

# Churches in Ireland Connecting in Christ

Irish Council  
of Churches



2020  
Annual Report

STEWARDS WILL GUIDE YOU TO YOUR SEAT  
PLEASE KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE

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## ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2020

	Year Joined ICC
Church of Ireland	1923
Methodist Church in Ireland	1923
Moravian Church, Irish District	1923
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	1923
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church	1923
Religious Society of Friends	1923
Salvation Army (Ireland Division)	1965
Lutheran Church in Ireland	1972
Greek Orthodox Church in Britain & Ireland	1997
Cherubim & Seraphim Church	2001
Romanian Orthodox Church	2004
Antiochian Orthodox Church	2005
Redeemed Christian Church of God	2014
Indian Orthodox Church in Ireland	2019
Syrian Orthodox Church in Ireland	2020



## PRESIDENT —Report

WRITER

Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson

*'My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me' John 17:20-21.*

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged us all to find new ways of meeting and doing church. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to partner with Dr Gladys Ganiel of Queen's University Belfast in a

significant piece of research to capture how this has been experienced by our member churches, as well as the wider faith sector. Dr Ganiel's reports, *People Still Need Us* and *Something Other than a Building* demonstrate how, in response to the challenges of the virus, local church communities have sought ways to respond to peoples' emotional and spiritual needs.

While Covid-19 resulted in major disruption to our work plans for 2020-21, the need and desire for inter-church engagement from our members only increased. We had the opportunity to facilitate peer support and collective outreach in a range of areas, with a notable example being issues related to bereavement, which have been particularly stressful for those in pastoral ministry. Our experience in facilitating dialogue has enabled us to create spaces for engagement with a range of different stakeholders, including Funeral Directors and those tasked with formulating policy in this area. In meeting with Government and other statutory bodies ICC has been able to support member churches in building relationships where the unique values and contribution of the Churches are being recognised and appreciated.

It has been a challenging and demanding year for us all and not least for the work of ICC. In that regard I want to express thanks to our staff, Rebecca, Megan, Damian and Nicola. They have had an exceptionally busy year

**N**o matter how we might see ourselves politically or culturally there is an identity that overrides all others and that is our being brothers and sisters in Christ.

and have had to adapt to new ways of working, but this has not dampened their enthusiasm for the work of ICC. Our member church representatives, whether on the Standing Committees or thematic groups have made a particular effort to ensure that we remain attentive to the work of relationship-building, as well as continuing our collective engagement on issues of peace and reconciliation and social justice.

Video conferencing technology has allowed us to continue some of the listening work that would normally be done in person. Although we miss the informal conversations over coffee, we have adapted our usual methodology to allow us to convey our pastoral concern on a range of issues. As ICC President, it has been a privilege to chair many of these encounters and hear people's stories. In particular, we have been exploring with our working group on legacy issues the work that remains to be done to transform a culture of violence. It

has been very moving to hear victims and survivors describe the human cost of violence, and outline their vision for a peaceful future. It was important in this work also to listen to those who are working to prevent young people becoming involved in acts of violence, including those who have spent time in prison and understand the human cost of that choice. This is challenging and sensitive work, but the experience of our working group has confirmed the importance of the Church being willing to engage with those who find themselves on the margins of society, or who feel that they are not being heard.

During this year of the Centenary of Northern Ireland a working group is currently considering ways in which this anniversary may be marked. It is hoped we can devise a programme that will encourage people, while being mindful of the past, to look to the future in a spirit of mutual respect.

Despite the challenges of this past year we are thankful for how ICC has been able to continue to develop the reality of our aim 'Churches in Ireland Connecting in Christ'. The contribution of so many of our members is greatly appreciated. This has enabled us to respond to opportunities of engagement that have fostered better understanding among our people and encouraged us all to live out the imperatives of the Gospel.

Jesus in John's Gospel Chapter 17 reminds us of the unity that He requires of us in our ministries. No matter how we might see ourselves politically or culturally there is an identity that overrides all others and that is our being brothers and sisters in Christ. He is that unshakable foundation that gives us confidence to look to the future and to work together for the common good.



## HONORARY TREASURER — Report Year 2020

WRITER  
Jonathan Wilson

The accounts for the year show a surplus of £20,830, reflecting the underspend arising from the Covid-19 disruption to the annual work plan, notwithstanding a small loss of rental income from the Inter-Church Centre. Given the nature of ICC and IICM, major areas of routine expenditure include travel and meeting costs. Staff and trustees adapted quickly to the changed circumstances, moving meetings online and developing new areas of work in response to the pandemic. There were, however, planned activities that had to be cancelled or postponed, such as the Inter-Church Meeting, because coming together in

person is considered to be an integral element of the methodology. Further, our total reserves now stand at a healthy £561,011 and are sufficient to provide for the financial requirements of the organisation going forward.

