



Churches
in Ireland
Connecting
in Christ

Irish Council
of Churches

2016
Annual Report

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ICC CONSTITUENT COMMUNIONS 2016

	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
Rt Rev John McDowell

Once a year, for the past three years, members of the ICC Executive have gone together on a twenty-four hour Retreat. As with all Retreats, the intention is to have a period of time together when we are wholly present to God and to have an opportunity for guided reflection.

This year's Retreat was led by Fr Gerry O'Hanlon SJ and focussed on some passages from the New Testament, interlaced with Fr O'Hanlon's reflections on contemporary culture and the Church in Ireland. Among other things, we were encouraged to consider the Irish Church's inheritance in the Wisdom tradition (our day-to-day work)

and in the Prophetic Tradition (what we might do and say in particular situations of contemporary life on this island).

Looking back over the past year since the last AGM, and reflecting on what we as an Executive heard and said in the Retreat, I would like to offer three observations which might help shape what we do in the year to come.

Firstly, on a number of occasions, Jesus asked his disciples "What do you want?" or "What are you looking for?". Perhaps that is a question we should ask ourselves as a Council: What do we want from our activities and, depending on the answers, can we expect the Lord to be with us as we set about doing what we have decided to do, both wisely and prophetically?

Arising from that question is a further query of how we achieve our goals. Another succinct quotation (this time from a book on efficient management, rather than the New Testament) that came up in our twenty-four hours together was the notion that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast".

Finally, a thought that comes from a rather longer quotation from Archbishop Oscar Romero, is offered alongside material from the 'sidelines' of our time together on Retreat in Drumalis.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of

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We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

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saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No programme accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,

an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

– Oscar Romero, Bishop and Martyr.

Summarising all of the above, I propose that our task for the year ahead be:

- not to think that we have been relieved of the task of working out for ourselves what we as a national ecumenical body want to achieve in the company of one another and of the Risen Lord
- to bear in mind that a strategy, no matter how complete, will not change a culture, especially a religious culture that is deeply divided and (in Northern Ireland at least) a political culture that simply does not seem to have the resources within itself to imagine and create an integrated, democratic society. (Paradoxically, acknowledging the two points made above is itself a strategic decision)
- in partnership with the IICC, to affirm those within our churches who have a genuine prophetic vocation and encourage them to work together to articulate what might be a Christian contribution to a healthy pluralist society in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Such a contribution should be strange enough to be credible and familiar enough to be realistic.



HONORARY TREASURER —Report Year 2016

WRITER
Jonathan Wilson

This is the first year that a complete set of accounts will be submitted to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. 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.

We are currently in the process of registering with the Charities Regulatory Authority (RoI) and, as part of that process, have submitted financial statements for 2016 and a copy of our Internal Financial Procedures document.

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 have adopted a cautious approach to budgeting for 2017 in anticipation of increased costs in the context of an uncertain global financial climate.

The level of reserves remains consistent with agreed policy 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 the 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. In 2016 the Joint Management

Committee worked with ICC staff to develop a framework for Risk Management for the organization, together with a timetable for reporting, review and updating of this framework. Where appropriate, risks are covered by insurance and insurance coverage was reviewed with the broker by the Joint Management Committee and ICC staff in 2016.

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. Investment during 2016 was in line with the investment strategy as revised in 2015, in order to maximise our income with due regard to an ethical approach and appropriate risk management. A modest return on investments in 2016 was anticipated. We have budgeted for a modest return on investments in 2017 in light of the challenging environment.

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.

GENERAL SECRETARY —Report

WRITER
Dr Nicola Brady



I was fortunate to be in the position of attending the 93rd Annual Meeting of the ICC, hosted by the Church of Ireland in Christ Church Cathedral, the week before interviewing for the post of General Secretary. It was a valuable opportunity to hear the outgoing ICC President and General Secretary reflect on the journey that has brought the organisation to where it is today. As Rev Dr Donald Watts outlined the values that underpinned the mission statement 'Churches in Ireland – Connecting in Christ', it was clear that a great deal had been achieved in developing a new cohesion and sense of purpose for the ICC. My predecessor, Mervyn McCullagh, traced how the organisation has evolved against the backdrop of a rapidly changing society, across the island of Ireland. As a long-term member of the Church in Society Forum, formerly the Inter-Church Committee on Social Issues, I was involved in some of the consultation and strategic planning that led to structural changes which have strengthened the central roles of the ICC Executive and Irish Inter-Church Committee. It was also clear from the appreciation expressed for

Donald and Mervyn's leadership that these changes have been successful. Committee members dedicate considerable time to ICC and IICC meetings and it is vital that these are adequately resourced so as to provide opportunities for significant dialogue and effective decision-making. The current ICC staff team will continue to make resourcing these meetings a central focus of our work in order to ensure clear communication and accountability.

I come to this role after eight years as Research Coordinator for the Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. Inter-church collaboration on social justice issues was a core element of this work, and I have been able to build on this experience in my new role as ICC General Secretary. I would like to thank my former colleagues and the members of the Catholic Bishops' Conference for their support and encouragement and their interest in finding new ways to work together.

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Church Conferences and Assemblies

I took up the post of General Secretary in May 2016, when many of our member churches were holding their annual conferences and assemblies. I was greatly encouraged by the welcome I received at these events, which gave valuable insights into the priority concerns of our members. This experience really underlined the importance of Inter-Church dialogue as the same issues were being raised across the different gatherings. ICC Executive members also undertook to attend the conferences and assemblies of other churches and make a report to their colleagues. This kind of engagement supports not only information-exchange, but also relationship building, by allowing churches to get to know each other better.

