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Presbyterian Church – Religious Society of Friends – Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin –
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Dublin Council of Churches

Annual Report to Patrons and Member Churches



June 2014 – June 2015

www.dublinchurches.ie

INTRODUCTION

A PERIOD OF TRANSITION:

The past year has seen a considerable amount of change take place within the Dublin Council of Churches. As our friend and former DCC Chair Rev Mary Hunter moved on to pastures 'up North', and I took over – somewhat in fear and trepidation as the first Roman Catholic so to do - we have seen a number of 'key' DCC members leave us because of new postings.

There was a line from John Chapter 4 proclaimed at the Inaugural Service of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2015 which struck a chord with me: "Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well." Many of our Christian communities could relate to this being 'tired out', and so too the DCC. It is necessary at times, to sit down, take stock and be refreshed by the water flowing from the well [cf: John 7: 37-38] before continuing the journey.

Despite not having the personnel nor time to organize our liturgy around St Patrick's Day for 2015, we still enjoyed a deeply worthwhile Churches' Forum Day on Reformation which set a high bar for similar days and events for the future. We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Pastor Martin Sauter for that achievement. We celebrated the Walk of Light, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and we felt the Lord reassuring us as new Christian Communities approached us eager to join.

There have been moments when our Christian Communities have been able to give fine common witness, at short notice, generously and spontaneously. I sincerely believe this is precisely due to the kind of trust and bonds we have formed through the DCC over the years. I think particularly of the attendance and participation of DCC members and patrons at the Eucharist celebrated by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in solidarity with the people of France and others similarly suffering in the world in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral on 13th January 2015.

We face into 2016 – a year charged with the weight of emotional remembrance - trusting that the joy of the Lord will be our strength [cf: Nehemiah 8:10] helping us to regroup and witness that in Christ 'all things hold together' [Colossians 1:17].

My I take this opportunity to express heartfelt thanks to our Vice Chair, Niamh Hardiman, our Secretary Uta Rabb and our Treasurer Edward Lewis for their hard work and dedicated service this past year.

Fr Damian McNeice

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The Objectives of the Dublin Council of Churches

- To explore within a Christian fellowship, based on mutual love and the presence of Christ among us, the calling of the People of God to pray and work together for the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer "that all may be one." (John 17:21)
- To encourage cooperation between churches and the interchurch groups at both local and district (city) level.
- To facilitate and exchange information and views of member churches on matters of concern.
- To support joint study and action.
- To disseminate information on ecumenical activities and resources.

MEMBERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

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| Church of Ireland: | Rev Mark Gardner, Edward Lewis, Uta Raab |
| Presbyterian: | Frances Martin, Cherry Poynton, Avril Robb |
| Roman Catholic Archdiocese: | Fr Kieran McDermott, Fr Damian McNeice, Eilis O'Malley |
| Methodist: | Robert Cochran , Elizabeth Kelly, Rev John Parkin |
| Religious Society of Friends: | Rachel Bewley-Bateman, Niamh Hardiman |
| Lutheran Church: | Pastor Joachim Diestelkamp, Yvonne Langebach, Pastor Martin Sauter |
| Salvation Army: | Major Stuart Dicker |
| Antiochian Orthodox: | Fr John Hickey |
| Greek Orthodox: | Fr Tom Carroll, Styliani (Stella) Xenopoulou |
| Romanian Orthodox: | Fr Raul Simion |
| St Thomas' Indian Orthodox: | John Mathew, Fr Anish K Sam |
| Co-opted: | Peter Byrne (Christian Aid) |

During the course of this year we have said 'farewell' to a number of long-standing and esteemed members of the DCC.

As noted in last year's report, Rev Mary Hunter retired both as Chair of the Dublin Council of Churches and in her role as representative of the Presbyterian Church at the AGM in June 2014. We are grateful to Mary for everything she did while on the

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DCC, not least for her three years as Chair. We welcome Cherry Poynton as new representative of the Presbyterian Church and note that she had been on the DCC in previous years.

