

Churches
in Ireland
Connecting
in Christ

**Irish Council
of Churches**



2014
Annual Report

CONTENTS

Core Reports

	President —Report
04.....	<i>Rev Dr Donald Watts</i>
	Honorary Treasurer —Report Year 2013
07.....	<i>Jonathan Wilson</i>
	Executive Officer —Report
08.....	<i>Mervyn McCullagh</i>
	Irish Inter-Church Meeting —Report
15.....	<i>Alison Meagher</i>

Associated Organisations

	CTBI —Update
17.....	<i>Canon Bob Fyffe</i>
	Christian Aid —Update
19.....	<i>Rosamond Bennett</i>

ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2014

	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

In reviewing the work of the ICC during my first year as President I am very conscious of the legacy we have been left by those who have gone before, inspiring the vision of Churches in Ireland working together to proclaim the coming kingdom of God. For more than 90 years, the Council has been a marker, often in turbulent times, of God’s call to His people to be faithful in seeking His way, not only for the church but for the society in which we are placed to serve. Like the prophet Malachi we can rejoice with confidence in God’s promise – *‘For you who obey me, my saving power will rise on you like the sun and bring healing like the sun’s rays.’* Malachi 4:2

Some years ago the Council began a quiet but steady review of its work to consider how it could best serve the churches in Ireland and the work of Christ’s mission. It recognised that while there are two ecumenical

bodies – the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting – the Spirit is leading us in one direction, as together we witness to Christ’s power and presence in the world. The phrase [Churches in Ireland – Connecting in Christ](#) became the banner under which we have been working, while recognising that sometimes there are initiatives in which only some of the Churches will be involved.

More recently, we have taken some time to prayerfully consider the fundamental purpose of our calling and the essential values which underpin our work. They are listed fully on page 6 of this report. This thinking has led us to a clearer understanding of the work we should undertake and the relationships into which we are being called. It has meant pausing some of the work which had been carried out to give time to refocus our priorities. That is not in any way to suggest

that the work has not been important. Much of it is vital and will inform the discussions as we move forward. The positive outcomes will, I believe, emerge in the next year.

The past year has been characterised by reflection and listening to one another. The process was significantly helped by a time of ‘retreat’ led by Dom Mark-Ephrem Nolan. In reality this was a significant ‘advance’ as we listened to God and to one another. The next stage will be to consider the work which is emerging from our being together in the presence of God, in the context of our mission in Ireland. Some thinking had already begun with the theme of mission and evangelism forming the basis of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting in November.

On this journey we have been helped by many people but I especially mention two whose

deep spirituality has been a great encouragement to me and a blessing to ecumenical endeavour on this island – our past president, Rev Fr Godfrey O’Donnell and former co-chair of the IICM, Cardinal Sean Brady. Their generosity of spirit has contributed much to the process of churches connecting together in Ireland. I am also delighted to welcome Most Rev Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, as the new IICM co-chair and look forward to working with him over the next year and beyond.

We are also blessed by being in a much stronger financial position, which has been achieved by careful management in the office helped by the insights of the out-going treasurer, Robert Cochran. Our genuine thanks go to him and a welcome to our new treasurer, Jonathan Wilson, who is already offering insight from his wide experience.

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For more than 90 years, the Council has been a marker, often in turbulent times, of God’s call to His people to be faithful in seeking His way, not only for the church but for the society in which we are placed to serve
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Of course, nothing much would have happened without the hard work and commitment of the office staff – Mervyn McCullagh, Karen Kelly, Alison Meagher and more recently Megan Miller who is covering for Karen’s maternity leave. All of them are deeply dedicated to the work of the organisation. We wish Karen well and appreciate Megan’s important contribution. I want especially to mention Alison’s creative work in preparation for the RTE broadcast service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This was a tremendous opportunity to communicate something of our vision throughout Ireland. Our thanks extend to all who contributed, not least our newest members from the Redeemed Christian Church of God. Lastly, of course my genuine thanks to my friend and sparring-partner, Mervyn, without whom little of what I am encouraged to report would have happened.