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International Context

My second week in the job was spent in Lisbon with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) for a General Secretaries' meeting, from 31 May to 3 June 2016. The CEC General Secretaries' meeting brings together a network that can provide useful information on how the challenges facing churches and inter-church structures are being addressed in different European contexts. The meeting was chaired by the CEC General Secretary, Fr Heikki Huttunen, who outlined the priority areas of work for CEC in the coming years. The central focus will be the next CEC General Assembly, which will take place in Serbia in 2018. This will be a significant opportunity for pan-european church dialogue on a wide range of issues and the ICC, as well as the Irish churches who are members of CEC, are committed to playing an active role in the preparations. A written submission outlining our key recommendations to CEC was submitted in December 2016.

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Unsurprisingly, the major thematic item on the agenda for the European General Secretaries' Meeting was the refugee crisis, with particular emphasis on the role and responsibility of churches in highlighting the positive contribution of migrants and refugees to our society, while also acknowledging the extent of the current crisis and the urgent humanitarian need. Finally, the meeting provided an opportunity to discuss inter-church relationships in Portugal. Relations between the Catholic Church and other Christian churches have been difficult as a result of the legacy of the Salazar dictatorship (1932-1968). During this time other churches were persecuted by the State, and legislation to support religious freedom was not introduced until 2001. Some churches continue to take measures to avoid legal registration (for example, renting premises in the name of an individual, registering as a secular

charity) because of a lack of trust in the State. The CEC meeting provided an opportunity for a series of public meetings between the representatives of the National Council of Churches in Portugal (COPIC) and the Roman Catholic Cardinal of Lisbon. A programme on the meeting was broadcast on state television, helping to raise the profile of inter-church collaboration in Portugal.

The following month, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting in Trondheim, Norway, from 2nd to 8 July 2016. The Central Committee has an important role in setting the agenda for the WCC, shaping its work plan and issuing statements on issues of shared concern. Representatives of National Councils of Churches are entitled to have observer status, with limited speaking rights and no voting rights.

Bishop Alan Abernethy of the Church of Ireland Diocese of Connor is currently a member of the WCC Central Committee. Major global justice issues considered by the WCC at this meeting included the rights of indigenous peoples (with a presentation from the Sami community of Norway), the Black Lives Matter campaign, the refugee crisis and religious persecution and violence in the Middle East. There was a very moving presentation on the theme of forgiveness from representatives of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of South Africa to mark their return to full membership of the WCC following the breakdown of the relationship in the 1960s as a result of the DRC's support for, and involvement in, apartheid. The DRC had been supported in the reapplication process by the South African Council of Churches, which it joined in 2012, and representatives expressed their gratitude to their brothers and sisters

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in the other South African churches who kept the door open for the DRC, despite how it had rejected them, and were ready to offer their forgiveness when the DRC sought to build new relationships.

Programme Officer

There has been a further new addition to the ICC staff team this year in our new Programme Officer, Dr Damian Jackson. Before leaving, Mervyn had secured funding from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, together with match-funding from the ICC and the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, to employ a Programme Officer, based in Dublin, to increase the capacity of ICC to support inter-church engagement in that jurisdiction. The funding was received and the job description approved by the summer of 2016, with recruitment taking place during September and October. We were delighted to welcome Damian to the team in time for the Irish Inter-Church Meeting in November. He brings a wealth of relevant experience to this role and will be a

significant resource for our member churches.

ICC Executive Meetings

The ICC Executive continued to meet throughout 2016, beginning with the annual retreat in February, which took place in Drumalis, Larne. This provided an opportunity to reflect together, with Rev Karen Campbell of the Presbyterian Church leading the group in worship. The meetings in the early part of the year were focussed on the task of finding a new General Secretary, with considerable attention paid to revising the job description to reflect the changes that have taken place since Mervyn was recruited.

The September meeting was hosted by the Lutheran Church in Dublin. After the formal business, we were joined by members of the Lutheran congregation for a discussion on Brexit. Coming from Germany, they brought useful insights and a new perspective to our discussions. As all of our member churches operate on an all-island basis, Executive members are very conscious

of the potential implications of Brexit – from practical issues about cross-border working and currency instability, to pastoral concerns about those communities most at risk. It was clear that there is an important role for churches in ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable are not eclipsed in negotiations centred on trade and economic considerations.

With this in mind, the Executive was delighted to be invited to hold their November meeting in St Michael's Church of Ireland parish on the Shankill Road, Belfast, hosted by Revd Canon Jim Carson and his wife Heather, Parish Development Officer. The Shankill Road is an area that was one of the most deprived during the conflict, and remains so today, with the potential to suffer devastating consequences from the removal of funding for community-level initiatives that have previously been supported by the European Social Fund. The meeting included a panel discussion with representatives of local churches, together with Baroness May Blood, sharing with the Executive their concerns, but

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Executive members are very conscious of the potential implications of Brexit - from practical issues about cross-border working and currency instability, to pastoral concerns about those communities most at risk.

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also their hopes and vision for the area. The meeting concluded with a walking tour around the Lower Shankill area led by representatives of the local community association, who explained how the area has changed, what has been achieved and what remains to be done. Executive members found it very useful to have this examination of local realities and challenges after our reflections on the wider European context.

Inter-Church Committee

The Inter-Church Committee met quarterly throughout 2016. The expanded meeting in May was hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Assembly Buildings, Belfast. This provided an opportunity for planning and charting the challenges and opportunities members foresee for the years ahead. Communication emerged as a significant theme with participants noting the importance of churches sharing what we do and working to shape public discourse in light of our values. At the same time, however, the importance of adequate training and research to keep up with current developments, in terms of both media and policy, was emphasised.

