

The background is an abstract, textured composition of various colors including deep reds, purples, blues, and greens, resembling layered rock or a complex painting. Overlaid on this is a large, white, stylized cross logo. The cross is composed of four quadrants, each formed by multiple parallel lines that curve slightly at the ends, creating a sense of depth and movement.

Churches
in Ireland
Connecting
in Christ

Irish Council
of Churches

2015
Annual Report

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ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2015

	Year Joined ICC
Church of Ireland	1923
Methodist Church in Ireland	1923
Moravian Church, Irish District	1923
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	1923
Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church	1923
Religious Society of Friends	1923
Salvation Army (Ireland Division)	1965
Lutheran Church in Ireland	1972
Greek Orthodox Church in Britain & Ireland	1997
Cherubim & Seraphim Church	2001
Russian Orthodox Church in Ireland	2003
Romanian Orthodox Church	2004
Antiochian Orthodox Church	2005
Redeemed Christian Church of God	2014



PRESIDENT —Report

WRITER
Rev Dr Donald Watts

It's a great privilege to once again be able to introduce reports on the work of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) over the course of the past year. Last year, I commented on how the ICC and the Irish Inter Church Meeting (IICM) work closely together under the banner: Churches in Ireland – Connecting in Christ. This has been important in providing creative synergy for the ecumenical life of the churches in Ireland. In the more detailed report of the Executive Officer you will find examples of the very valuable work in which churches engage together with civil and political society on issues such as welfare reform and the migrant crisis. The importance of our work together was also very evident in the latest Irish Inter Church Meeting, held last October on the theme, *'Missional Challenges in a Rights-Based Society'*. This was an opportunity to think together on the theme of human rights, which can often be presented as a challenge to the churches but is, in fact, a fundamental aspect

of biblical teaching. It is often as we struggle together on difficult themes that we grow together in Christ. In my years of involvement with the ICC, it seems to me that we have been moving towards a more relational view of ecumenism which I find exciting if, at times, challenging. As we each develop our relationship with Jesus Christ we inevitably will be drawn to engage with one another – *'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself'* (2 Corinthians 5:19).

While it is important to nurture developing relationships within the membership of the IICM, my more specific task in this report is to comment on the work of the ICC. Again I will simply paint a few broad brush-strokes and leave it to others to fill in the detail.

The ICC is increasingly being recognised as a co-ordinating channel for the churches in their important relationships with the civil and political structures of society. This was well illustrated by the welcome invitation to the ICC Executive from the Irish Joint Secretary of the British – Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat, to meet with him over lunch and later to host a reception for other faith-based groups with whom we have contact. This was not only a very enjoyable event, but was significant in bringing together many people who have a key role in representing faith in the public square. The role of the ICC as a channel between the churches and decision-makers is not only being recognised by the Irish government but by departments of the Northern Ireland Executive also, as evidenced elsewhere in the reports.

Such contacts are important and illustrate one way in which the ICC can serve the needs of the churches, particularly at a denominational level, but churches are not primarily central bodies. They are worshipping communities who faithfully serve God in all kinds of situations throughout Ireland. I believe that we must look again at how we may encourage cooperation among churches who seek to serve and witness to their local communities, not with any sense of being 'experts', but coming alongside to learn with those who are seeking ways to work together.

One of the encouraging legacies of the Irish Churches' Peace Project was a clear desire in many local situations for churches to engage with one another. From that experience, and with the encouragement of the churches involved, the ICC has applied to the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland for a grant to employ someone to encourage local initiatives in reconciliation. The application is still being considered, but it is important to set it alongside another grant which was mentioned at the last AGM, and which has been consolidated since then. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has generously offered funding for someone to work alongside churches in the Republic of Ireland, particularly, but not exclusively, on migrant issues. The Irish Episcopal Conference has also agreed to contribute to funding the post and recruitment should take place in the coming months. Although I have at times been concerned by a potential Northern bias in some of the ICC's work, it is right that at a time of crisis, the churches should prioritise their role in seeking a peaceful and more stable way forward. Thankfully, in the providence of God, the darkest days are behind us, although there is much work in reconciliation still

to be done. This is the right time to move forward, hopefully with these two appointments, to continue the churches' concern for reconciliation and welcome. At the same time it will provide an ICC presence in the Republic of Ireland, which we have not had since 2012.

There has been, however, another development in the ongoing work of the ICC Executive during my time which I believe is more significant than any other. It is the recognition that if we are to work and grow together as churches, we must spend time in worship and prayer, simply acknowledging that we are in the presence of God together. For that reason, the Executive has, over the past two years, gone away for a quiet period of twenty-four hours to reflect, worship and engage with an opportunity to be in God's presence. This year the Rev Karen Campbell facilitated worship, while different members led our thinking on the five key aspects of faith, holiness, hope, respect, and witness, which were indicated at the last AGM as the key values that underpin the work of the ICC. These themes were set in the context of Christ's call to serve. When, in the Upper Room, Jesus washed his disciples' feet, He lifted them beyond their comfort zone by demonstrating the challenging level of service which He demands of those who seek to follow Him. It will surely be as we spend time together with Jesus, allowing His Spirit to work in us, that we are taken out of our individual comfort zones, but only so that we become more comfortable with one another.