In early October 2014, Pastor Joachim Diestelkamp (and his wife, Pastor Corinna Diestelkamp) returned to Germany to take up a new position in Loccum and the DCC have therefore been without a formal Lutheran patron since. We were sorry to see Joachim leave, as he had been a key contributor to so many of the activities and discussions of the DCC over the years. We are looking forward to meeting the newly appointed Lutheran Pastor, Stephan Arras, in due course, following his official introduction in late September 2015.

We had the pleasure of welcoming back Rev John Parkin of the Methodist Church onto the DCC. He recently came to live in Dublin after a period ministering in Waterford.

Katerina Pekridou has not returned from Greece in the meantime and, in her stead, we welcomed Styliani – better known as: Stella – Xenopoulou as representative of the Greek Orthodox Church.

We wished Captain James Wadsworth of the Salvation Army well on his return to work in the United Kingdom.

Fr George Varghese has been succeeded by Fr Anish K Sam as parish priest of the St Thomas' Indian Orthodox Church and we welcome Fr Anish to the DCC.

MEETINGS

The council met seven times during the year, in addition to the AGM. Since the Irish School of Ecumenics relocated to premises within Trinity College Dublin in the city centre during 2013, the DCC has had no fixed venue for their meetings and we are extremely grateful to the following who hosted us in the past year: Holy Cross College, Clonliffe (thanks to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese); Wesley House, Leeson Park (thanks to the Methodist Church); Friends' Meeting House, Churchtown (thanks to the Religious Society of Friends), the Greek Orthodox Church community in Arbour Hill (thanks to the Greek Orthodox Church) and St Philip & St James' Church of Ireland Parish Centre, Booterstown. This being hosted by different traditions has, in itself, been enriching.

ANNUAL OFFICERS

Elected [*and re-elected] to serve in June 2014

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| Chairperson: | Rev Damian McNeice |
| Vice Chairperson | Niamh Hardiman |
| Minute Secretary | Uta Raab* |
| Hon Treasurer | Edward Lewis* |

ACTIVITIES

2014 turned out to be a year with two Churches' Forum Days. We had a very successful and thought-provoking Churches' Forum Day in September 2014, in the context of the visit of Dr Margot Kaessmann, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (EKD) 's Ambassador for the Reformation Anniversary.

On the Churches' Forum Day held in April 2014, Salters Sterling, in the course of presenting an overview of the history and development of the DCC over the past fifty years, challenged us with his address to become more publicly and socially active, The DCC organised the annual Inaugural Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity again in January 2015, but there was no special St Patrick's Day Service on St Patrick's Day 2015. Plans are underway for our next Churches' Forum Day in September 2015 in relation to the forthcoming centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising, and preparations for the 2016 St Patrick's Day Service will commence soon.

5th CHURCHES' FORUM DAY: "Church Today: In Need of Renewal – Reform or Re-formation?"

The Lutheran Church in Ireland, with support from staff of Trinity College and the German Embassy in Dublin, invited Dr Margot Kaessman for a short visit to Dublin, an opportunity that the DCC gladly seized for its Churches' Forum Day on the morning of 23rd September 2014 by having Dr Kaessmann as the main guest speaker. Dr Graeme Murdock of the Centre for Early Modern History at Trinity provided the historical background with the initial presentation, pointing out that reformation around the time of Luther had at its centre a desire for a spiritual transformation that was never achieved, by none of the denominations that evolved out of the Roman Catholic church, which itself had made great attempts at such a renewal. He finished by

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saying that the Reformation is still a powerful reminder of the possibility for renewal of the churches, especially if it is regarded as a reconnection with the Christian tradition. In her keynote address, Dr Kaessmann outlined how secularised modern Germany has become after over four centuries of faith being central to people of any denomination. Not only had people forgotten God, she commented, they have “forgotten that they had forgotten”. She welcomed the closer cooperation and understanding between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church since their discussions on “justification by faith alone” in 1999. She highlighted the importance of reflecting on the Reformation on an ecumenical level as well as an interfaith level and, not least, the need to find a language that those of no faith can comprehend in these times and places in which we live.