FAITH

The goal and grounding of all that we do is our shared Faith in Jesus Christ; we seek to be faithful to God and committed to our journey together

HOLINESS

Willing to be opened and changed by God as we connect with each other and meet together in the Lord; Experiencing God's holiness as we spend time together in prayer and seeking to be reconciled in Christ

HOPE

Hoping in Christ and living in the power of the Holy Spirit sustaining us and fuelling our courage; We are courageous in our vision and mission having the strength together to fulfil our reason to be

RESPECT

Respecting and seeking to understand each other's beliefs; we are aware of our diversity while recognising the presence of Christ in each other as we seek to understand the fullness of God's revelation for the world

WITNESS

Witnessing to God's kingdom of justice, peace and reconciliation through word and action; and to our common discipleship in the way we live and work together; and also as we listen to the world in which we live and serve



**HONORARY
TREASURER**
—Report
Year 2014

WRITER
Jonathan Wilson

The presentation of our accounts continues to evolve as we prepare for the full implementation of the Charity Commission requirements. The accounts now include the full activities of both the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting to provide a full appreciation of our activities over the past last twelve months, whilst maintaining the identities of both instruments.

The accounts show a small surplus for the year and a position which is ahead of our budget for the period. We continue to build our 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 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. We continue to drive real

efficiencies in terms of cost control and budgets are strongly challenged to ensure expenditure is appropriate to purpose. We are projecting a small surplus for 2015 based on current forecasts.

We continue 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 will look at our approach to this and develop a more forward looking investment strategy that seeks to maximise our income, with due regard to an ethical approach and appropriate risk management.

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. I would also like to pay tribute to Robert Cochran, our immediate past honorary treasurer for the years of valuable service he has provided to the organisation.



EXECUTIVE OFFICER —Report

WRITER
Mervyn McCullagh

It is almost 25 years since the heyday of post-modernism and in an era defined by being post-almost-everything, social change in Ireland continues to accelerate at a pace surpassing the expectations of many. Increasingly, churches need to continually discover new ways to compete in the polyphonic marketplace of ideas. Individual rights continue to be given prominence over broad ideologies and many of the public cases this past year have pushed the boundaries to which communities are required to bend their long-cherished principles in order to accommodate individual desires. This is not new. In remembering how similar trends were experienced by the exiled children of Israel, the 91st Annual Meeting of the Council reflected on the theme of Remnant.

Prof Frances Young, in giving her keynote address, argued that ‘the last thing we can afford to do is go into a holy huddle and separate from the world, seeking a purity which is hard and dead.

We need creativity and a readiness to let new things happen¹.

Our incoming President Rev Dr Donald Watts added that ‘we, as Christian people, must be determined by the future, a future that Jesus has created for us’. He encouraged us to ‘walk confidently and joyfully towards a future determined for us by Jesus’ death and resurrection.’

We have sought throughout the past year to follow these words of encouragement. To walk confidently in Christ, seeking creativity with a readiness to let new things happen. We have kept these themes in our minds as we seek to deepen our fellowship through our regular meetings together, collaborate on public policy issues, enable cooperation across the churches, work on externally funded projects, build more effective networks and partnerships and, as an organisation, continually improve our governance, working practice, and communications.

¹ From Holy Remnant to Aliens and Exiles, Prof Frances Young to the Irish Council of Churches, April 2014

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Individual rights continue to be given prominence over broad ideologies

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RTÉ WPCU Service

In January 2015, the ICC and IICM brought Church leaders from across a broad range of Christian traditions in Ireland together to mark the commencement of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in a service that was broadcast on RTÉ One.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is celebrated globally as an opportunity to pray for the unity of all Christian people as they share in Christ’s ministry. This year, the Week was observed from 18th to 25th January and considered the theme ‘the Well is Deep’. The theme was inspired by the church in Brazil, based on a reading from John 4:7 where Jesus meets with a Samaritan woman by a well.