In writing a report on the ICC's activities in the past year I am, as always, conscious of the amazing amount of work which goes on to make this happen, often quietly behind the scenes. While I have referred to the headline themes, there are many practical issues

which need the constant attention of staff. This year there were added pressures, particularly in the archiving of our records by the Public Records Office and registration with the Charities Commission. Both processes were demanding on staff but also helpfully forced us to consider important governance issues. All of this background work is cheerfully undertaken by Karen, Alison, and for a time this year, Megan. Each have strong gifts which they bring to the work of the ICC and we are grateful for them.

Of course, the team during this year was headed by Mervyn and, as many of you will know, this will be his last AGM. There will be other opportunities to speak about his work, but his commitment to clarifying a way forward for the churches in their ecumenical journey, as well as ensuring that the ICC is a stable and sustainable organisation has been immense. At times, those of us who have journeyed with him have needed some persuasion, especially in the early days of 'rebranding', but Mervyn had a clear vision for the organisation while, at the same time, a willingness to listen to the needs of the churches. There is no doubt that the ICC is a much stronger and 'fit for purpose' organisation because of his work over the past five years, as well as his determination to serve His Lord within the churches of Ireland. He did so with Rain's loving support and we wish them both well as they take up their new challenges in Sri Lanka.



HONORARY TREASURER —Report Year 2015

WRITER
Jonathan Wilson

This is the second year that we have presented the accounts in this format, as we continue to implement the presentational aspects of the Charity Commission. The accounts include the full activities of both the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, represented as unrestricted and restricted funds as appropriate. This provides us with a fully consolidated record of our activities over the past twelve months, whilst maintaining the identities of both instruments.

The accounts show a surplus for the year and a position which is ahead of both our budget for the period and, indeed, the position for the prior year. We continue to drive real efficiencies in terms of cost control, and budgets are strongly challenged to ensure expenditure is appropriate to purpose and represents value for money. We are budgeting for a small surplus for 2016 based on current forecasts.

We continue to build appropriate reserves in a modest way to replenish losses incurred during successive years of deficit and to ensure the funding of the organisation reflects our current activities and future plans. The amount of reserves held is broadly in line with the trustees' view

of reserves needs, which we keep under review. Reserves are expected to remain at, or about, the planned level for the foreseeable future.

The operation of the financial overview depicts a robust control environment with regard to financial control and members are kept informed about the financial position of the organisation on a regular basis. The Executive keeps under review the major risks to which the charity is exposed and has established mechanisms to review and mitigate key risks identified. Where appropriate, risks are covered by insurance.

We continued to be challenged by the low interest rate environment and the effect this has on our ability to attract appropriate returns on our reserves. During 2015, we have adjusted our investment strategy, seeking to maximise our income with due regard to an ethical approach and appropriate risk management. Following these changes, we expect a more favourable return on our investments in 2016.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the hard work of the officers involved and it is with their hard work and appreciation of financial matters that we can provide the financial report.



EXECUTIVE OFFICER —Report

WRITER
Mervyn McCullagh

Preface

As I present my last report to the Annual Meeting, I wish to express my deepest thanks for all of the support, engagement, guidance and friendship that

I have had the privilege of sharing with you since I took up this role in August 2010

As an organisation we have changed in so many ways over the past five and a half years and we are now working together in ways, and on issues, that many would not have imagined possible when I took up office. This is due to the commitment to the organisation from all of our member churches, the guidance of the Executive, the leadership of each of our Presidents, and the trust you have placed in me as your Executive Officer.

We have a clear sense of purpose and a desire to work together with a commitment from key decision makers across our member churches. As a body we are more secure financially than we once were and are now registered with the Charity Commission in Northern Ireland. This involved a huge amount of work, beginning with the rebrand, and has ultimately led to the way we now present our financial statements. We have joined the Church Leaders' Group, and have been trusted by the churches to take an active co-ordinating function on a

range of church and societal issues. We have improved our relationships with government, particularly in the Republic, and this has enabled a number of important conversations to naturally take place as and when issues have arisen.

We have had wide-ranging discussions on the changing nature of politics and society on this island and the place of the churches within it. We have listened to the global church. We have spoken publicly when required and have worked quietly behind the scenes when appropriate. We have expanded our membership and are on the verge of employing a new staff member in Dublin. But, perhaps most importantly, we have created space for each of us to ask sincere questions of each other and to genuinely listen.