The speakers, the facilitator and RC Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at the 5th Churches' Forum Day (photo: Lynn Glanville)

Five representatives of different traditions then responded to Dr Kaessmann's address: Church of Ireland Archbishop Michael Jackson, Rev Donald Watts, President of the ICC and former Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Fr Kieran McDermott, of the DCC and Episcopal Vicar in the RC Archdiocese's Office of Ecumenism and Evangelisation, Rachel Bewley-Bateman of the DCC for the

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Religious Society of Friends and Archpriest Mikhail Nasonov of the Russian Orthodox Church. Our facilitator on the day was Gillian Kingston, Interim Vice-President of the World Council of Methodists and erstwhile Chair of the DCC. Following the five responses, the gathering – featuring DCC members and patrons and also encompassing many ecumenical friends from a variety of traditions and backgrounds - broke up into several small groups to discuss what we had heard. Our responses, in the form of one sentence or phrase, were then collected when we returned into the main room. In her final response, Dr Kaessmann stressed that reform and reformation are not something to be discussed and reflected upon within a particular church or denomination, but between all the churches and between churches and the wider society. The Forum Day concluded with a light lunch, which provided a time for deepening fellowship and sharing ideas, impressions and information.



Dr Margot Kaessmann and RC Archbishop Diarmuid Martin are having an informal conversation (in German!) (photo: Lynn Glanville)

Our gratitude goes to the subcommittee who organised this Forum Day, Pastor Joachim Diestelkamp, Fr Kieran McDermott, and especially Pastor Martin Sauter,

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who put an unbelievable amount of work into the preparations for this event. We also thank the Religious Society of Friends for graciously allowing us to use their wonderful premises in Quaker House and providing a warm welcome as ever. We thank Niamh Hardiman for writing written an excellent report on the proceedings of the day [which is available on request from the DCC].

Many of us had the pleasure of listening to Dr Kaessmann again later that same day at a public lecture in the Longroom Hub of Trinity College, with the topic “Remembering the Reformation – Challenges of the 2017 Centenary”, which was chaired by Prof. Linda Hogan. Dr Duncan Morrow from the University of Ulster, Justice Catherine McGuinness (Church of Ireland) and Dr Brendan Leahy, erstwhile of the DCC and now RC Bishop of Limerick, were also speakers at that event which proved so popular that all the seats in the lecture room were taken and many people stood along the walls to be able to follow the very engaging speeches and discussions.

ECUMENICAL WALK OF LIGHT

The DCC continues to sponsor this event which usually takes place on the last Sunday of the liturgical year. The walk on 23rd November 2014 marked the 10th such walk in the Greater Leeson Street area, now incorporating 14 congregations from eight different denominations. The motto was “Isolated by Hurt, Joined by Hope – Emmanuel, God with us” and the walk itself started in St Mary’s RC church, Haddington Road, went onto St Bartholomew’s Col church, Clyde Road, and ended in the Methodist Centenary Church, Leeson Park, where refreshments were served after the concluding worship. Three charities were supported by the 2014 walk: The Friendship Club (operating out of St Mary’s RC church), Trust Ireland and the International Outreach @ Leeson Park (of the Korean church).

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The start of the WOL 2014 outside St Mary's Haddington Road (photo: Lynn Glanville)

We are aware that similar walks have been organised in other areas of Dublin in the last few years and we are greatly encouraged by how the concept of an ecumenical walk has spread. It was heartening to see Fr Richard Sheehy, erstwhile PP of St Mary Immaculate Refuge of Sinners RC church in Rathmines (one of the 14 congregations mentioned above), now PP in Glasnevin, join the 2014 walk with a group of his new parishioners from Glasnevin, exploring the possibility of organising similar events in their vicinity.

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INAUGURAL SERVICE FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

This service at the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity symbolises the spirit of ecumenism in the wider Dublin region by visibly bringing together the patrons of the various member churches of the DCC, plus other church leaders.



The patrons and church leaders before the WPCU Inaugural Service (photo: Lynn Glanville)

The theme for the service on 18th January 2015, which took place in St Bartholomew's Col church, Clyde Road, was taken from the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: "The Well is Deep". As a visible sign of the coming together of different churches, several church leaders poured water into a central urn, the symbolic "well" of the theme. The Salvation Army Choir sang a beautiful hymn based on the John 4 text and the Gospel narrative was presented in a very effective dramatized version.