The September meeting dealt with a wide range of issues. Particular inter-

est was expressed in the possible visit of Pope Francis to Ireland in 2018 in the context of the World Meeting of Families taking place in Dublin that year. The meeting also provided an opportunity for our graduate intern, Dr Sarah Buchanan, to make a presentation on the research project she had carried out during her time with the ICC. The theme was 'Welcome and Belonging in the Irish Churches' and the central questions of the research arose from issues raised during the planning session of the expanded IICC meeting in May, where members expressed an interest in investigating how well the Irish churches were living up to their Christian commitment to be communities of welcome. Sarah's analysis helpfully added another layer to this reflection with a focus on belonging. Her findings were both encouraging and challenging, identifying many simple ways in which churches could have a major impact on the experience of someone coming to Ireland as a migrant or refugee.

Communications Liaison Group

This year, we completed one full cycle of the meetings of the Communications Liaison Group, which meets twice per year, rotating between the ICC and participating churches for the hosting of meetings. It was

decided that this was an appropriate point to evaluate the progress made to date. The feedback was extremely positive, with all participants agreeing that this was a useful forum for planning and sharing information but also, most importantly, for peer support, providing an opportunity to reflect on the particular challenges Communications Officers face in their role. It was unanimously agreed that these meetings should continue as before. An ongoing concern is the need to raise the level of debate about moral and ethical issues in our society and identify opportunities for church representatives to engage in productive and respectful debate on these issues.

Church Leaders

At the meetings of the Church Leaders group, the ICC is currently providing policy support in the area of welfare reform in Northern Ireland. This continues the Church Leaders' ongoing engagement with this issue since the proposals for the current reforms were first announced by the British Government. In the current phase of this work, ICC has been bringing together representatives of our member churches working on social policy and social service provision to share information as we monitor the implementation

of the various strands of welfare reform. There is an opportunity to build on the previous engagement of Church Leaders with policy makers, by bringing to their attention any gaps in provision that are impacting vulnerable people. Clergy often have valuable insights into the many ways in which individuals and families are struggling and being left behind. As with the Communications Officers Liaison Group, the members of this working group have found it helpful to share information with colleagues. In addition, this group has been able to meet with representatives of the community and voluntary sector, broadening our engagement, and bringing additional resources to the examination of these issues by Church Leaders.

Visit of Metropolitan Silouan

In July 2016, representatives of the ICC and the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference were delighted to welcome His Eminence Metropolitan Silouan of the Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, on the occasion of his first pastoral visit to the Antiochian Orthodox community in Belfast. Metropolitan Silouan emphasised the importance of cooperation and dialogue between Christians of different traditions, illustrated by the positive experiences of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Britain and Ireland. Born in Syria and recently returned from a visit to the exiled Syrian community in Lebanon, the Archbishop gave a moving account of the challenges facing the Syrian church. We were immensely grateful to the Archbishop for taking the time to engage with the ICC during his visit and our prayers and solidarity remain with the Christian communities of Syria and the Middle East.

Archives

The process of archiving all documentation relating to the ICC's history (including correspondence, minutes, reports and photographs) continues. The process of transferring this material, some of which dates back to 1911, to the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) is complete, and their archivists are currently undertaking the task of preserving and cataloguing our papers. PRONI have divided the papers into two main categories, those relating to the work and history of the ICC, and those pertaining to the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. The process of archiving the former has been completed, whilst PRONI will continue to work on the latter over the next twelve months. They have also taken the decision to revise the original 30-year rule that was applied to the release and availability of our records, particularly those that relate to or identify any particular person. In order to further ensure privacy and confidentiality, a 50-year rule will now, instead, be applied. A special word of thanks is due to Alison Meagher for co-ordinating this process on behalf of the ICC.

Engagement with Government

We continue to engage with Government and policy makers in both jurisdictions as directed by our member churches. The consistent priority throughout 2016 has been the global refugee crisis. ICC has engaged with church representatives working on this issue, as well as meeting with representatives of the Irish Government and those with responsibility for this area in the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland. In our meetings with officials, we have underlined the desire of local church congregations to be actively involved in supporting refugees, and the willingness of Church Leaders to support govern-

ment initiatives in this area. Building on this engagement will be a central focus of Damian Jackson's work as Programme Officer.

The Department for Communities NI organised a consultation on its community engagement work in 2016, part of which dealt with faith sector engagement. Participants in the working group on welfare reform (see above) agreed to attend a meeting with Sharon Polson, Head of Policy and Innovation in the Voluntary and Community Unit to give feedback on proposals from the Department and make recommendations. It was a very useful exchange and further meetings are to follow.

In November I attended the All-island Civic Dialogue on Brexit convened by An Taoiseach Enda Kenny, which took place in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham. It was a useful opportunity to hear, side-by-side, the positions of the different political parties and other interest groups, NGOs etc. The willingness of the Irish Government to engage in such an inclusive dialogue is to be welcomed and the ICC will continue to participate in the next stages of this process, planned for 2017.

A word of thanks

In concluding this report I would like to thank all those who have made my feel so welcome in my new role. I would like to thank the ICC staff: Karen Kelly, Alison Meagher, Damian Jackson and Sarah Buchanan, who was with us from May to October this year. On behalf of the staff team, I would like to thank our Executive and Committee members who give so generously of their time, with particular thanks to the ICC President, Bishop John McDowell, and the members of the Joint Management Committee for all their support and guidance in our work.