In preparing the operational budget for 2021, the Joint Management Committee was mindful of the organisation's reserves policy and of the significant financial challenges facing many of our member churches, in the context of the uncertain economic climate. Taking all these factors into consideration, the trustees decided to provide relief to member churches by way of an exceptional Covid-19 grant, relative to the level of member subscriptions. At the same time, it is important to note that subscription levels have been frozen since 2017 and currently represent the minimum level required for the sustainable operation of the organisation under normal circumstances.

With continued uncertainty about the scale of the economic impact of the

pandemic trustees will continue to adopt a cautious approach to planned expenditure throughout 2021. There will be a decrease in rental income from the Inter-Church Centre and a low return on investments. Again, there will be some savings arising from the limitations on in-person meetings and events. In addition, the Joint Management Committee will be seeking to integrate any learning from these exceptional circumstances into the routine work of the organisation where travel and meeting in person is not necessary and video-conferencing could allow for more efficient use of time and resources, and reflect our ethical commitment to climate justice.

During this time we have continued to prioritise partnership working and this has enabled us to put significant resources at the disposal of member churches in the form of the range of academic research projects outlined in this report. We are grateful for the continued support of our member churches and their commitment to the work that is done together through ICC and IICM. Supporting them through the challenges they face as a result of the pandemic will remain a key strategic priority for the coming year.

I would like to thank colleagues on the Joint Management Committee, ICC Executive and Irish Inter-Church Committee for their support and careful attention to matters of finance and governance. I would also like to thank our staff team and, in particular, to acknowledge the very careful and detailed work carried out by our Finance Assistant, Rebecca Schwindt, under very challenging circumstances.

## GENERAL SECRETARY —Report

WRITER



Dr Nicola Brady

As we look back on the past year we are conscious of the suffering and loss and the pressures and anxiety experienced by so many, yet there is also much to be thankful for in the resilience demonstrated across our society, including in our church communities.

The first meeting of 2020 for the ICC Executive was our retreat, facilitated by Brieghe O’Hare from Well.com. The theme was ‘Spending time with the God who actively seeks out life-storms, experiencing his presence with you in them.’ Little did we imagine the life-storms that lay ahead for us, as individuals and as churches, and that this would be the only time the Executive would meet in person.

When the Irish Government announced its initial lockdown measures we were hosting a meeting of Church Communications Officers in Dublin. As we discussed with Communications Officers the impact of the restrictions for member churches it was clear that there would be

significant consequences for the ICC and IICM work plans.

In-person meetings were cancelled, but very quickly replaced with a wide range of virtual gatherings to support member churches in responding to the multifaceted challenges of Covid-19. We quickly realised that one of the main ways in which we could help was by facilitating the exchange of information and resources between members. Our Communications Assistant and Programme Officer collected and collated the relevant information, and undertook research to address any gaps. This had the added benefit of making the information about the churches’ response accessible in one place.

A significant loss to our work plan was the cancellation of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, due to take place in November. The experience of being together in person is such a central element of this event that we felt it could not be replicated in digital form, particularly at a time when members were facing so many pressures on personnel. When the Inter-Church Committee met in person

in February the theme of ‘identity and belonging’ was chosen for the IICM. It was decided that this would be carried over into 2021 when it would have particular resonance in the context of the 1921 centenaries.

As we adapted the rhythm and methodology of our work to respond to Covid-19 we found that the number and variety of meetings we facilitated was increasing. Although there is much that is irreplaceable about in-person encounters and we greatly miss the opportunity for informal conversations over coffee, we have found ways to deepen our connections and develop our work during this extraordinary time.

### **Addressing the impact of Covid-19**

One of our first priorities in responding to Covid-19 was to ensure that we continued to support trustees in their responsibilities in the area of governance. Committee meetings moved to Zoom and the JMC carried out a review of the work plan and revised priorities. The AGM took place online with reduced numbers and delegated authority,

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limited to essential business. In 2020 the ICC Presidency transferred from Rev Brian Anderson of the Methodist Church to Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson of the Presbyterian Church. Members were very disappointed to miss out on the opportunity to express their thanks in person to Rev Anderson for the vision and dedication he brought to his leadership of ICC, with his emphasis on the common good which found expression in, amongst other things, the significant project on housing and homelessness.

The incoming ICC President, conscious of the relationship-building opportunities that have been lost due to the absence of in-person contact, initiated a series of consultation meetings with individual member churches. These provide a valuable opportunity to hear about how the pandemic has impacted each of our members and to discuss how we could best support them in their inter-church engagement.

At each of our online Committee meetings we created space to discuss the impact of the pandemic

on our members and identify opportunities for collective engagement through ICC/IICM. We have been in a position to provide a point of contact for government in both jurisdictions, alongside other member church representatives, helping to disseminate information and articulate concerns. There have been challenges for all concerned in balancing the importance of public worship and spiritual wellbeing in a holistic understanding of health, with the need to protect public health in the context of a global pandemic.