The televised service was led by Rev Dr Donald Watts, President of the Irish Council of Churches, with input from: Most Rev Dr Diarmuid Martin, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin; Most Rev Dr Michael Jackson, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin; Rev Peter Murray, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland;

and Very Rev Dr Trevor Morrow, a former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church. The service also featured participation from a number of the ICC’s other member churches including the Antiochian Orthodox Church, the Lutheran Church in Ireland, the Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Religious Society of Friends.

The spirit of unity espoused by this gathering of Christian representatives was best encapsulated by an observance from Rev Peter Murray who quoted an African proverb: ‘If you want to go *fast*, go alone; if you want to travel *far*, travel together.’

Liaison Groups

The Churches’ Communications Officers Group has continued to meet and discuss areas of shared interest. Our new Treasurer has agreed to convene the Finance Officers Group, which will carry forward our previous work on ethical investment.

The Reconciliation Liaison Group, originally established

following the conclusion of the Haass talks, continues to be committed to the process of dialogue with each other and with civil society.

Following their previous work in articulating a vision for a reconciled society, the group developed a set of principles that they offered to Church Leaders as a resource to help shape and influence public discourse. This set of principles has been used, in whole or in part, in a variety of ways including social media, newspaper print and as context to public dialogues. It has also provided the backdrop for discussions between some of the RLG participants and the five main political parties. The future form of the group is fluid at present, but participants continue to keep in touch, as they work within their churches and take initiatives, as appropriate, to respond to the current political situation in Northern Ireland as well as broader issues of reconciliation in Ireland.

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Alex Maskey MLA, Chair of the Social Development Committee. This augmented an earlier meeting that had taken place between church representatives, amongst whom the ICC had a delegation, and Secretary of State Teresa Villiers. During this gathering, which built upon a long tradition of dialogue between churches and political leaders, Ms Villiers outlined her priorities for political progress in Northern Ireland and listened to the concerns of those present.

Migrant Integration

Churches, as organisations with many members from minority ethnic communities are keenly aware of how diversity can enrich our local communities. At the same time, though their pastoral engagement they have gained an in-depth understanding of the challenges which impede their equal participation in society.

Building on a long track record of work relating to migrant integration in Ireland, the Inter-Church Committee reaffirmed its commitment to embracing diversity, promoting religious freedom and building inclusive communities through a public statement issued in May 2014 and through our subsequently coordinating a response to the consultation on a Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Captions

- 01 Most Rev Dr Diarmuid Martin and Rev Peter Murray, speak with Alison Meagher
- 02 Orlagh Leong (UCD Chaplaincy), Patrick Neavyn (Society of Friends), Jessica Lim (TCD Chaplaincy), Yvonne Langebach (Lutheran), Pastor Matthew Agboola (Redeemed), Fr John Hickey (Antiochian Orthodox), Rt Rev Trevor Morrow (Presbyterian), Rev Peter Murray (Methodist), Archbishop Diarmuid Martin (Roman Catholic) and Archbishop Michael Jackson (Church of Ireland) at the RTÉ service

European Affairs

The European Affairs Committee has engaged in future planning and is making arrangements to progress the work of the committee over the next year and beyond. Following a highly productive and informative meeting with the European Parliament Information Office in Dublin, the group have identified a number of areas of EU policy that are particularly pertinent to churches in Ireland and that they plan to consider and act upon. These include: migrants and the free movement of people within the EU; Religion and diplomacy, or faith as a factor in the formulation of EU policy; Religious minorities and the freedom of religious expression; Climate; The working week and work-life balance; Religion in education; and Taxation. The Committee will engage with these issues over the coming year, communicate

with relevant officials and elected representatives and help to inform and share developments in European Affairs with the Irish churches.

Church Leaders Group

Following a decision in mid-2014 the ICC President and Executive Officer have been invited to be part of the Church Leaders Group in Ireland (previously known as the Four church leaders). Members of that group have also been invited to attend the Inter-Church Committee. This greatly assists the exchange of information between two bodies which have acted in parallel for many years.