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CAPTIONS

- 01 ICC President, Rt Rev John McDowell, with His Eminence Metropolitan Silouan.
- 02 Heather Carson, Noel Hunter, Rev Colin Duncan, Rt Rev John McDowell and Baroness May Blood at St Michael's parish, Shankill Road.
- 03 Martina Anderson MEP (centre) meets with members of the ICC European Affairs Committee, L-R Dr Nicola Brady, Canon Adrian Empey, Dr Kenneth Milne, Margrit Grey, Major Stuart Dicker, Maxine Judge, Markus Grimmeisen.
- 04 Rev Dr Donald Watts, Mervyn McCullagh, Rt Rev John McDowell.
- 05 Rev Brian Anderson, Stephen McCann & Rev Andrew Dougherty.
- 06 Rev Bill Mullally, Dr Nicola Brady and Fr Tim Bartlett at the All-island Civil Dialogue on Brexit.
- 07 Cherry Poynton, Margaret McKenna and Uta Raab.
- 08 Dr Nicola Brady and Dr Kenneth Milne with Jim Nicholson MEP and Mark Moffitt.
- 09 Rev Dr John Stephens, Rev Frank Sellar and Pastor Martin Sauter at a meeting of the Irish Inter-Church Committee.
- 10 Rev David Bruce & Bishop Trevor Williams.
- 11 Bishop Brendan Leahy, IICM Co-Chair.
- 12 A Week of Prayer for Christian Unity event.
- 13 Archimandrite Abba Yohannes Amsalu.
- 14 Members of the ICC Executive are given a tour of the Shankill Road murals.
- 15 Dr Nicola Brady, Rev Dr Donald Watts and Rev Brian Anderson meet with members of the Ecumenical Youth Council of Europe.



PROGRAMME OFFICER —Report

WRITER
Dr Damian Jackson

I began my role as ICC/IICC Programme Officer at the IICM in November. It was an excellent way to begin as it gave me the opportunity to meet many key people in the Irish ecumenical world. My thanks to all of you for such a warm welcome.

For the last nine years, I have been based in the Irish School of Ecumenics. I completed a PhD in Migration Studies and Christian Ethics which explored the drivers of attitudes of Irish churchgoers to immigrants, particularly undocumented migrants. I have also worked with members of various other churches to explore ways to make churches places where people can belong, even if they come from different cultures and countries. Additionally, I am a member of Dublin City Interfaith Forum, a joint initiative of the ICC and Dublin City Council.

I am enjoying immersing myself in the role and am finding it very exciting. I've been putting together a plan which divides the work into three main areas:

1. Nurturing local inter-church activity in the Republic of Ireland
2. Building connections with new and non-member churches
3. Refugee and Migrant integration and advocacy

The motivation for the work in each of these areas comes from the conviction that when churches work together it is a powerful witness both within and without. It is how we show our distinctive values and bear witness to Christ. In being together we are being the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, in the first area, I am seeking to reconnect with centres of local inter-church activity, to find out what is working, what hasn't worked, to encourage and to learn. I then hope to consolidate this learning and disseminate it – back to the member churches but also to new sites where there is desire and potential for fruitful inter-church engagement.

The second strand of the work entails building connections with churches which have, as yet, no formal

contacts with ICC/IICC. I've met with representatives from African Pentecostal Churches, Evangelical Alliance Ireland, and some independent churches. I hope to identify ways in which such churches, for whom the formal membership structures of ICC/IICC may be too resource-demanding, might meaningfully connect and collaborate where appropriate.

Finally, the third area of my work coincides with a long-standing personal interest in the area of migrant integration, both at a national level and, more specifically, in the potential for churches to become places where people can belong and make a spiritual home. As such, I'm representing ICC/IICC at formal meetings with the Department of Justice and the Red Cross, which seek to identify ways in which faith communities can contribute to the integration of refugees in Irish society, and also working with churches and church-based groups who are seeking to grow in openness to people from other countries and cultures.

I would be very happy to hear from members who are enthused by this work and request your prayers for these efforts.



GRADUATE INTERN —Report

WRITER
Dr Sarah Buchanan

Dr Sarah Buchanan recently completed an internship at the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Committee, where she undertook a project looking at the welcome, inclusion and participation of newcomers in church life across a number of denominations.

The months I spent at the ICC allowed me to gain an insight into present-day ecumenism, but also to develop my own research interests and discover more about the local community sector.

On my first day, I attended the Irish Inter-Church Committee, where Dr Nicola Brady looked at the role of ecumenism almost 20 years on from the Good Friday Agreement. Before this, I hadn't realised the many diverse areas in which the Churches are working together, such as poverty, welfare reform, the refugee crisis, and peace and reconciliation.

At the end of this meeting, the topic of diversity within the Churches arose and one leader spoke of the necessity to welcome people from all nations who are migrating here.

This discussion gave me an idea for the research component of my internship, which I later gave the title of 'Welcome and Belonging in the Irish Churches'. With the help of the General Secretary and Embrace NI, I developed a set of questions to talk to migrants about their experiences in local churches, and to talk to clergy about their experiences of working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Church leaders shared the benefits of having people from different backgrounds in their congregations, saying, "you are reminded that you are part of the global church"; "you learn what your values are and what is peripheral" and "with greater cultural insight we gain massive insights into the Christian faith." I presented my findings at the Irish Inter-Church Committee in late September.

Apart from this project, I have enjoyed working alongside the European Affairs Committee at a key moment after Brexit. In August, I was privileged to attend a meeting

of Church leaders with Archbishop Silouan of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, who shared the experiences of Christians living in Syria today. Through my work with various committees, I have been able to develop professional skills that I will take with me, such as minute taking, managing web content, liaising with the press and working on policy documents.