The restrictions on pastoral care have been particularly distressing in the context of bereavement where so much of the church and wider community response has been curtailed, depriving the bereaved of many of the supports we typically rely on for comfort. We have been conscious that this is very stressful for clergy and all those involved in care of the bereaved. We have facilitated workshops and roundtable discussions for member church representatives, as well as engagement

with funeral directors and those responsible for the development of government policy in this area.

We were fortunate to have the opportunity to partner with Dr Gladys Ganiel of Queen's University Belfast in a research project to assess the impact of Covid-19 on faith leaders across the island of Ireland. A summary of her main findings to date has been included in this Annual Report. Her research provides a crucial evidence base for churches as they plan for a still uncertain future. The research has also been a great source of encouragement, highlighting not only the resilience of church communities, but also the way in which the increased inter-church involvement evident during this time has been a sign of hope for many.

**Church Leaders group**

In addition to the work carried out by staff, the ICC President has been involved in a series of joint initiatives of the Church Leaders (Ireland) Group. The group significantly increased the number and frequency of its meetings during 2020 to respond to the challenges of Covid-19, meeting with political leaders, issuing collective messages of pastoral concern and sharing information about denominational responses to the pandemic.

Covid-19 was, of course, not the only item on the agenda of the Church Leaders' Group during the period and there were joint meetings to examine the societal impact of political decision-making in areas such as dealing with the legacy

of the conflict and Brexit. There were important new initiatives including a joint video message for Remembrance Day.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) facilitated a Four Nations Church Leaders Forum to discuss the impact of the pandemic. This provided a helpful space to discuss the challenges experienced in different jurisdictions across the UK and Ireland from a Church perspective, and resulted in a shared Call to Prayer on Palm Sunday. The Church Leaders (Ireland) Group later issued an invitation to members of this Forum to join a conversation on the impact of Brexit across these islands and our shared commitment to reconciliation.

**Peace and reconciliation**

The IICM working group on peace and reconciliation was able to use the opportunities of the digital space very effectively to organise regular Zoom meetings with a wide range of groups and organisations working in this area. We are particularly grateful to the victims and survivors of the conflict who shared their stories and told us of their hopes and their concerns. We were moved by their courage and challenged to examine how the churches could do more together to ensure that the local church community is a place of compassion and ongoing support for those who have been traumatised by violence. The Presbyterian Church provided a valuable opportunity for reflection on these themes with a webinar to examine the impact of its Considering Grace project, at

which I was invited to share some thoughts on the learning in an inter-church context. We also had regular engagement with the Commission for Victims and Survivors to explore how churches might connect with their work.

Through a partnership with Rev Gary Mason’s Rethinking Conflict organisation we had two very useful sessions where Professor Monica McWilliams helped us refine the strategic focus of our peace-building work. The Inter-Church Committee has now issued

arising from Brexit. In October 2020 the IICM Co-Chairs issued an open letter to political and civil society leaders outlining some of the challenges identified in the local, British-Irish and wider international contexts. Our Brexit working group has continued to meet throughout the year and we have raised concerns about the particular vulnerabilities of Northern Ireland, with representatives of the EU, the British and Irish Governments, and other civil society representatives. We continue



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a consultation paper to help us engage with member churches, partner organisations and policy makers to explore how churches can best use their resources to create spaces for relationship-building in which the difficult questions of the unfinished work of peace can be explored.

**Brexit**

The IICM developed a framework to support member churches in engaging with the pastoral issues

to participate in civic engagements organised by government to share the experiences and concerns of local churches and faith-based charities working in areas such as community relations and social cohesion.

The ICC European Affairs Working Group completed its second term in 2020 with a final report to the Executive outlining the opportunities to raise the concerns of the Irish churches at EU level,

and the need for the national inter-church structures to bring together those who are engaging at this level on behalf of our member churches. A review of our work in this area is planned for 2021. We are very grateful to the members of the European Affairs Committee, led by Dr Kenneth Milne, for all they have done to raise the profile of the churches' work in the area of European Affairs, and to keep these matters on our agenda. We were also deeply appreciative of the support of Bishop Noel Treanor, Vice President of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Unity, who provided support to the Committee in the preparation of its final recommendations.

### **Identity and Belonging**

The learning from our peace and reconciliation and Brexit working groups has contributed to the shaping of our focus for the next IICM on 'Identity and Belonging: Past, present and future'. It will also draw on the work of the Programme Officer in the area of racial justice. The other major point of focus within this theme will be the 1921 centenaries, marking the events surrounding the partition of Ireland, the establishment of Northern Ireland and the resulting reconfiguration of British-Irish relationships. Our preparatory group is examining how the challenges posed by these centenaries could present risks to the work of peace and reconciliation in the present, but also where there may be opportunities to deepen the work of reconciliation, with particular emphasis on the role that churches might play in creating spaces for reflection and giving leadership to the wider society.