The group continued its advocacy for the most vulnerable and marginalised on the issue of proposed welfare reform in Northern Ireland, meeting with Mervyn Storey MLA, Minister for Social Development and later

The exercise of considering and formulating a response to the consultation paper illustrates a particularly effective way of working for the ICC, whereby the organisation acts as a conduit for representatives of our member churches with a particular skill set and expertise to be drawn together with relevant partner organisations, in this case the charity EMBRACENI.

In response to a request from the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, the ICC commissioned Dr Damian Jackson to co-ordinate the Irish response to a European survey on migrant integration within our member churches. This was a follow-up to a similar study done in 2008. Three areas were assessed: migrant involvement in churches, how churches are working with migrant youth and the ways in which working with migrants is helping churches.

Reporting back to the ICC Executive, Dr Jackson noted the following:

- There is a high number of migrant youth.
- There is an under-representation of migrants in leadership positions in churches
- Data had not been systematically collected. Nine responses out of thirteen came from estimates or personal knowledge rather than data collected.
- Several churches are due to appoint people on a nationwide basis to deal with inter-cultural issues. Many other churches recognised the importance of this issue.

- 03 Most Rev Pat Storey and Major Stuart Dicker at the Annual Meeting of the Council
- 04 Past President Godfrey O'Donnell and Mervyn McCullagh
- 05 Pastors Matthew Agboola, Dare Adetuberu and Ebenezer Oduntan from the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)

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We are working together closely with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland to seek ways of developing this work further, particularly in the Republic of Ireland, in 2015.

Direct Provision System

Arising from a shared concern for the human dignity and well-being of people seeking asylum in Ireland who find themselves forced to rely on the direct provision system, the ICC came together with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church and Evangelical Alliance to lobby the Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald. Expressing serious concern about the serious inadequacies of the system, we requested:

1. Comprehensive reform of the asylum application system in the forthcoming Immigration, Residence and Protection bill so that decisions, including appeal, take no longer than 12 months.

2. That Ireland sign up to the European directive on reception conditions (Council Directive 2013/33/EU of 26 June 2013) and allow those awaiting asylum decisions to work after twelve months.
3. The provision of cooking facilities in direct provision accommodation.

In response to the issues raised by us, a letter from the Minister drew attention to the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016, and specifically the implication that ‘the government will also establish an independent Working Group to report to Government on improvements with the protection process, including Direct Provision and supports for asylum seekers.’ The letter stressed that ‘the issues raised in your correspondence will broadly come under the terms of reference of the Working Group.’ We continue to follow the progress of this complex and important issue and await the publication of the Working Group’s report, which the

Government have indicated should take place around Easter.

New Inter-Church Meeting Co-Chair

We were delighted to welcome Most Rev Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick, as the new co-chair of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. This follows the retirement of Cardinal Seán Brady. Bishop Leahy has been active in the Inter-Church Committee for many years, planning numerous Inter-Church Meetings and contributing richly to much of our thinking and work together. It is a privilege to have him as our co-chair. We were also delighted to welcome Archbishop Eamon Martin as a new member of the Inter-Church Committee.

ICC Executive Membership

At the September meeting of the executive we noted a number of changes in personnel. Rev Trevor Gribben was appointed Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He has been



an active member of the ICC Executive and has been warmly welcomed in his new role. We said goodbye to Pastor Corinna Diestelkamp, who returned to Germany after many years of faithful service in the Lutheran church. She has been replaced by Martin Sauter. Mr Robert Cochran stepped down as Treasurer in September and was replaced by Mr Jonathan Wilson. Bishop Trevor Williams retired and we await news of his replacement and we welcomed Patrick Neavyn from the Religious Society of Friends. Members paid tribute to the long service and dedication of all those who left the committee.

ICC Executive Retreat

To help deepen the roots of our fellowship together the February meeting of the Executive left business to the side and spent an overnight in prayerful retreat, led by Dom Mark-Ephrem Nolan of the Benedictine Monastery in Rostrevor. Focusing on how we treat ‘the unexpected

guest’ with hospitality and grace, we spent time reflecting and praying through the implications of our work together. The opportunity to listen to God, the cornerstone of our work and ministry, was a tangible blessing.