Finally, through a number of external meetings, I learned more about the workings of the local community sector. In June, I attended a TBUC (Together Building a United Community) event with representatives from more than a hundred organisations and in July and October I attended the Community Faiths' Forum, a platform for dialogue between the faith sector and the government. All of these wide and varied experiences meant that I was never bored at the ICC. The internship was a valuable experience from both a personal and professional perspective and I wish to thank Bishop John McDowell, Dr Nicola Brady and Karen Kelly for helping me to find my feet quickly, and the many individuals who provided valuable input into my research project.



IICM —Report

Preface

The 27th Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) took place over the 24th and 25th November at Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre, Portarlinton Co. Laois. The IICM is the formal meeting between the Irish Episcopal Conference and the Irish Council of Churches. It gathers senior church leaders and lay representatives from across 15 denominations in Ireland, bringing together the broad spectrum of Roman Catholic, Reformed, Migrant-led, Independent and Orthodox traditions. The theme chosen for the 2016 meeting was 'Forsaken? The suffering of the churches in the Middle East'.

WRITER
Dr Nicola Brady

The 2016 IICM was very well-attended in recognition of the importance of this theme to our member churches. We were very fortunate to be able to draw on a wide range of expertise from our guest speakers and hear directly from those living in the region.

Francis Campbell of St Mary's University Twickenham assisted us to situate the issues arising from the persecution of Christians in the context of current geo-political realities in this "year of shifting political paradigms". We were reminded that the problem of religious persecution and discrimination is a global reality that needs to be addressed through dialogue, and a renewed global commitment to human rights, respect for pluralism and the protection of minorities.

Denise Wright, Chair of EMBRACE NI, facilitated a discussion on the experience of refugees when they come to Ireland: the challenges they face in getting settled here, their fears for family and friends left behind and for the future of the Christian community in their homeland, as well as their hopes for a peaceful future. Although the complexity of community relations in Northern Ireland

can present a particular challenge to refugees coming to that jurisdiction, the practical difficulties are the same on both sides of the border. Local church communities have been making an important contribution by fundraising, donating items people may need and offering English language classes.

Visa problems prevented Archbishop Suheil Dawani, Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem, from speaking on the first day of the conference – a reminder of the difficulties faced by those forced to flee their home countries in search of safety. Fortunately the problem was resolved in time for Archbishop Suheil to address the meeting on the second day with a reflection on the theme of pilgrimage and the significance of the Christian presence in the Holy Land. The Archbishop explained that: "Christians in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East are peace-builders, promoting understanding and tolerance between diverse peoples and religions. The peace we seek and pursue is one with justice and compassion. Wherever justice and compassion heal suffering and create inclusive communities,

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there divine presence is discovered and the image of God restored."

We are most grateful to Dr Harry Hagopian, Middle East Advisor for the Catholic Bishops' Conference in England and Wales, who - at very short notice - agreed to give us a reflection, via Skype, in place of Archbishop Dawani's first address. Dr Hagopian not only provided a comprehensive overview of the current challenges facing the Christian community in the Middle East region, but, as someone with prior knowledge of the Inter-Church structures in Ireland, he was able to focus his analysis on the importance of ecumenical dialogue in this context.

Archbishop Eamon Martin shared a personal reflection, highlighting the courage of those who take up the call to ministry in regions where the Christian community is under threat, illustrated with reference to the tragic death of Fr Ragheed Aziz Ganni, from Mosul, who had lived in the Pontifical Irish College during his studies in Rome. Fully aware of the risks, he returned to his native Iraq in

2003 and was killed four years later on his way home from Mass.

A joint presentation from Rosamond Bennett, CEO of Christian Aid and Noreen Gumbo, Head of Humanitarian Programmes for Trócaire, underlined the urgent humanitarian needs that are impacting Christians and non-Christians across the region. There can be no lasting peace and conflict resolution until these fundamental needs are addressed. This will include the need to deal with the trauma suffered by the victims of violence. Christian development organisations have a responsibility to model the values and human rights obligations they wish to see respected in societies throughout the Middle East region by recognising the human dignity of all those in need, and making no distinction on grounds of religious or ethnic identity in terms of services offered and partner organisations supported.

The event concluded with a panel discussion, chaired by ICC Vice President Rev Brian Anderson, to look at possible follow-up initiatives arising

from the event. The panel members were Denise Wright (EMBRACE NI), Sr Joan Roddy (a volunteer with the Jesuit Refugee Service), Bishop Patrick Rooke (Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal) and Rev Uel Marrs (Global Mission Secretary, Presbyterian Church).

As part of a joint statement issued after the event, the IICM Co-Chairs noted that:

The significance of the Middle East as a spiritual home for the three Abrahamic faiths, all with a long history there, underlines the tragedy of what is currently unfolding, with implications for the whole human family. Faith communities have a particular responsibility to counter the global tendency towards fragmentation with an emphasis on community, inclusion and shared values. Taking as our starting point our commitment to respect for the dignity of the human person, we need to be strong advocates for the protection of all vulnerable minorities.



EUROPEAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE —Report

WRITER
Dr Kenneth Milne

Brexit

As reported to the Annual Meeting of the Council in 2016, the European Affairs Committee was asked by the Executive to prepare a discussion document to assist Churches to reflect on the implications of the forthcoming EU referendum in the United Kingdom on EU membership. It did so, and published a paper in May 2016. In the referendum, the UK voted by 51.9% to 48.1% 'to leave', although Northern Ireland voted by 56% to 44% 'to remain'.