Our time spent praying together, away from the business agenda, has grown in importance and it goes to the heart of what we do as an organisation. This would have been almost unimaginable a few short years ago.



Through the Irish Inter-Church Committee (IICC) we have published important papers on Ethical Investment, Migrant Integration, Blasphemy and Reform and Renewal in Northern Ireland. We have explored emerging models of local ecumenism, and developed a directory of local ecumenical activity as well as new models of interfaith engagement at a city level.

For the wider church we have run five unique Irish Inter-Church Meetings (IICM) and five diverse Annual Council Meetings that have increasingly evidenced the fellowship, willingness to learn, sharing and co-operation that are testament to the purpose and nature of our organisation and our calling as the body of Christ.

We work differently with each other and with the wider ecumenical institutions and have developed, I believe, a contemporary and contextual model of ecumenical engagement that works.

How this applies to the specific activities of 2015 is the subject of this report.

ICC Executive

The Executive has met five times this year. It began with a reception hosted by the Irish Joint Secretary of the British and Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat, which included the members of our former Boards and Fora, along with many of our current partners. As well as building on good working relations with representatives of the Irish government, this reception symbolically marked the conclusion of one way of working (static boards and fora) and led us to more fully realise the opportunities of working through dynamic working and liaison groups.

The Executive received confirmation in July that the ICC has been

registered as a charity in Northern Ireland, with Charity Number NIC102643. A registration process for the Republic of Ireland will begin shortly. With thanks to the work of Megan Miller, we have been carefully reviewing our governance documentation to enhance our compliance and the presentation of the accounts also continues to improve. We undertook charity trustee training for all Executive Members in September. The ICC Executive now has the dual function of being the trustees of the charity, but also embodying a key objective of the charity, namely the formal bringing together of senior representatives from across our member churches to meet, dialogue and plan activities of mutual concern. The agenda has carefully shown both of these purposes.

The Executive has, since last year, sought to spend one meeting a year where they take time to pray together. This year we gathered in Drumalis, Larne, in February. The purposes were many: to spend time in prayer and reflection; to provide peace and the renewal of God's spirit for the busy leaders of our churches; to strengthen our friendships; to enhance our understanding of the organisation's vision and values; and to pray through the future of the organisation at a time of change. The reflective sessions were all led by Executive Members, who developed the theme of servant leadership in the context of faith, holiness, hope, respect and witness. The closing session reflected on the servant leadership required to enable us to connect through a common belief in Christ. Karen Campbell from the Presbyterian Church led the worship sessions and the entire meeting was set in the context of prayer. This is an activity that may not come naturally to many of our member traditions, yet is fundamental to our purpose.

Following the same-sex marriage referendum in the Republic we coordinated a conversation with the Department of Justice with ICC Member churches to provide information on the possible implications of changes to the Marriage Act for religious solemnisers and to more fully understand the existing constitutional protections for religious freedom in Ireland.

Our President has been active in representing the organisation at a wide variety of public events locally, nationally and in Europe.

92nd Annual Meeting of the Council

We have a variety of ways of running our Annual Meeting. Often, these focus on areas with local ecumenical engagement, but last year we chose to showcase the work of one of our member churches, the Salvation Army. This followed our principle of 'being at home in each others' home' and delegates explored the theme 'With Heart to God and Hand to Man'. As hosts, the Salvation Army demonstrated various aspects of their ministry in Ireland, particularly Homelessness, Dementia, Family Breakdown, Anti-Racism and Child Protection measures. They provided opportunities for delegates to explore new ways of sharing the love of God in the service of their own communities and the keynote address was delivered by Major Anne Read, the Salvation Army's Anti-Trafficking Response Co-ordinator. The meeting concluded with triumphant worship led by the Salvation Army band and choir.

Irish Inter-Church Committee

The Irish Inter-Church Committee has met quarterly, and now includes the senior representatives of the four larger denominations as ex-officio members. Under the guidance of our co-chairs (Bishop Brendan

Leahy and Rev Dr Donald Watts), the committee has changed the way it goes about its business. Where previously it received reports from committees and forums, it now consciously engages the members of the committee to share the work that is taking place within their churches and to shape their own agenda and policy. This has enabled a vibrant and relevant committee which has openly discussed a wide range of pertinent issues and is, perhaps, operating more closely in line with its original intent.

The expanded meeting of the committee was hosted by the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin in Drumcondra. The committee took the opportunity to engage in long-term horizon scanning and considered the impact that changes in our external environment may have on each of our churches. Major contemporary external drivers for change include challenges to traditional authority, shrinking civil society space, economic austerity, increased multiculturalism, rising individualism, the democratisation of morality and growth in new social technology, all of which lead to overarching changes in the social fabric.