The Church Towards a Common Vision

Bishop Leahy and Dr Richard Clutterbuck co-ordinated a dialogue on the recently published World Council of Churches convergence document, *The Church Towards a Common Vision*. We explored three specific areas: Moral questions and the unity of the Church; Legitimate and divisive diversity; and Authority in the Church and its exercise. It was agreed that the ICC would not issue a common response to the document but that churches would share their responses with each other.

Irish Churches Peace Project

We have continued to be an active partner in the Peace III funded Irish Churches Peace Project together with

the Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, and Methodist Churches in Ireland. The project works for the transformation of Northern Ireland and the Border Region to build a peaceful and stable society, with a better and shared future. The project staff have built considerable momentum over the year with a wide range of initiatives being developed and credit is due for their commitment to the work. The project concludes in mid-2015 and we have begun to work with the other partner churches to explore how a longer term project may be developed with the support of Peace IV. Full details of the Project can be read in their separate Annual Report and on their website: <http://icpp.info>

European National Councils of Churches

This year the Secretaries General of the National Councils of Churches in Europe met together in the Netherlands. This valuable meeting, which enables all of us to identify com-

mon trends in our work, spent considerable time examining the impact of the financial crisis and the growth of nationalism in Europe. The Scottish Independence Referendum and the conflict in Ukraine were specifically considered. I have been invited, by the German Churches, to be part of the planning group for the next meeting, which is due to take place in Berlin in May 2015. The Conference of European Churches recognises the strategic importance of the National Councils and is changing the way it relates to them. As a consequence, this meeting of Secretaries General will become even more important to each Council.

Women’s Link

Women’s Link brings together representatives from the women’s organisations of our member churches. The committee enhanced their membership by introducing new representatives from the Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends. The Annual Women’s Fellowship Day was hosted by the Salvation Army in the Belfast Citadel last April. The theme of the gathering was ‘Were you there?’ Helen Sloan OBE, from Bangor Storehouse, provided an amusing and thought-provoking talk on the sometimes hidden needs of our neighbours. Jenny Robinson, Presbyterian Deaconess from Friendship House, Sandy Row shared a reflective insight into community work drawing on practical experience. Phyllis Watters, the current president, has ably represented the organisation at a variety of National Celebrations and on the ICC Executive. Our thanks are due to Phyllis for her leadership

and commitment and we look forward to working with the new officers Joyce Bond, president and Eilis O’Malley, secretary over the coming years.

Conclusion

Co-operation across the churches is as important now as it always has been though the apparent reasons may have changed. There continues to be no biblical precedent for disunity for those who believe in Christ Jesus. In presenting this report I offer my heartfelt thanks to all the members of the Executive and the Inter-Church Committee for their work over the year, but especially to our President Rev Dr Donald Watts for his tireless commitment to the work of the Council, his clarity of thought, his overall guidance and attention to detail and his willingness to travel to attend numerous events across the island on behalf of our members. His love of the church and deeply held faith is a source of inspiration. Thank you.

We are blessed with an excellent staff who continue to work above and beyond the call of duty, demonstrating the flexibility and commitment that typifies small staff teams.

We give thanks to God for all his blessings to us and pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, and following the example of Christ our Saviour, we may bring glory to God as we work for the extension of Christ’s kingdom.

- Captions pp12 and 13**
- 01 Rev Peter Murray, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, Archbishop Eamon Martin, Social Development Minister, Mervyn Storey MLA, Right Rev Dr Michael Barry, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, The Venerable George Davison, Church of Ireland and Mervyn McCullagh.
 - 02 Members of the ICC Executive with Dom Mark-Ephrem Nolan



**IICM
—Report**

Preface

On 27th November 2014, 55 delegates from the Roman Catholic Church and the member churches of the ICC gathered at Mount St. Anne’s Retreat Centre in Portarlinton, Co. Laois, for the 27th Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