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The two Dublin Archbishops bring water to the central urn (photo: Lynn Glanville)

It was Archbishop Martin's turn to choose someone to give the Address and he asked the Roman Catholic Chair of the DCC. I alluded to the upcoming centenaries of historical importance approaching between 2015 and 2017 and hoped that a healing of memories could take place by the way the different denominations and parts of society approached these centenary commemorations. It is important that our ecumenical commitment and prayer together is not 'for one week only' each year but becomes a part of our fundamental and constant being in relationship with the Lord.

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Referring to the Gospel narrative of the Samaritan woman at the well, it is important to remember that Samaritans were at the periphery of the society at the time, looked down upon by Jesus' countrymen and fellow Jews. We need to find where it is necessary to walk with those on the periphery now, in our day and to allow the Lord to surprise us into communion with one another.

We are most grateful to Rev Andrew McCroskery and the parishioners of St Bartholomew for all their assistance and hospitality at this service and we were encouraged by the fine attendance.

OTHER TOPICS / PROJECTS

Thanks to the Salvation Army, the topic of homelessness was discussed several times at our meetings, including by having a guest who shared with us his experience of the problems of people on rent allowance trying to find landlords willing to accept tenants on rent allowance. While the legalities around the advertising of rental properties has changed in the meantime to make it illegal not to accept tenants on rent allowance, homelessness is still a very pressing issue and we are grateful to the Salvation Army for their project of calling for Christian landlords/landladies 'with a heart' who would cooperate with the Salvation Army in housing vulnerable people.

Mindful of the many ecumenical events that happen in local areas in the wider Dublin region, not only in the context of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the DCC is currently compiling an audit of such events / groupings.

Individual DCC representatives are, however, very aware that they may have limited experience of other denominations' and traditions' styles of worship and there are plans being considered to provide more opportunities for such experiences and sharing the impressions gathered.

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CONTACT WITH OTHER CHURCHES / RELIGIONS / THE STATE

From June 2014 to June 2015 DCC representatives participated in the following:

13th July National Day of Commemoration 2014 – As both Chair of the DCC and RC representative on the organising committee, Fr Damian McNeice attended both the preparations for this event and the actual ceremony in Royal Hospital Kilmainham.

16th November 2014 German Remembrance Day, Glencree. An ecumenical service was held at St. Kevin's Chapel led by Pastor Martin Wielepp of the Lutheran Church in Ireland, Fr Damian McNeice, (Chair of the DCC) and Mr John Welsby of the parish council of the joint parishes of Enniskerry, Glencree, Curtlestown and Kilmacanogue). It also involved the Goethe-Institut Choir Dublin, students of Curtlestown National School and St. Kilian's Deutsche Schule Dublin.

13th January 2015 Attendance and participation of DCC members and patrons at the Eucharist celebrated by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin in solidarity with the people of France and others similarly suffering in the world in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral on 13th January 2015. Archbishop Michael Jackson led a meditation. President Michael D Higgins, members of the Diplomatic Corps and representatives of Government were present.

18th January 2015:

An RTÉ televised Sunday Morning Service for the WPCU 2015 with patrons of the DCC taking part.

Monday, 20th April 2015

Involvement of some members of the DCC in the "prophetic voices" part of Christian Aid's Climate Conversations event in Christ Church Cathedral,

Sunday, 26th April, Taney Church, Dundrum

A Special Service marking the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Our conversations with churches interested in becoming members of the DCC continued particularly with leaders and representatives of the Armenian Apostolic (Orthodox) Church community in Dublin and the Ethiopian Orthodox church with Abba Yohannes and his congregation.

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CONCLUSION

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The DCC continues to rely heavily on the kindness and knowledge
of Mr Robert Cochran for his ongoing work of the Council's website.

We are most grateful to him.

<http://www.dublinchurches.ie/>

Apart from our member churches and a contact possibility,
our website points to upcoming events via its Facebook page.

It also contains links to various
national and international ecumenical bodies
as well as important bilateral and multilateral ecumenical documents

Contacts

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Secretary

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This report can be viewed at, and copies printed from the DCC website at

www.dublinchurches.ie/dcc-report15.pdf

Member churches are free, and indeed encouraged,
to copy and distribute this report within their churches as they deem appropriate.