### **Research projects**

Our 2019 work on 'Church in a Changing Public Square' highlighted the critical importance of having access to the research and analysis that will allow us to communicate effectively how the churches' pastoral experience might inform public policy choices and contribute to public debate on major societal challenges. It is also essential to enable us to anticipate future risks. We have been very fortunate to identify, in the course of this year, three opportunities for research partnerships that will allow us to develop aspects of this work.

Two of these projects will be in partnership with the Centre for Religion, Human Values and International Relations of Dublin City University, led by Professor Philip McDonagh. In the first of these, entitled 'The Economics of Belonging' we explore how the experience of faith communities could help shape and inform the development of more effective wellbeing indicators, across the island of Ireland, that could help policy makers and the community and voluntary sector to work together more effectively to address the root causes of poverty and deprivation. The second project, 'Multilateralism and Methodology', examines the ways in which our current structures for international cooperation may not be fit-for-purpose when it comes to some of the major global challenges that are of concern to churches, including climate justice and global peace-building efforts. The project will analyse the ways in which religious leaders could support political efforts to address these chal-

lenges through effective multilateral engagement.

The third of these projects is a CTBI initiative on 'Church, Nationhood and Identity'. In recent years, major strands of CTBI work have addressed issues related to identity-based social pressures and fractures. CTBI, in consultation with the national ecumenical instruments has been responding to these challenges in a range of ways, including advocacy on racial justice and social cohesion, creating spaces for respectful dialogue on issues relating to political and national identity, as well as engagement in community development and community relations. CTBI proposes to strengthen and resource this work through a new project that will address some of the major underlying themes from a Christian perspective, examining how churches contribute to a sense of solidarity and belonging through the Christian understanding of citizenship and the common good. This two-year project will support national interchurch structures in anticipating future challenges and preparing a strategic response, identifying the resources that would be needed to allow churches to develop their leadership in this area through research, sharing of best practice and by raising the profile of the work through collaboration in communications. The role of CTBI in this process is one of a catalyst, facilitating, providing additional resources where possible, but with a significant leadership role for each national body. The project is a very good fit with the IICM's thematic focus on identity and belonging and our staff team has had the opportunity to bring some of

that experience to the shaping of this project.

### **Communications**

We have continued to facilitate meetings of Church Communications Officers throughout 2020 and, as with other areas of work, the frequency of these meetings has increased to enable us to respond to the challenges of Covid-19. We began the year with an engagement with Religious Affairs correspondents Patsy McGarry and Sarah MacDonald to discuss the future of religious affairs in the Irish media. Later in the year we had virtual meetings with representatives of RTÉ and BBC which provided an opportunity to convey appreciation for the work of the public service broadcasters during the pandemic and explore ways in which the churches could support their efforts to keep people connected. We are very grateful for the support of Communications Officers in promoting the many inter-church initiatives undertaken throughout the year.

### **Looking to the future**

We are very conscious that we, together with our member churches, are facing an uncertain future as restrictions are still in place and the full economic and social cost of the pandemic remains to be seen.

We will continue to support our member churches in their efforts to respond and we are very grateful to our Committee members for their participation, support and encouragement during this time. In particular I would like to thank the members of the Joint Management

Committee who continue to give generously of their time to support staff and trustees in ensuring we adhere to the highest standards in governance and accountability. The ICC President has faced extraordinary demands on his time because of the uncertainty and wide range of high-level consultations that have been taking place during the pandemic. He has been unfailing in his generosity, his pastoral support to staff and his concern for all those who engage with our work.

Our working groups have produced some very valuable reports and significant opportunities for engagement over the past year. This is only possible because of the generosity of member church representatives who have been willing to take on these responsibilities in addition to their existing work at a very busy time. The increased frequency of these meetings over Zoom during the past year has allowed us to deepen this engagement and sharpen the strategic focus of our work in key areas. The staff team is very grateful for the support of all our working group members.

Finally I would like to thank the staff team for their commitment and resilience at a challenging time and the flexibility they have offered in adapting to changing circumstances in order to best serve the needs of our member churches.

### **CAPTIONS (P8-9)**

- 01 The Church Leaders Group in their joint video message for Remembrance Day.
- 02 Delegates online at the AGM in April 2020.



## PROGRAMME OFFICER —Report

WRITER  
Dr Damian Jackson

At the “Being Christian Together” conference on local inter-church engagement in Summer 2019 Rev Dr Johnston McMaster spoke about identity, noting its complex and multi-layered nature and the human tendency to “flatten” and shrink it with simplistic and reductive terms. This has the effect of narrowing our circle of empathy and solidarity and can therefore make our churches less inclusive than they ought to be. They can become a sort of club where we gather with like-minded folk in a safe space.

This neither reflects the biblical vision of Christ’s church where people of all tongues and nations will worship him together, nor our call as Christians to welcome the stranger and love our neighbour, be they part of our church community or not.