WRITER
Alison Meagher

Captions Page 16

- 01 Mervyn McCullagh, Rev Dr Donald Watts, Most Rev Brendan Leahy, Sam Harper and Alison Meagher
- 02 Most Rev Diarmuid Martin, and Prof Kirsteen Kim
- 03 Kate McQuillan and Gillian Kingston
- 04 Rev Andy Caroll

The Irish Inter-Church Meeting this year explored the theme ‘*Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Irish Landscapes*’. This particular theme derives from the similarly titled document from the World Council of Churches Commission on Mission and World Evangelism. Throughout the day, delegates sought, through the exploration of this global theme, to discover how our churches engage in mission, both together and separately, showing a united face of Christ in an increasingly unbelieving Ireland.

Keynote Address

With the aim of setting the day’s discussions and reflections within the wider context of the WCC document’s contents, Professor Kirsteen Kim, one of its architects, opened proceedings by delivering a keynote address. Prof. Kim is Professor of Theology and World Christianity at Leeds Trinity University, and has authored numerous texts on these subjects. Stressing the explicitly

pneumatologically-defined framework in which ‘*Together Toward Life*’ exists, Prof. Kim highlighted the four key themes of the document, attempting as it does to stimulate mission and reflection and encourage discerning action.

These themes are:

Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life The Holy Spirit has the power or energy to re-create our world. By the grace of God we also participate in that mission of love that is at the heart of the life of the Trinity that renews the whole creation.

Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins The vulnerable people at the margins are in a unique position to see what is out of view for the people in the centre. They are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance and agency that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.

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Spirit of Community: Church on the Move After his Resurrection, Jesus Christ sent the church into the world. At the same time he breathed the Holy Spirit into the church (John 20:19-23). Therefore, the church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning. If it does not engage in mission, it ceases to be church.

Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All While the Holy Spirit gifts some to be evangelists, we all are called and emboldened to give an account of the hope that is in us. Not only individuals but also the whole church together is mandated to evangelize in word and in deed.

In her concluding remarks, Prof. Kim indicated that the overriding theme of “Together Towards Life” can be defined as *‘Finding out where the Holy spirit is at work and joining in’*, a theme particularly pertinent and resonant for many of those in attendance at the Inter-Church Meeting.

Workshops For the remainder of the day, delegates had the opportunity to attend workshops where they participated in group work and discussions based on four themes relevant to the subject of this IICM. Kathy Galloway, Head of Christian Aid Scotland and a former leader of the Iona Community led discussion on ‘Mission and the Reconciliation of Creation’. Kate McQuillan, a member of Trócaire’s Outreach Team discussed ‘Mission as the Pursuit of Justice’. Rev Andy Carroll, Presbyterian Minister for the recently ‘planted’ congregation of Donabate, Co. Dublin, considered ‘Mission as Evangelism’. Finally, Dr Mary McCaughey, lecturer in systematic Theology at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, brought a group together to think about ‘Mission as Ecumenism’.

New Co-Chairs The gathering was also noteworthy as the first event at which Rev Dr Don-

ald Watts and the Most Rev Brendan Leahy came together as co-chairs of the Meeting. Rev Dr Watts, former Clerk of the Presbyterian Church, was installed as ICC President in April 2014, whilst Bishop Leahy has been recently appointed co-chair after the retirement of Cardinal Seán Brady.

Paying tribute to Cardinal Brady, who was present for the day’s events, Rev Dr Watts stated that he had been deeply grateful to work alongside him, describing him as ‘a man of great humility’, with ‘very real pastoral responsibility’. He thanked the Cardinal for his dedication to developing the relationship between churches in Ireland during his time as co-chair. Bishop Leahy, too, extended sincere thanks to Cardinal Brady and in his closing remarks noted that the Holy Spirit is active, it is up to us to join in, and that the churches recognise, perhaps more humbly now, that we are in this together.

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 its General Secretary.