In response to these trends, the committee explored possible scenarios that may exist for the future mission and witness of the church by imagining a number of possible futures. These included atomised church communities (a period of dispersion), a remnant church (a period of persecution), an authentic post individualistic church (a period of restoration) and a dominant growing church led from the Global South (a realignment of ecclesial centres). The committee saw the impact of these scenarios in Ireland as the likely emergence of numerically smaller, local, authentic missional communities of faith typified by increased mutual support, evidencing the

love of God in word and deed and celebrating their corporate identity in Christ. This was, of course, a thought experiment, but the consideration of possible futures reminded us of the core missional purpose of the church and our individual and collective call to discipleship.

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting was particularly successful and focussed on the theme of 'Missional Challenges in the Rights-Based Society'. It aimed to enable churches to explore the impact of human rights on how the church engages in its mission within an increasingly diverse rights-based society. A full report is contained on page 15.

Irish Churches Peace Project

The Irish Churches Peace Project (ICPP), an initiative of the island's four largest churches, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist, along with the ICC, successfully concluded in June 2015. Throughout its course, the Project promoted reconciliation in our communities, through the churches working together.

The project culminated in a highly successful two day conference which shared grassroots experiences and learning across the Project. The ICPP produced a wide range of valuable dialogue resources, all of which are hosted on the ICC website and are also available in printed form from our office. At the conclusion of the project, each of the five partners appointed two people to capture the rich learning we had gained and to explore the best ways of continuing the collective peace work of the churches. That group has developed a broad outline strategy recognising the work that churches do individually, the strategic long term work that should be done collaboratively through existing inter church



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structures and the time-limited work for which we would potentially seek external funding.

Central to this strategy is the addition of one or two dedicated staff who would enable the churches to fully realise this vision of 'Churches working together in the community to build a society where difference is respected and valued'. Following consultations with the Department of Social Development and the Community Relations Council (CRC) we have made an initial approach to the CRC to support us in this work and are awaiting the outcome.

European Affairs Committee

The European Affairs committee has met regularly throughout the year with appointed representatives from across the member churches. It began the year with a series of discussion papers on Taxation, Human

Rights and Freedom of Religious Expression, Work – Life Balance, Faith and Diplomacy, Migration, Religion and Education, and Climate Change. The Executive then asked the committee to prepare a discussion document to assist churches to reflect on the implications of the forthcoming EU referendum in the United Kingdom. This document is at an advanced stage of preparation and will be available on our website and distributed when complete.

Communications Liaison Group

The Communications Officers of our churches have been meeting regularly to share information, support each other and enhance coordination of joint ventures and public statements.

Flowing out of these meetings we organised a one-day immersion into social media, designed specifically

for the Communications teams of our member churches and the Irish Episcopal Conference. The workshop was led by Gareth Dunlop from Fathom. It sought to illustrate how social media can be best harnessed for each of our organisations. The workshop explored many of the issues that must be considered in building a social media strategy and as well as the ways different social channels could be used to attract and engage target audiences. A critical issue that emerged was the need for cross-organisational support for a social media strategy that maximises the opportunities for an organisation to listen and respond to its members. It is not enough to leave social media engagement to 'those who understand it'. Rather, such a strategy requires governance level support to assist the cultural change within organisations that new social technology requires.

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We have transformed the way that we work together and have developed, I believe, a contemporary and contextual model of ecumenical engagement that works

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Church Leaders' Group Ireland

We have continued to take an active part in the Church Leaders' Group over the course of the year. The group continued its ongoing advocacy on Welfare Reform in September when the leaders spoke out on behalf of the most vulnerable members of society and expressed their hope for a more equal, just and inclusive Northern Ireland. In November, the group welcomed the Stormont Agreement and its implementation plan, specifically the way in which it demonstrated 'an awareness [on behalf of political leaders] of their shared responsibility for the common good', which they had previously encouraged.

Climate Justice

The Church Leaders' group met with Ministers Mark H. Durkan and Alan Kelly in advance of the UN Climate Conference in Paris (COP 21), and we were subsequently included in the consultation process for a climate bill for Northern Ireland. A variety of church representatives joined with the People's Climate Marches organised by Christian Aid and the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition in Dublin, Cork and Belfast. Together with leaders of other faith communi-

ties the ICC President signed the Lambeth Declaration on Climate Change in June, which recognised the urgent need for action on climate change. He also attended the official ecumenical service in Notre Dame Cathedral to mark the summit. These actions joined in global solidarity with a wide variety other faith agencies as a part of a global movement that now recognises the urgent need to bring about climate justice as changes in our climate most greatly affect the world's poorest populations.

Integration of Migrants and Refugees

Our member churches have been reflecting on current issues of migration into the EU and, it is important to note that each church has made cut-backs in integration staffing and projects in some regard over the past five years, and that no formal networks for collective response between churches currently exist in the Inter-Church Structures. In this report we are prompted to publish again the affirmations on migrant diversity which were agreed in 2010 as an output of the Parish Integration Programme.