Consideration of the multilayered nature of identity has permeated much of our work since as we have sought to examine the implications of increasing diversity in our churches. To what extent is this diversity reflected in the

leadership and culture of our churches? Are we judgemental towards people who face exclusion from our society, such as homeless people, people seeking asylum or Travellers?

In all of these matters the level of our solidarity is influenced by the extent to which we feel an identification with the people who are suffering or excluded. Thus we as Christians are challenged to examine our own hearts individually, and as church congregations and parishes, to discern how open we are to those around us who may not have that innate sense of belonging that comes from a personal history in the community.

When we do this the impact can be powerful and reach well beyond the congregation itself as we discovered in February last when we held a listening event where clergy of churches in towns which had experienced protests against proposed direct provision centres spoke about their response. In many places people from the local church were a catalyst — gathering like-minded others who together spoke out in solidarity with people seeking asylum, welcoming them and rejecting other voices who sought to demonise and exclude them. This kind of neighbour-love is powerful but challenging as it requires courage, and allying with others where we have common

cause, even if it may be uncomfortable because of disagreement on other matters.

A particular focus in 2020 to support churches in their desire to live out their love for those who have had to flee their homes to seek safety has been the Church of Sanctuary network. Churches of Sanctuary is a movement of ordinary churches who have committed to being a place of welcome to those who have had to flee persecution or violence. It provides a framework for local churches to undertake this work whilst intentionally being a voice of solidarity in their local context. A planned conference in April 2020 had to be cancelled but we hosted a webinar in November.

At a broader geographical level, as part of CTBI’s Churches Refugee Network (CRN) Steering committee I was able to contribute to awareness raising throughout Britain and Ireland on the challenges faced by asylum seekers and other immigrants in Ireland. I invited David Moriarty of the Jesuit Refugee Service and Dr Eburn Joseph of UCD to speak on these topics as part of a series of webinars looking at the impact of coronavirus restrictions on migrant communities across Britain and Ireland.

In January last year CRN organised an in-person day seminar on refugee resettlement to which I invited Captain Ashley Prodggers, Salvation Army minister in Rathmines who spoke about the HomeFromHomeD6 refugee sponsorship group that was started by the local churches and welcomed a family from Syria to Ireland through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme.

Of course all such in-person events were brought to a halt by the coronavirus pandemic. One aspect of ICC’s immediate response to this was to provide information for churches as they adjusted to new ways of being and building community under the restrictions

that have been necessarily imposed. We put together a dedicated information page on our website and wrote regular blogs highlighting how churches have creatively responded. We also sought to draw attention to the adverse impacts of the restrictions, on family relationships, domestic abuse, people in direct provision, mental health and nurturing children's faith.

Smaller church denominations were impacted in particular ways as we learned in roundtable discussions that we facilitated with our member churches. Some of them are disproportionately represented in the healthcare sector and suffered the consequences of overwork and pressure, not to mention those who contracted the virus.

One positive outcome was the Irish Blessing video which was a result of a small group who put a lot of work in to involve people from all walks of life and all parts of the country to produce a beautiful and moving song which expressed the compassion and love of God's people for the people of Ireland, using an adaptation of St. Patrick's Breastplate. It has since been watched over 1.5 million times on YouTube and if you have not yet seen it, you must!

One of the privileges of my work is witnessing local churches seek together to bless their communities as I visit them around the country. In most of 2020 this has not been physically possible but two early exceptions were the opening of a new Salvation Army church premises in central Dublin where a vision of being a hub for the local community, bringing God's love in practical ways to the inner city, was inspiring and encouraging. In January the Monaghan clergy group and I met with the chief executive of Monaghan County Council to discuss the new Peace Centre and explore how



churches can participate in that exciting project to show their love in practical ways. In October I was able to join the Dublin Council of Churches at their annual Churches' Forum Day as well as joining their November council meeting at which I was able to share about ICC's work.

The pandemic has been particularly dangerous for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, as well as those in close quarters with others in hostel accommodation. In our blog we recognise that while governments both local and national have put in place measures to mitigate these risks and address housing insecurity during the pandemic there is still fear that when these measures expire the situation will be worse than before.

The Northern Ireland launch of the resources on housing insecurity and homelessness took place in East Belfast Mission on the 13th February, attended by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Daniel Baker. In commending the study resource Bishop Alan Abernethy spoke about how his own personal journey of life and faith is profoundly connected with homelessness and mental health. Then ICC President Rev Brian Anderson, Aidan Byrne, Manager of East

Belfast Mission's Hosford Homeless Project, and one of their former residents, Ruth, also spoke at the launch.

In advent we ran a blog series on the housing study resource with contributions from people with theological, economic, pastoral and practical expertise to inform and equip churches to engage with compassion in whatever way is appropriate for them.