WRITER
Canon Bob Fyffe

In September 2014 I travelled to Malawi, one of the poorest countries in the world, as part of a group discussing how ACT Alliance (of which Christian Aid is a partner) can find new and more efficient ways of working together. In that meeting we discussed the new and emerging paradigms in international development. We live in a world of greater mutual dependence and recognise and encourage partnership over patronage. In these new paradigms we recognise the importance of hearing the voices of those on “the edges” of power and influence.

One of the important points of learning for me is the way in which many organisations and faith communities are seeking fresh ways of engaging around the “big ticket” issues such as climate change, poverty and globalisation. To me the question remains how the ecumenical

movement can be part of this changing scene and how we can allow our structures, many of which are still modelled on post WW2 thinking, to emerge in ways that serve our member churches.

Part of this new paradigm was caught in the discussion and debate around the Scottish Referendum held in 2014. Away from the party political confrontations, many local communities, often enabled by their local churches engaged in discussions about what kind of society they wanted to live in. What are the values of our communities and how can we live well together. This was a “bottom up” process that again allowed local voices to be heard and for values to be discussed. The result was a massive engagement in the democratic process with more than 90% turnout across Scotland.

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Mutual respect and understanding must lie at the root of any healthy relationship

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There are many parallels to this in the CTBI initiative called Good Society in which we have continued to ask local groups of Christians across Britain and Ireland “what does a good society look like to you?” Many of the outcomes can be found at <http://agoodsociety.org/> but highlight the positive role that communities expect from their local churches. I am hoping that we can develop our partnership with ICC to continue rolling out the Good Society project across many more parts of Ireland in the coming months.

Hearing different voices from the edge is a theme picked up within the Middle East. Although the countries of the Middle East form the historical centre of Christianity, many if not all, Christians across the Middle East feel under existential threat. Following our annual conference last year which focused on the plight of Christians, we launched the 2015 Lent course ‘Walking and Praying with Christians of the Middle East’ <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/CGC/688> Our keynote speaker was Bishop

Elias Chacour (former Archbishop in Jaffa) who movingly said that Christians in the Middle East needed our prayers and friendship. He went on to say that if that friendship meant hating others, such as the Jewish community, then he did not want such friendship. Mutual respect and understanding must lie at the root of any healthy relationship.

We have been blessed within CTBI to have been led by our Moderator Margaret Swinson who has overseen many significant changes, but we are equally blessed to have Bishop Angaelos (General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church) as our new Moderator. This gives the Churches of Britain and Ireland a special place of insight into the issues of Christians in the Middle East. It is an area we will continue to focus on both in prayer and action.

Following on from the recent Busan Assembly we have produced a study guide for congregations on ‘*The Church Towards a Common Vision*’ the most recent Faith and Order doc-

ument, which can also be accessed on the CTBI website.

There are exciting days ahead for the deepening partnership between CTBI and the ICC. Together we are exploring new ways of mutually enriching each other’s programme, based on a growing trust. This means looking at improved efficiency in serving our shared membership, in resourcing issues and improving capacity that delivers real support. There is much to focus on as we seek together to share our best work, our most important information, our deepest learning.



CHRISTIAN AID —Update

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

WRITER
Rosamond Bennett

Some of the key issues that cause poverty today are often the most difficult to bring to public attention.

But over this past year our message that tax dodging is a major cause of poverty seemed finally to be getting through, and our reputation as a source of expertise in this area was recognised by the mainstream media.

In February 2015, for example, Christian Aid hosted a conference in Dublin about international tax dodging and its effect on human rights. The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Professor Philip Alston was the keynote speaker, alongside the Minister of State for Finance Simon Harris TD, and partners from Guatemala and the Philippines, amongst others.

As the Irish Times reported, Professor Alston said ‘loopholes and schemes introduced by

successive governments have essentially allowed multinational companies take the profits from their operations in developing countries and “launder” them paying absolutely minimal tax.’

In a follow-up report, the same newspaper said, ‘Christian Aid estimates that developing countries lose €121 billion annually due to multinationals avoiding tax, far more than they receive in aid.’