The implications of what is commonly called 'Brexit' are very considerable for both political jurisdictions on the island. As things stand, following Brexit the great majority of those who belong to our member Churches will find themselves living outside the European Union. Indeed, some congregations and parishes

will find themselves divided. The European Affairs Committee was already seeking to identify those aspects of EU policy of most concern to the Irish Churches, with a view to seeking to engage with the various agencies of the Union on these issues. However, in the light of the UK pro-Brexit vote, particular attention will need to be paid to the anticipated impact of that vote.

The Committee decided that an appropriate approach to EU matters would be through the elected Members of the European Parliament. Following discussion with the Office of the European Parliament in Dublin and meetings with the three Northern Ireland MEPs, it was clear that a visit to Brussels would be the most effective means to obtain briefing on the issues of most concern to us. Such a visit will also provide an opportunity to meet with MEPs, particularly those representing the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, who have relevant responsibilities through committee work in the Parliament.

Consequently, a visit to Brussels has been arranged to take place in November 2017, and it is anticipated that issues related to Brexit, at least

some of which should have become clearer by then, will figure largely on the programme for the visit.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

The local ecumenical instruments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland are associate members of CTBI, which exists to take forward the Churches' ecumenical agenda on a strategic Four Nations basis. The ICC was represented by the Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Dr Kenneth Milne, at meetings convened by CTBI at which the role of the Churches in relation to public debate of the implications of Brexit were discussed prior to and following the Referendum.

Conference of European Churches (CEC)

In preparation for the 15th General Assembly to be held in Serbia in 2018, CEC has circulated 'an open letter to the Churches and partner organisations in Europe and an invitation to dialogue and consultation'. ICC is one such partner organisation, and the Executive sought the views of the European Affairs Committee on the letter prior to submitting the ICC comments to CEC.

Roman Catholic Church

The terms of reference of the European Affairs Committee include liaising and developing co-operation with the European affairs representatives of the Irish Episcopal Conference. To this end, discussions have taken place, at the invitation of the Conference, with the Most Revd Noel Treanor, Bishop of Down and Connor.



WOMEN'S LINK —Report

WRITER
Joyce Bond

2016 was a significant milestone for Women's Link as we celebrated the important part women play in the transmission of our faith through the ecumenical engagement of our various women's organisations and Churches. In the mid 1960s the organisation, known then as Women's Church Organisations, came into being with the aim of helping the various women's organisations work more closely on their shared aims and to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas. It became known as ICC Women's Link in 1993 and links were forged with women in England, Scotland and Wales through the CTBI 4 Nations Meeting up until 2010. In 1997, during the Decade of

Solidarity with Women, a visit from the World Council of Churches team sharpened reflection on the position of women within the Church.

The ICC Women's Link 50th Anniversary Service was held in the Agape Centre, Belfast South Methodist Church, on Saturday 22nd October. Gillian Kingston, a former President of Women's Link and Vice-President of the World Methodist Council addressed the theme "Connecting in Christ". Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary of the ICC, read the lesson and Salvation Army Belfast Citadel bandmaster, John Moore, led the Praise. The service was led by Joyce Bond, President of Women's Link, and committee members led prayers. The invited congregation, who travelled from the four corners of Ireland and beyond, enjoyed further fellowship after the service when an Anniversary cake was cut and shared.

Gillian based her address on St. John Chapter 13 to help us remember we are servants of Jesus Christ. Her focus on Jesus washing the disciples' feet with other illustrations emphasised the need for practical service and witness. Gillian developed our theme "Connecting in Christ" and challenged us to be connected in 2016 to enable us to overcome differences of tradition, church affiliation, culture and custom. Connecting in Christ we are drawn to embrace each other, to reach out to others and include them in the embrace – the migrant, the refugee, the stranger – for all of whom Christ died!

Women's Link representatives come from participating churches of the ICC, from Women's World Day of Prayer and World Day of Prayer. Women's Link provides a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas, to work together on matters concerning the teaching of Christ relative to the home, the church, the community and the world, and an opportunity to pray and share news of advocacy and engagement. Women's Link makes contact with Christian Women's Groups and invites them to participate in events, conferences, sharing news of projects locally, regionally and globally and to raise awareness and address social issues.



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CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND — Update

Preface

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

WRITER

Bob Fyffe (with additional reporting by Alan Meban)

The partnership between CTBI and ICC continues to grow and develop. We have been especially delighted to support the creation of a new post based in Dublin. We are also confident that the sharing of expertise and programme ideas can be mutually enriching. I have chosen just two or three developments to highlight.

The Centre for Theology and Justice has come together through the partnership of Luther King House in Manchester, Christian Aid, Church Action on Poverty and CTBI. The centre will begin in a small way and seek to grow organically as churches and groups seek to reflect on situations and issues that are common to us all. The Centre for Theology and Justice will, for example, look to work with groups such as the Churches' Refugee Network. The new Centre could consider producing resources on Identity and Nationhood in a post-Brexit Europe and Welcoming the

Stranger and Learning from the Other. Webinars will be run (and recorded) that introduce these papers and discuss their content and impact. Many existing resources can be brought forward again and be applied to current issues such as climate change or migration.

The Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group (IFTAG) has just completed work on a study resource for local churches that develop some of the principles that are contained within "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" produced by the WCC in partnership with the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and the World Evangelical Alliance. This focuses on actual stories where dialogue and building community has not always been easy. IFTAG is also in the midst of a project that is exploring the relationship between agendas focused on Church Growth and Interfaith Dialogue and is looking to prepare resources

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following a number of important conversations with a variety of people from different theologies and ecclesial backgrounds. IFTAG is also planning a residential consultation on the theological language that churches use when speaking of Israel-Palestine. This will address issues such as Zionism, Christian Zionism, how to make use of Jewish Anti-Zionist literature, theology of Land and hermeneutics.