Finally, the work we did in preparation for the direct provision listening event in February has led us to an increased awareness of racism in Ireland so I prepared a report on the work that the churches have done in this area in recent years highlighting where this has been strong, and where there has been inadequate attention. Having considered this report the ICC Executive Committee has agreed that this shall be a greater focus of my work over the next couple of years, in particular in supporting churches to examine where they have allowed invisible barriers to prevent the full inclusion of people from ethnic minorities into their church communities. Without this kind of reflective work our ability to bear witness and advocate on in this issue in our societies is weaker and lacking in authority and integrity.

# ‘PEOPLE STILL NEED US’: A REPORT ON A SURVEY OF FAITH LEADERS ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

WRITER  
Megan Ross

This report was published in May and analyses the results of a survey that was a collaboration between Queen’s University and the Irish Council of Churches/Irish Inter-Church Meeting (ICC/IICM). The principal investigator at Queen’s, Dr Gladys Ganiel, worked with the General Secretary of the ICC, Dr Nicola Brady, and representatives of member denominations to develop the survey questions. It was distributed to more than 2,000 faith leaders, with 439 usable responses received from every county on the island.

The main insights of the survey show that faith leaders and communities have not only played important roles in providing pastoral care and social services during the pandemic, but there is also evidence of increased prayer and high levels of online

religious practice among people on the island of Ireland. It provides us with a snapshot of how faith leaders and communities adapted in a time of rapid change and uncertainty.

An increase in the stress and pressure felt by faith leaders was also highlighted due to the nature of being on the front line, particularly in the experience of comforting those bereaved by Covid-19 or other causes and conducting funerals.

One of the major sources of stress for clergy was feeling guilty about not doing enough for their congregations and in response to the pandemic while other areas of stress were found in learning new skills for online ministry and balancing work

and life. Faith leaders highlighted that there are significant limitations to online ministries but that there has been more involvement from laity within these areas.

Some faith leaders observed that the pandemic had confirmed the important place religion still has in society and how people have found comfort in faith during the pandemic. Responses reflect a sense that faith does matter, not only for faith communities but for the wider society at this time. The report also highlights how clergy may consider a different approach to church in the future with eventual blends of online and in-person ministries to maintain connections made.



# 'SOMETHING OTHER THAN A BUILDING' : A REPORT ON CHURCHES ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

WRITER  
Megan Ross

During much of the Covid-19 pandemic, church buildings across the island have been closed for worship due to government restrictions. When churches have been open, strict social distancing has limited the numbers who can attend in person. This second report was published in February 2021 in collaboration between Queen's University and the Irish Council of Churches/ Irish Inter-Church Meeting (ICC/ IICM). Providing a further snapshot into the role of faith leaders and communities, the interviews include 32 clergy from across the island. The report highlights how clergy have continued to journey alongside their congregations and communities during the pandemic.

A key theme of this report is the reminder that the church is much more than a building. Interviewees also highlighted issues such as reflecting on what the post-

pandemic Church will look like and an increased level of engagement in inter-church cooperation. The report once again illustrates the significant pressures on clergy.

The report highlights reflections on and understandings of what it means to 'be church'.

For some, the pandemic has been an opportunity for this idea to spread more widely. It has been a chance for churches to change, including an increase in lay volunteerism. Members of congregations have offered their time and skills in ways they never needed to before. People have stepped into roles to serve with enthusiasm, outside the walls of their church building. The

interviewees who note this encouraging reaction to community need, highlight that this will play a role in increased teamwork in churches post-pandemic.

There is also evidence of a shift in national level inter-church relations. Inter-church cooperation at this level has been more frequent and united during this time with collaboration around pandemic-related issues such as closing and re-opening church buildings and conducting funerals. At local level, already-existing inter-church/ecumenical relationships have been maintained at a reduced intensity alongside dealing with the various challenges churches have experienced.

## Something Other than a Building

A Report on Churches on the Island of  
Ireland during the Covid-19 Pandemic



Dr Gladys Ganiel,  
Queen's University Belfast  
January 2021



## WOMEN'S LINK —Report

WRITER  
Joyce Bond

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

This year the members of Women's Link have used new methods to stay connected in their own churches and together.

Throughout the months of restrictions and life changing challenges created by the pandemic, members of organisations have been busy sewing scrubs, masks, helping with food parcels, hospital bags, finding new inventive ways of keeping in touch with members in their organisations, churches and communities and helping those in isolation. Prayer and Bible Study has undergirded all activity through "What's App" and Zoom when possible. We thank God for the technology that has enabled fellowship and where it has been possible to encourage one another. Vaccines bring hope and confidence for 2021. It has been remarkable that the themes chosen in advance by organisations for 2020 and 2021 have prepared members spiritually for situations created by the pandemic.

The Officers met in February for programme planning but sadly representative members from Women's Church Organisations/Churches did not meet as a forum and our Fellowship Day with Rev. Annie Deche was cancelled.