This lack of co-ordination networks has been brought into sharp focus since we began meeting with the Department of Social Development in Northern Ireland and the Irish Refugees Protection Programme Task Force regarding the churches' contribution to the long term integration of migrants and refugees. We have had very supportive contact with senior civil servants as well as Ministers Mervyn Storey and Frances Fitzgerald.

Specifically, in the Republic of Ireland, churches are being asked to help identify accommodation to house refugees for stays between a few weeks and up to two years. The Irish Red Cross is collating pledges of houses, apartments and rooms through its website. The database of pledges will be matched against the needs of refugees leaving the network of government-run Emergency Reception and Orientation Centres and moving into the community. Churches will also have a role enabling the welcome and integration of refugees into selected communities alongside other voluntary and statutory organisations.

Alongside these meetings, some of our members have developed their own initiatives and many have channeled their support through the programmes of Christian Aid and Embrace NI. CTBI have taken a lead in undertaking a series of fact finding visits, as well as co-ordinating information and tactical action across the United Kingdom and Ireland. This has been enormously valuable as the issue is much greater than any one nation. As described elsewhere in the report they have deepened their relationship with us through committing funds, which have been supplemented by both the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Irish Council of Churches, to develop a new post in the Republic of Ireland.

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Archives

The comment is often made that there is a huge volume of material that the churches have produced that is not available to the general public or researchers. After being assessed and organised, ICC and IICM records were moved to the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) in August. The collection consist of minutes, consultations, reports and miscellaneous papers dating from 1911-2010. The papers have been accepted on indefinite loan and will have a 30 year closure period applied by date of document. We expect the collection to be fully indexed by PRONI over the next 12 months or so, after which it will be publicly accessible, within certain parameters. There is much rich material that will be of real interest to people who wish to examine more fully the contribution of the churches to Irish life since the ICC began. Thanks are due to Alison Meagher for putting together the collection and ensuring that it is now being housed more appropriately than it ever could have been in the Inter-Church Centre.

Mission Partnership Forum

I was invited by the Presbyterian Church and Methodist Church to act as an independent chair in a review of their Alternating Ministry scheme. This scheme, which is currently in operation in three centres, has evolved over time but can trace its origins to the same processes that led to the formation of the Irish Council of Churches. A full report from the review group will be brought to both the Presbyterian Assembly and Methodist Conference in June.

World Council of Churches

In December, representatives from the World Council of Churches – Dr Clare Amos, Programme Executive

for Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation with the WCC, Ms Marianne Edjersten, WCC Director of Communications, and the Rev Garland Pierce, American Methodist and Senior Assistant to the WCC General Secretary – travelled to Belfast to meet with the Irish Churches. The officers of the ICC and other churches met with the delegation over a lunch hosted by Bishop Alan Abernethy in Belfast. Discussions centred around peace and reconciliation issues across the whole island and ways of streamlining better communication between the World Council, the national council and the member churches on an operational level. Following this meeting, an invitation has been received to be present at the next WCC Central Committee Meeting in Norway.

European National Councils of Churches' Secretaries General

This year, the Secretaries General of the National Councils of Churches in Europe met together in Berlin, Germany, from 26 to 28 May. I was invited by the German Churches to be part of the planning group for this meeting. This was a valuable meeting, which enabled the twenty general secretaries present to: identify common trends in their work across Europe; spend time discussing future scenarios for the work of national councils; seek to understand global trends and responses to faith based persecution; discuss church-state relationships and freedom of religion with church officials and members of the German Parliament; understand local ecumenical activity in the heart of one of the world's most secular cities; share responses across the European churches in advance of the December 2015 climate talks in Paris (COP 21); and together with representatives from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches

(CEC) be briefed on global and European work on the Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace.

Conference of European Churches (CEC)

The ICC assisted in the coordination of the appointment of representatives to the Thematic Reference Groups within the newly configured Conference of European Churches. This resulted in three appointments of Irish representatives: Rt Rev Michael Jackson from the Church of Ireland was appointed to the Ecclesiology Reference Group; Rev Dr Johnston McMaster from the Methodist Church to the Peace-building & Reconciliation Group and Dr Kenneth Milne, Church of Ireland, to the EU Policy & Legislation Group.

We also offer our warm congratulations to Fr Heikki Huttunen, Orthodox Church of Finland, following his appointment to the position of General Secretary of CEC. We have worked with him through his role as General Secretary to the Finnish Ecumenical Council and very much look forward to working with him in this new capacity.