The reality of religious plurality of the Christian ecumenical experience is never far from the CTBI Work Programme. For the first time for a number of years the Churches' Forum for Inter-Religious Relations met for a residential meeting in Leeds and explored, amongst other things, those aspects where there are difficulties in the bilateral relationships the churches can have with other faiths, in particular Judaism (vis-à-vis Israel) and Hinduism (vis-à-vis caste and conversion). CTBI will be ex-

ploring a partnership with Place for Hope where resources could be developed whereby constructive and gentle relationships can be developed in a world of turmoil and mistrust. Relations with Islam also featured significantly especially in the changing socio-religious makeup of Europe, with the important question – how are Christian-Muslim relations are being changed, challenged and reshaped in light of the refugee crisis and the rapidly changing political scene in Europe of which Brexit is but one manifestation.

CTBI's Focus on Refugees

Reacting to a visit of church leaders to visit refugees in Greece in September 2015, CTBI trustees took the decision to instigate a programme of work around refugees and asylum.

The UN Refugee Agency estimates that around the world over 65 million people are currently

forcibly displaced. Two thirds are internally displaced within their own country. 21 million are refugees and have had to travel beyond the borders of their home country.

Two thirds of refugees are hosted in the Middle East and Africa, living in countries close to their homes. Turkey hosts 2.5 million refugees; Pakistan 1.6 million; and the population of Lebanon has risen by a third with 1.1 million refugees mostly entering the country from neighbouring Syria.

While the media often speak of a European refugee 'crisis' and use pejorative language that describes "floods of refugees invading Europe" the truth is quite different. Only 6% of refugees are hosted in Europe. And with a lack of safe routes into Europe due to border closures, the journey into Italy, Greece, Spain and Bulgaria is often perilous.

5,082 people are thought to have died or gone missing in Mediterranean Sea crossings in 2016. One out of every 75 people making the journey to Europe died before they arrived. A bleak and tragic statistic. And yet calls for safe routes into and across Europe go unheeded.

CTBI's programme aims to change attitudes amongst faith communities about refugees using true stories, accurate data and theological reflection. We want to encourage and increase the level of prayerful and practical support for refugees in the UK, Ireland and internationally.

As well as setting up a website (focusonrefugees.org) and social media presence, CTBI returned to Greece in May 2016 with a team of twelve women from across Britain and Ireland (including Rev Kathryn Viner, Minister of Malone Presbyterian Church in Belfast) to visit refugees and projects.

They witnessed the stark contrast between a fenced-off concrete government-run registration centre on the island of Samos and the 'wild' camp that consisted of a tented village built around a petrol station near Idomeni.

The visit was intentionally 'women to women', given that their voices are often silenced in the dominant narratives. The encounters acknowledged that women and children who are displaced and uprooted are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment, abuse and trafficking as well as forced or early marriage.

As well as seeing first-hand the work of the Anglican Chaplaincy, Greek Catholics, an independent evangelical church in Thessaloniki and some local social enterprise networks, the team visited The Naomi Project, an initiative of the German Evangelical Church in Thessaloniki, which runs a refugee support service and spent

time in a Salvation Army day centre providing meals and supplying baby items, clothes and shoes.

They also learned about the work of Apostoli (Orthodox Church of Greece) working in cooperation with International Orthodox Christian Charities (a member of the ACT Alliance) who distribute food parcels, run soup kitchens and encourage schooling as well as supporting farm cooperatives of thousands of the most vulnerable Greek individuals and families caught up in their own internal financial crisis.

CTBI's Focus on Refugees continues with a visit to Italy being planned to bring young men from Britain and Ireland to Italy – the main refugee entry point at present – to meet young male refugees who are so often demonised as "a security threat" yet have often fled home to escape conscription, are isolated from their families and want to help build a future for their families and communities back home.

CAPTIONS (P17)

- 01 Denise Wright, Rev Bill Mullally, Rev John Seawright and Rev Fr Godfrey O'Donnell.
- 02 Rev John Parkin.
- 03 Archbishop Suheil Dawani.
- 04 Francis Campbell.
- 05 IICM delegates in discussion groups during panel session with Archbishop Eamon Martin, Rosamond Bennett (Christian Aid) and Noreen Gumbo (Trocaire).

CAPTIONS (P20-21)

- 01 The Island of Samos which in its peak (November 2015) was receiving 85,000 refugees a month arriving by boat. Pictured is the 'new' government run refugee camp where they have all been held since the borders between Turkey, Greece and Macadonia closed.
- 02 CTBI group on a visit to Greece to assess the new Syrian refugee crisis which is unfolding in the country. Delegate Kathryn Viner helping out at the Salvation Army food and clothes distribution depot in Athens.



CHRISTIAN AID
—Update

Preface

With a cold winter across Europe, thousands of refugees have been stranded and forced to endure freezing temperatures. Rosamond Bennett, CEO of Christian Aid Ireland, reflects on the suffering of refugees who have come to Europe to find safety and on the organisation's work to tackle violence and build peace.

WRITER
Rosamond Bennett

Mohammad, an engineer from Aleppo, was a proud, respectable man. He stood with his shoulders back and his head up.

'I was like a king in Syria, and Syria was the queen of the world,' he said.

Mohammad and his family had done what all desperate people do when war destroys your country and life becomes untenable – they left their home in search of safety.

He and his family have been refugees in Greece for a year and live in a tent in woodland, near a coastal town.

Empty promises

Unfortunately for them, by the time they arrived on the Greek shore in February 2016, a wave of hostile rhetoric towards refugees was sweeping across Europe.

The welcome banners were down and instead countries were

pulling up their drawbridges and closing their borders to those seeking sanctuary.