16 Days of Action Against Gender Violence - Mothers' Union produced a Prayer Booklet of Reflection, Prayer and Action, circulated in Ireland, and shared in a Global Day of Action online where members around the world stepped out of their comfort zones to support women, and men, who suffered abuse, high lighting "1 in 3 Women worldwide have experienced domestic or sexual abuse" giving a voice to the voiceless. Sadly abuse has increased in Ireland during the pandemic.

World Day of Prayer Service - 5 March 2021 - prepared by Christian women in Vanuatu, has for its theme "Build on a Strong Foundation" (St. Matt 7 24-27) reminding us that the choices we make, wise or foolish, can affect

our lives. Branch secretaries will give guidance on this Service.

Methodist Women in Ireland with their President's Theme "God matters" encouraged women to link spiritually during lockdown and to appreciate the bond members have in Christ. Officers will stay in post for another year. Their 14th World Assembly due to take place in Gothenburg has been postponed until 2022,

The Moravian 13th European Conference in Berlin has also been postponed, but members value telephone links and good neighbourly contact and leaving of everyday essentials on the doorstep.

Government Covid Guidelines, which are ordinances from the Old Testament are being followed: Exodus 30: 18-21 - Wash your hands; Leviticus 13: 45-46 - Keep your distance; Leviticus 13: 4-5 - Quarantine for seven to fourteen days.

We appreciate the help and support we receive from Dr. Nicola Brady and her team at Inter-Church House.



# CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND —Update

## Preface

The ICC is an associate member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. CTBI was set up to take forward the churches' ecumenical agenda on a strategic Four Nations basis. It works closely with Action for Churches Together in Scotland, Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales), Churches Together in England and the Irish Council of Churches.

WRITER  
Bob Fyffe

Very few of us will argue with the idea that we have lived through the most remarkable past year. In some ways however, the Covid-19 crisis has provided an opportunity to work differently and in often unexpected ways. For many people the pandemic has created an environment in which it has become easier to share in work across our usual boundaries and borders, allowing us to speak into discussions and hear different voices that might otherwise have remained unknown and unheard.

This is certainly true in terms of the development of meetings with Senior Church Leaders that have taken place periodically across the last year. The most recent meeting brought together many church leaders from every corner of the four nations in order to engage with and hear from the Irish churches. This was especially true around the issues of a post Brexit Ireland and its relationship with Great Britain. For CTBI this created a moment for us to serve our member churches by offering them an opportunity for greater involvement and understanding of the complex issues affecting us all.



CTBI and the Irish Council of Churches have worked very effectively together over the past year and our partnership continues to deepen. This in no small way is due to the goodwill and respect of both trustees and staff from our respective organisations. An example of this would be the work we have been able to achieve around racial justice and refugee issues along with Church of Sanctuary work.

## Church of Sanctuary

Inderjit Bhogal and Richard Reddie worked with Damian Jackson to host a Church of Sanctuary webinar in October 2020. This focused on how to encourage more churches in Ireland to become Churches of Sanctuary and the actual event involved Dublin Cathedral.

## Churches' Refugee Network (CRN)

Damian Jackson is also on the Steering Group of the Churches Refugee Network and a regular participant at CRN events. There is always an Irish dimension to CRN events. Richard and Damian also worked to secure Irish speakers/participation for the three CRN webinars in June/July 2020 focusing on immigration/asylum and refugees during a time of COVID-19 Racial Justice Damian Jackson is also writing a chapter in the forthcoming book 'Race for Justice' which will be published by Lion Hudson later this year. His chapter will focus on racial justice in Ireland over the last 25 years. He also sourced Irish speakers for CTBI racial justice-related webinars.

In sharing insights into the scourge of Serious Youth Violence, Damian shared insights about gang issues in Ireland and raised awareness of Corrymeela's research on sectarian-based gang activities in Northern Ireland. This report is on the Synergy Network website.

## Church, Nationhood and Identity project

Here we have been able to build on the work previously scoped out by Peter McDowell in 2015. With renewed urgency we have engaged with the four national ecumenical bodies to provide focus groups to design a process of engagement and encounter that will enable us to question our own assumptions and challenge complacencies. The previous experience of the Irish Council of churches in engaging with these issues across the island of Ireland has informed our research ideas moving forward. We are especially grateful to the expertise and organisational skills that Nicola Brady brings to this task, and we look forward to learning a great deal from her and the outcomes of her Eisenhower Scholarship.

In a year which many people will remember for all the wrong reasons, it is clear that when we are faced with adversity that we work best and most effectively when we work together. This has never been more true than it is at the present time between our two councils and we look forward to many more years of fruitful partnership.



## CHRISTIAN AID —Update

WRITER  
Rosamond Bennett  
Chief Executive Officer  
Christian Aid Ireland

In January last year I visited Christian Aid supported projects in Sierra Leone. Little did I know that this would be the last time I would travel outside the island of Ireland for the rest of the year.