As I Leave You

This role has been a blessing and a privilege and I am thankful for God's leading and guidance in all our work. *Unless the Lord builds the house we labour in vain.* My sincere thanks to former presidents, Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke and Rev Fr Godfrey O'Donnell and to our current president Rev Dr Donald Watts for their friendship, support, attention to detail and leadership through every crisis I've thrown at them. To Jonathan Wilson, our treasurer, who has given so much of his valuable time to transforming our top level financial processes and to Robert Cochran who put a shape on the organisation that we could all make sense of. To an exceptional staff team both

former and present, Philip McKinley, Adrian Cristea, Mark Thompson, Megan Miller, Alison Meagher and the consistent presence of Karen Kelly – I simply couldn't have asked to work with better people. We have got the best out of each other and have achieved more together than I suspect any of us imagined. My prayerful best wishes to my successor as they take on the future challenges that await and to Rt Rev John McDowell and Rev Brian Anderson as they take up office as President and Vice-President.

I offer my prayerful love and sincere thanks for our fellowship together and for the privilege of serving you in Christ. May God bless you all richly in your ministry and witness as Churches in Ireland.

Captions

- 01 Members of the Irish Inter-Church Committee at Archbishops' House
- 02 AGM Worship with the Salvation Army, Sydenham
- 03 Pastors Matthew Agboola, Dare Adetuberu & Ebenezer Oduntan, Redeemed Christian Church of God with Mother Agnes Aderanti & Most Snr Apostle Olusola Obube, Cherubim & Seraphim Church
- 04 Laura Burtney and Stephen McCann, Methodist Church at the Social Media Training Workshop
- 05 Sr Joan Roddy and Glenn Jordan
- 06 Deacon Dragosh Elanaru, Frs Contantin Uncu, Raul Simion and Godfrey O'Donnell, Romanian Orthodox
- 07 Mr Robert Cochran, Archbishop Richard Clarke and Archbishop Michael Jackson
- 08 Corona Joyce (Irish Red Cross), Enda O'Neill (UNHCR), Minister Frances Fitzgerald and Mervyn McCullagh
- 09 Stephen Adams (Irish Baptist Network) and Nick Park (Evangelical Alliance Ireland) at the Irish Inter-Church Meeting
- 10 Fr Heikki Huttunen, the new General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, at the ENCC meeting in Berlin
- 11 Irish Church representatives with World Council of Churches delegation at St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast
- 12 Gareth Dunlop at the Social Media Workshop



IICM —Report

Preface

For the second year in a row, the beautiful surroundings of Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre in Portlinton played host to the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, when 46 delegates from the Roman Catholic Church and the ICC member churches gathered from 22nd-23rd October 2015.

WRITER
Alison Meagher

The 28th Inter-Church Meeting explored the theme of *'Missional Challenges in a Rights-Based Society'*. Freedom of movement (migration), multiculturalism, freedom of belief, freedom of expression and social justice are human rights that churches believe in, and which derive from common Judeo-Christian roots. There are, nevertheless, many examples where a conflict between these rights contributes to a narrative of an encroaching civil society upon a threatened Christian space. However, each of these rights can be advocated within a Christian framework.

A particularly strong lineup of speakers included Rev Anthony Peck, General Secretary of the European Baptist Fellowship; Baroness Nuala O'Loan, former Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and current member of the House of Lords; Sr Joan Roddy, an outreach worker with the Jesuit Refugee Society; Professor Neville Cox a fellow at the Department of Law in Trinity College and former barrister;

and Glenn Jordan, Director of the Law Centre of Northern Ireland. Inspired and stimulated by the input of the aforementioned speakers, those in attendance considered how churches do their mission and how they understand human rights.

In welcoming delegates to the Inter-Church Meeting, Bishop Brendan Leahy, IICM Co-Chair, noted that, over the course of the two-day event, they would help one another into a space of listening, exchanging and offering and that within that space, Jesus Christ would both enlighten and lead those present to where they needed to be. ICC President and IICM Co-Chair, Rev Dr Donald Watts, later affirmed his hope that this Meeting would help the churches to move towards regaining a confidence that perhaps has been lost in recent years, as they transition from a place of dominance to one considerably less so.

Rev Peck laid the foundations for all further discussion through his



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principal assertion that the Judeo-Christian tradition provides the basis of human rights, which finds its roots under three main headings, namely Creation, Reincarnation and New Creation. By quoting Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev Peck also emphasised how important it is for 'the language of rights not to lose its anchorage in a universalist religious ethic, and just as important for religious believers not to back away from the territory and treat rights language as an essentially secular matter.'

Baroness O'Loan delivered an address on freedom of religion and the application of human rights in a changing society. She considered the high-profile Asher's Bakery case and how the judgement relates to the fundamental human right to be free, to believe and to emphasise that freedom to believe as far as possible. Of particular significance was Baroness O'Loan's challenge to the churches in Ireland to provide greater support to politicians and public representatives who seek to protect religious freedom. In England, the Christian Institute provide talking points and information to politicians in advance of relevant debates, but no such



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structures exist in either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

A particularly moving element of the Meeting was Sr Joan Roddy's reflections on 'The Migrant Journey', based on her experience working with refugees and migrants over the course of many years. Having shared a wealth of experiences and observations, Sr Roddy concluded that 'for us as churches, the journey of the migrant, in its many dimensions, is both challenge and gift, opening our eyes to the many "departures" we must make if we are to be committed in sharing the mission of Jesus in this, our day.'