Instead of a warm welcome from Europe, war-weary people like Mohammad spent the winter huddled together around open fires in Greece and Serbia, surviving in temperatures of – 30°C in some places.

The real crisis

The war in Syria, which is in its sixth year, has contributed to the highest number of displaced people since World War II with nearly five million having fled to escape its bombs and bullets.

Yet most of these have settled, not in Europe, but in Syria's neighbouring countries.

Globally, most of the world's refugees are hosted by, and in, poor countries. And refugees in Europe, like Mohammad, rep-

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resent only a tiny fraction of those globally displaced.

Today, one in every 122 people is a refugee, internally displaced or seeking asylum. Conflict in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Iraq and Colombia have driven millions of people from their homes. Yet the cost of world military spending is said to be nearly 250 times more than is spent on peace building.

Tackling violence and building peace

Christian Aid was born as a result of war over 70 years ago. In 1945, in the aftermath of the most catastrophic conflict in history, church leaders in Britain and Ireland reached out to people in continental Europe left hungry, destitute and homeless. Christian Aid, as it would become known, was formed.

70 years on, war still blights the lives of millions of people – from Syria to South Sudan and Somalia. Violence is also present in our world in other forms; gang warfare, police brutality,

domestic violence, forced eviction from land or property, to name but a few. It pervades many countries and poor communities, even though they are not at war.

Thanks to the generosity of Churches across Ireland, Christian Aid is supporting people who are living through war and violence across the world and helping communities to work towards peace.

Christian Aid tackles the root cause of violence and conflict by working with local organisations to hold governments to account, giving poor people a voice, helping communities divided by conflict to build peace and challenging the culture of impunity that can allow perpetrators to escape justice.

Christian Aid is also working with refugees in Greece and Serbia to provide shelter, legal protection and support for buying essential items. We are advocating for long-term practical solutions to the humanitarian crisis including the resettlement and relocation of refugees, as well as greater investment in address-

ing the root causes of displacement worldwide.

People like Mohammad and his family have ambition and skills. They are people who left their homelands, not because they wanted to, but because they no longer had any chance of a life if they stayed.

‘We only want to live in peace and make a better future for our children,’ Mohammad told us. ‘We want to go on to live a better life.’

With your support, we are standing side by side with people like Mohammad, as they hope to realise a life of peace and safety for their families once more.

CAPTIONS

- 01 Miratovac, Macedonia-Serbia border. A little boy puts on the wellies that he has received from Philanthropy.
- 02 A family that fled violence in Herat, Afghanistan, eats breakfast in a tent in a city park in Belgrade, Serbia. The park has filled with refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries stopping over on their way to western Europe.

IN MEMORIAM



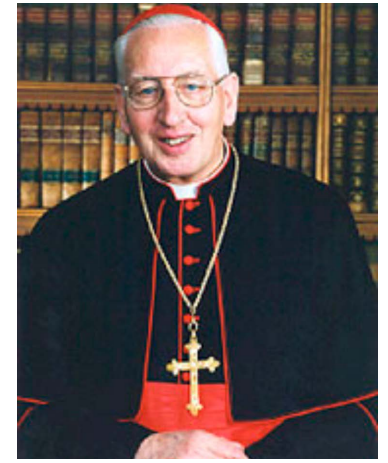
Bishop Gerard Clifford

As a priest, and later as a bishop, Fr Gerry Clifford was at the heart of inter-church relations in Ireland from the early days when the first tentative steps in ecumenical relations were being taken against a backdrop of violence and fear. Over the years, his unwavering commitment to this work was a source of reassurance and encouragement for many. As a long-term member of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, and its associated committees, Bishop Gerry worked tirelessly to ensure that dialogue was accompanied by practical action that visibly demonstrated the commitment of churches to working together on issues of shared concern. The support, encouragement and guidance he gave to staff as a member of the Joint Management Committee was always greatly appreciated. Significantly, one of his final contributions was as a member of the working group which shaped a new vision for the inter-church structures as ‘Churches in Ireland – Connecting in Christ’. His leadership has left a lasting impression on the landscape of Irish ecumenism.



Bishop Samuel Poyntz

Bishop Samuel Poyntz was Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross (1978-1987), before being appointed Bishop of Connor (1987-1995). He was vice-chair of the British Council of Churches from 1986-1990 and, in that capacity, led a British Council of Churches delegation to Israel/Palestine in 1989. He was President of the Irish Council of Churches 1986-1987 and Co-Chair of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. In this role he led several important delegations to international meetings, including the first European Ecumenical Conference in Lausanne, ecumenical visits to Austria and France and an Irish Inter-Church delegation to Russia in 1987. As the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev John Mann, has summarised in paying tribute to Bishop Poyntz, ‘his ecumenical endeavours were expressed both locally and internationally as he tirelessly strove to bring Christians to a deeper understanding of their inherent unity’, whilst many amongst the current participants in the ICC’s and IICC’s ecumenical structures certainly owe a debt to his leadership and encouragement.



Cardinal Desmond Connell

Cardinal Desmond Connell was Vice-President of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference between 1988 and 2004 and a member of its Commission on Ecumenism. He was a very active member of the Irish Inter-Church Committee from its earliest years and enjoyed warm personal relations with representatives of other churches. He had a deep personal commitment to promoting ecumenism and had a formative role in the evolution of the national ecumenical structures. Cardinal Connell made an important contribution to the future of ecumenism in Ireland by being pro-active in encouraging younger clergy to take up the work and study of ecumenism. His keen understanding of the wider global context for ecumenism shaped and informed this engagement, while he also brought an Irish perspective to international ecumenical engagements.

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