The issue of conflict and peace-building was addressed by two conferences in Northern Ireland in 2014. In the first, held in May at the 174 Trust in north Belfast, Christian Aid partners and staff from Iraq, Mali, and Colombia met Justice Minister David Ford MLA and Colin Craig of the Corrymeela Community.

Our chair, Bishop Trevor Williams, said peace and development go hand in hand, because ‘if people are living in an area

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where there is terrible violence and insecurity, they're driven off their land, they're driven away from their homes, they're driven away from the means by which they were gaining a livelihood. Suddenly they've become terribly poor, destitute and marginalised.'

The second peace-building conference, at Ulster University in Jordanstown in November, drew delegates from an even wider range of countries, including Sierra Leone, Myanmar, DR Congo, Pakistan, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, Angola, and Zimbabwe.

Christian Aid partners and staff from around the world had the opportunity to share their experiences of tackling violence in their respective countries and, crucially, to learn from each other.

Our development and humanitarian work overseas continues to be prioritised.

The Syrian civil war that started in 2011 has forced over three million Syrians to flee to neighbouring Iraq and Lebanon. In northern Iraq, our partner REACH continued to work with people living in informal camps around Sulaymaniyah and Erbil, providing hygiene kits, food and shelter.

In Gaza, a ceasefire announced on 26 August between Israel and the Palestinians brought an end to seven weeks of relentless violence and destruction. Immediately after the conflict our partners distributed food and other essentials to homeless families, while another partner PMRS (Palestinian Medical Relief Society) continues to provide medical care.

South Sudan is facing a serious food crisis as more than one and a half million people fled the fighting that broke out at the end of 2013. Farmers have been unable to plant or harvest



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crops. Again our partners have been providing emergency supplies.

In response to the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, our partners – including MCSL (Methodist Church of Sierra Leone) – have been focussing on supporting the survivors and families in quarantine.

As part of our continued engagement with the Churches, our Head of Church & Community Deborah Doherty visited South Africa accompanied by Bishop Patrick Rooke, Chair of the Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal; Revd Leslie-Ann Wilson, Presbyterian World Development Appeal Committee; and Louise Monroe, Methodist World Development and Relief Committee. Along with Alf McCreary of the Belfast Telegraph, they saw some of the work of Christian Aid's partners in what is still one of the world's most unequal societies.

During the past year we also took teachers to Kenya and a small group of supporters to Zimbabwe. The three teachers,

from Counties Down, Armagh and Cork, travelled to the village of Lengwenyi in Kenya, to see how the people there cope with climate change. On their return to Ireland, they produced a range of school materials to teach classes about global issues – including climate change – and the work of Christian Aid in Kenya. The supporters, meanwhile, were so inspired by what they saw in Zimbabwe that they have been speaking regularly in churches since. Indeed one of them, Mrs Jane Burns, even spoke at our RTÉ service in August about the personal impact the visit had on her.

We are committed to strengthening and deepening our valued relationships with churches and supporters in Ireland. This means both listening and learning from them and seeking opportunities to share knowledge and expertise from the development field that will enable all of us, together, to be as effective as we can in addressing the continued injustice and inequality in our world.

CAPTIONS

- 01 Women of the Samburu tribe in Lengwenyi, Kenya, who are coping with climate change with the help of Christian Aid. The Samburu have sometimes been nicknamed the 'Butterfly People' because of their colourful beaded jewellery and clothing.
- 02 Rosamond Bennett with Justice Minister David Ford MLA at the first of two Christian Aid peace-building conferences in 2014
- 03 A mobile clinic operated by Christian Aid partner PMRS (Palestinian Medical Relief Society) in Gaza. This photograph was taken just a few weeks after the ceasefire came into effect.
- 04 Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, speaking at the Christian Aid Tax & Human Rights Conference in February 2105.
- 05 Food being distributed to displaced families from Fallujah, Iraq by Christian Aid partner REACH in the Kurdish city of Chamchamal.
- 06 Bishop Trevor Williams, Chair of Christian Aid Ireland, with visitors from Mali, Iraq and Colombia at the Peace Wall in north Belfast

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