Reflective morning and evening prayer sessions took place during the Meeting, led by Canon Ian Ellis and Rev Fr Kieran McDermott respectively. The overnight retreat style of the Meeting's structure also supported a strong sense of the fellowship and engagement that underpins ecumenical gatherings such as this one.

Kicking off proceedings on the second day, Prof Neville Cox outlined a number of issues where human rights and religion have the potential to collide, thus instigating a conversation on what the churches' response



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should be. These were the issue of religious attire, equality and moral judgement, and blasphemy, religious sensitivity and public morality. In considering the role of religion in public life, Prof Cox noted that 'the secularist argument is that a reasonable compromise is that you do your faith stuff at home but in the public square (which is expanding), you have got to obey the state.'

The final address, delivered by Glenn Jordan, provided an ideal follow-up and response to many of the issues raised throughout the Meeting. He appealed to all churches present not to abandon the public square, but rather to learn the language of human rights, understand how laws are made and participate in this process in 'language and tones that are acceptable to our conversation partners'. Indeed, Mr Jordan also provided what was arguably the most resonant quote of the conference. In responding to a question posed by a delegate on the difference between 'Fr Ted' and 'Charlie Hebdo', he simply uttered the phrase, 'That would be an ecumenical matter!'

Captions

- 01 Baroness Nuala O'Loan
- 02 Rev Dr Norman Hamilton
- 03 Most Rev Dr Brendan Leahy

IRISH CHURCHES' AFFIRMATIONS ON MIGRATION, DIVERSITY AND INTERCULTURALISM

We affirm our commitment as Christian Churches:

1. To recognise and appreciate cultural and ethnic diversity as gifts of God, and to ensure that these gifts are reflected in the life of the Church.
2. To foster faith communities where the rights of each person are respected and where scope is provided for each person's potential to be realised.
3. To work towards inclusive communities, paying particular attention to addressing racism and xenophobia in attitudes, actions, practices and policies.
4. To explore and adopt ways of worship, systems of administration and other structures so that they fully respond to and reflect the Church membership.
5. To defend the rights of migrants in accordance with international and national laws and standards on migration.
6. To advocate for the rights of all migrants, and in particular their right to family life.
7. To support and assist migrants in appropriate, practical ways in their efforts to integrate in Church and society.
8. To establish networks with migrant-led Churches and chaplaincies by fostering co-operation and collaboration with them in providing pastoral care and support to migrants.
9. To seek the development of appropriate services for migrants and to draw attention to the need for public services generally to be responsive to the circumstances of migrants.
10. To work together as Churches and to network with people of other faiths and none to promote a greater understanding between denominations and other faiths and none, ensuring the growth of a society based on respect, dignity and equal rights for all its members.



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CTBI —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, CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales), Churches Together in England and the Irish Council of Churches. Bob Fyffe is the General Secretary.

WRITER
Canon Bob Fyffe

2015 was a year when we saw the current Refugee Crisis unfold before our eyes. Responding to requests for solidarity, CTBI organised a visit to Northern Greece, at the Idomeni border crossing, as well as a visit to Athens where we met with other churches and church projects. We also met with senior political figures who appreciated the concern of the churches. CTBI has been working with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, along with the WCC and the Diocese of Europe. We agreed that the refugee issue should become central to the work of CTBI and have been establishing various building blocks to inform and support church initiatives. We have been delighted to welcome onto the CTBI staff Alan Meban, who will be well-known to many of you, especially in Northern Ireland, as our Communications Advisor around this issue. We will be bringing Churches together in

the coming months to consider theological, ethical and practical issues around refugees, migration and asylum. The churches in Ireland will, as always, be playing an important and central role in these responses.

As reported last year, the partnership between the ICC and CTBI has continued to grow and develop. This has been illustrated by the joint funding of a new post in Dublin, but this merely represents the depth of engagement and the shared vision between both organisations. Both ICC and CTBI are dedicated to serving the Churches, but this also means offering a challenge to continue growing together. Mission is only served properly when it is rooted in unity. Our Lord prayed that we might be One so that the world might believe. The post being developed in the south of Ireland is an exciting step forward as we seek to undertake shared work across the national boundaries. We are

looking forward to the outcomes of the Good Society work being developed in Ireland.

The last year has also seen a move forward in the response to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. There has been a rekindling of interest and involvement, and this is strongly reflected in the take up across Ireland. The Irish input into the planning and resourcing of this programme is an example of how we can best work together.

