass attendance is the standard:

		%
Mass attendance - 3 times a month or more		
1981	European Value Survey	82
1990	European Value Survey	81
1991	International Social Survey	76
1998	International Social Survey	73

The young are dropping most quickly from religious observance and there is an increasing difference between Mass attendance in rural and urban areas.

### 12 Mass Attendance Northern Ireland

		%
Weekly or more Mass attendance		
1969	Rose Survey	95
1978	Moxon-Browne Survey	90
1986	Policy Studies Institute Survey	90
1989	British Social Attitudes Survey	86
1991	British Social Attitudes Survey	85
1998	Catholic Church/UBS Survey	57
	(Two or three times a month)	10)

A commentary on the 1998 survey in Northern Ireland and the 1997

Republic survey reached the tentative conclusion that there is a similar set of secularising influences affecting religious belief and practice throughout Ireland as a whole.

### 13 Protestant Church Attendance Northern Ireland

			%
1969	Rose Survey	once a week	45
		never	5
1978	Moxon-Browne Survey	once a week	39
		never	11
1986	Policy Studies Institute Survey	once a week	34
		never	15
1989	British Social Attitudes Survey	once a week	44
		never	15
1991	British Social Attitudes Survey	once a week	40
		never	16
	*	*	*

A Belfast Telegraph Millennium Generation Survey of **both** Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland found the following for the 25-45 year old age group:

	%
Every/almost every week	33
Never	27

#### Warning

There is clear evidence from England concerning church attendance that what people say they do and what they actually do differs. In England twice as many say they go to church as actually attend.

### 14 Statistics in Relation to Belfast

#### Presbyterian Church - Synod of Belfast

	Families	Persons
1963	50,222	147,431
1989	32,125	77,663
1999	26,277	55,096

#### Methodist Church - Belfast District

	Methodist Community
1963	34,106 (adjusted for change in boundary)
1988	18,690
1999	15,995



**Church of Ireland Diocese of Connor - Statistics for Belfast, North of River Lagan**

1969	70,977
1985	45,867

**Decline in the population of the city of Belfast (Council area):**

1971	417,000
1991	279,000

There is evidence (eg in the 1993 Churchgoers' Survey) that Belfast Protestant churchgoing is heavily characterised by "commuting" (much more so than its Catholic counterpart).

There are suggestions (see Eoin Cassidy, "Religion in the Inner City", *The Furrow*, February 2001) that mainstream Protestant churches are increasingly irrelevant to many inner city Belfast residents and some evidence that many of those who remain religious have shifted from mainstream Protestantism to Pentecostal churches.

**15 Outside Belfast**

The reduction in numbers in the Belfast City churches has not been matched to a comparable degree by rising numbers in the overspill areas outside Belfast. The Presbyterian Synod of Belfast lost 68,416 persons from 1963 to 1986 but the gains in Presbyteries around Belfast were only 20,853 in this period. The pattern is similar in the Church of Ireland Diocese of Connor and the Methodist Church. The movement of Protestant population out of Belfast has been associated with a large scale detachment from the church.

Analysis by Paul Doherty (in *Northern Ireland Politics*, eds. Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow, Longman, 1996) of the 1991 Northern Ireland Census of those claiming no religion (3.7%) and those who refused to state a religious affiliation (7.3%) show that these are concentrated in the Greater Belfast area. Belfast and its eight neighbouring Local Government Districts all have more than 12% of their populations either claiming no affiliation; or not stating a religion. North Down has the highest level, 12.5%. Further, within these Districts there is a substantial variation; in the Malone-Stranmillis area, parts of Jordanstown and Holywood, for example, over 20% fall into this category. The author suggests that all of this indicates a move away from religion.

It is in the provincial towns and rural areas (the West of Northern Ireland) where religion remains strongest (see, for instance, the Report of the Presbyterian Strategy for Mission Committee, Annual Reports 1994)

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Pastor P Reid

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