Sierra Leone was devastated by the Ebola outbreak in 2014. One positive to emerge from the crisis was the practice of placing soap and water or hand sanitiser outside offices to make sure people clean their hands thoroughly before entering. Within weeks of my return, this custom would become part of our routine as we battled to keep ourselves safe from coronavirus.

The coronavirus crisis was unusual because it struck 'here' first. However, over the course of the year it became apparent that developing countries were not going to be spared the pandemic.

For millions of people living in countries without the welfare protections we enjoy here, it was the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis that was felt first. Worst hit were those living a hand-to-mouth existence, relying on a daily wage to feed their families. Restrictions on movement and national lockdowns brought hunger and hardship but in countries such as Nepal and Nigeria, we distributed food and cash grants to many of the most vulnerable.

Closer to home, Christian Aid Week 2020 coincided with the spring lockdown but our supporters showed real creativity with their fundraising. They completed sponsored walks, climbed mountains virtually on their stairs and took on gruelling

physical challenges. Others donated the money they'd saved when they'd been unable to visit shops, restaurants and hair salons due to lockdown.

As I mentioned, since the pandemic struck, we've all been washing our hands more often than normal. Together with mask wearing and physical distancing, handwashing with soap is one of the best protections against coronavirus, which makes it even more shocking that 3 billion people, or 40% of the world's population, don't have the facility to wash their hands at home.

To highlight this injustice, our supporters decorated their Christmas trees with a bar of soap and shared pictures on their social media with the hashtag #SoapBuildsHope. Christian Aid has responded to the coronavirus pandemic in 27 countries across the world, and as part of this we have given soap to 250,000 people, many of them living in crowded slums and refugee camps, to help protect them from infection and prevent the spread of the virus



in countries that lack the ICU beds or ventilators to treat those who fall ill.

After many months of being physically isolated from one another, the coronavirus vaccine offers humanity the hope that one day soon, we can meet together again. And while we celebrate the vaccine's roll-out in the rich countries of the world, Christian Aid is campaigning to ensure that it's made available in developing too. Shockingly, it is estimated that 90% of people living in the poorest countries will not be vaccinated this year. We must never forget that none of us are safe until all of us are safe.

As well as our emergency response and long-term development work overseas, Christian Aid Ireland is tackling the underlying causes of poverty. In November, we lodged a complaint with the United Nations who are now investigating whether Irish tax policies enable profit-shifting, depriving developing countries of income that they might invest in health, education and other public services.

And while we look forward to the day when we can meet freely again, it's important that we don't return to 'business as usual'. The world economy hasn't been working for the poor or the planet and we urgently need to create a new kind of normal. That's why we're asking governments around the world, as they plan their economic recovery from coronavirus, to commit to tackling inequalities as well as climate change.

Despite the recent upheavals in all our lives over the past year, Christian Aid Ireland is blessed to have supporters who have been steadfast in the love they have shown to their global neighbours living in poverty around the world. Their continued generosity allows Christian Aid to bring hope to communities struggling with the effects of coronavirus, conflict and climate change.

CAPTIONS (P13-17)

- 01 At the Northern Ireland launch of the resources on housing insecurity and homelessness in East Belfast Mission on the 13th February, attended by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Daniel Baker, Bishop Alan Abernethy, ICC President Rev Brian Anderson, Aidan Byrne, Manager of East Belfast Mission's Hosford Homeless Project, and one of their former residents, Ruth.
- 02 People Still Need Us Report Cover
- 03 Something Other Than A Building Report Cover
- 04 Mothers Union Prayer Diary for 2020
- 05 Ashley Prodgers, Dublin South Salvation Army Captain, speaking at the Churches Refugee Network.
- 06 Dr Aowfee Khan in personal protective gear consults a patient at a Christian Aid supported health centre in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
- 07 With UK Aid from the UK government, Christian Aid has worked with local partners to provide nearly 4,000 vulnerable families in Nigeria who have been impacted by the coronavirus lockdown with packs containing items including soap, toilet paper and toothbrushes.

## ICC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2020

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**Vice-President**

Rt Rev Andrew Forster

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Rev Brian Anderson

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Rev Trevor Gribben

**Redeemed Christian Church of God**

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**Religious Society of Friends**

James Nelson

**Romanian Orthodox Church in Ireland**

Vacant

**Salvation Army (Ireland Division)**

Major Paul Kingscott

**St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church**

Fr Anish K John

**Syrian Orthodox Church in Ireland**

Fr Biju Parekkattil

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### **Salvation Army**

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### **Cherubim and Seraphim**

Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube

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Rt Rev David Bruce (Moderator PCI)  
Rt Rev John McDowell (CoI Archbishop of Armagh)

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Mr Jonathan Wilson

### **General Secretary**

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### **Co-opted**

Rev Trevor Gribben  
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