Our future plans will include a proposed new form of governance which will endeavour to bring the membership of CTBI into closer touch with its programme of work, its outcomes and our witness together. ICC and CTBI are well served by their respective staffs, and I want to thank them for the way in which we strive to work closely together.

I know CTBI has benefitted enormously from the input and

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Mission is only served properly when it is rooted in unity

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energy of Mervyn McCullagh. We would like to thank Mervyn, and perhaps the best way of doing that is to continue the excellent work and warm relationships that have been established over these recent years. As we wish Mervyn and Raing well as they move on, we also look forward to welcoming whoever comes to join our movement towards unity.

CAPTIONS

- 01 Syrian refugees travelling through Idomeni, on the Greek-Macedonian border.
- 02 At Gevgelija train station, Bishop Angaelos, Moderator of CTBI, talks to Syrian refugees making the journey to Germany.



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CHRISTIAN AID —Update

Preface

The Irish Council of Churches is a member of Christian Aid and Christian Aid is responsible to all of its member bodies for its work. Rosamond Bennett is the Chief Executive.

WRITER

Rosamond Bennett

CAPTIONS

- 01 Families on the move late at night receive food and blankets from Hungarian Interchurch Aid, a member of the ACT Alliance, as they prepare to cross the border into Austria. Christian Aid supports the work of two ACT agencies: International Orthodox Christian Charities in Greece and Philanthropy in Serbia.
- 02 Refugees approach the Croatian border near the village of Berkasovo in Serbia. ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together), of which Christian Aid is an active member, has provided critical support for families here and in other places along their journey.

Christian Aid's 70th Anniversary in 2015 was commemorated, rather than celebrated, with a service at St Anne's Cathedral in Belfast. Representatives of all of our sponsoring churches and church bodies, including the Irish Council of Churches, took part. Our guest speaker, Northern Ireland's Justice Minister David Ford MLA, reminded us of the origins of Christian Aid in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

In 1945, British and Irish church leaders came together to do something about the refugee crisis in continental Europe. As the years went by, the churches' agency – which came to be known as Christian Aid – widened its remit to tackle poverty and the causes of poverty in the rest of the world.

But seven decades on and it seems to me that we have come full circle. The news in 2015 was once again dominated by the

plight of refugees in Europe and once more, as violence in Syria and Iraq forced many hundreds of thousands of families out of their homes, Christian Aid and our local partner organisations were working in and around the conflict zone to give what help we could.

I visited northern Iraq last year to see some of this work for myself. One woman I met, called Nisreen, told me how she fled Syria with her husband and two children. 'It was not safe and we knew we had to go. We walked to Iraq. When we came here we had nothing except the clothes on our back.'

Nisreen told me in a very quiet, subdued voice that she had a lovely home in Syria. She would love to go back but she knows in her heart that that won't happen. Nisreen's story is not unique. I met many women refugees in Iraq and heard their stories, all of them distressing.

But our partners in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, have been able – with your help – to provide vital support to people like Nisreen and her family. This support includes food, water, blankets, hygiene kits and counselling. We have also been working hard, with our partners, in other areas of conflict including South Sudan and Colombia.

Meanwhile in Europe, where our work began all those years ago, Christian Aid has been supporting our ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) partners to give much needed relief to exhausted refugees arriving on our shores.

The churches in Ireland have been wonderfully generous in responding to our Refugee Crisis Appeal. I must also acknowledge the great generosity and prayerful support of the churches for our other appeals during the year – particularly for our emergency response to the two earthquakes that hit Nepal in April and May.

As I reported to you last year, it is not enough that we react to emergencies and other world development needs. Christian Aid is equally concerned with the causes of poverty. That is why we put so much effort into advocating and campaigning on the issues of climate change, international tax dodging and conflict resolution.

2015 turned out to be a major year for climate change campaigners, with the signing of the Paris Agreement at the UN Climate Summit in December. In the run-up to the agreement, Christian Aid supporters took part in numerous marches for climate justice in Cork, Galway, Dublin, Belfast, and many places in between. A group of our supporters even travelled from Ireland to Paris to add their voices to the call for all our governments to show some leadership.

Climate change is, after all, one of the major causes of poverty in poorer countries. Unusual droughts and unpredictable rainy seasons have been leading to devastating crop failures.

The other major development in 2015 of interest was the adoption by the United Nations of 17 new 'Sustainable Development Goals'. These replace the earlier Millennium Goals and will apply from 2016 to 2030. They cover a wide range of areas critical to ending poverty, including tackling inequality, discrimination, health, water sanitation, economic growth, climate change, and food security.

I particularly welcome the inclusion of Gender Equality as one of the new Goals, and the target of 'eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres'.

As we face into the coming years, Christian Aid and our partners will be watching what governments do next to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals translate into meaningful action for the communities we work with around the world.

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