

## **Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue Report**

**Proposer: Bishop Kenneth Kearon**

In the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, in the main assembly room on the back wall is a mural with a text in Greek at the bottom. It's the famous quotation from Jesus Prayer in St John Chapter 17, "That they may be one" the obvious text for an ecumenical centre, and it's the same text which appears on the crests and the headed notepaper of many many ecumenical organisations.

I've always been a bit uneasy about it. The prayer "that they may be one" occurs twice in Chapter 17, and on the second occasion there is a little more – "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:21). The vision for the church is not simply that everyone should be united; it's that they may be one in order that the world may believe. What would the world be like, if everyone believed in Jesus Christ?

According to 2 Corinthians 5 it would be a world which had accepted the church's message of reconciliation – a world when barriers were broken down, dividing walls removed and the circle of humanity would be remade.

Ecumenism, reconciliation among Christians, is vitally important because Christians can't preach a gospel of reconciliation to the world effectively if they themselves are divided. The purpose of ecumenism is to enable the world to be reconciled under God.

The Report of the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue on pages 340 ff is a summary of various relationships with which the Church of Ireland is engaged, including our very important ecumenical relationships. There is also an explanation for our engagement with European issues on page 342.

What I think is very remarkable is the extent to which conversations with others quickly leads to social action and engagement with some of the major issues of our day, as you read of conferences and meetings where the Church of Ireland is involved.

Conversations with the Orthodox churches lead to talk about migration and refugees, end-of-life issues and ecology; with Irish churches on the family, Brexit, reconciliation, and engagement with youth issues; with European churches on threats to peace and stability and military conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

My personal focus is on inter-faith issues. The point of conversations is not to discuss or negotiate elements of our faith – that's plain ridiculous; instead we seek to understand and engage. How does the Irish Jewish community feel about rising anti-Semitism in the world today, or attitudes to the situation in Israel and the West Bank and Gaza? Do they experience anti-Semitism in Ireland, and is there anything we could do to help?

Do Muslims in Ireland experience racism? How do they feel about terrorism done in the name of Islam? We as a church in Ireland know something of extremists using Christianity as an excuse for discrimination and violence.

So engagement with others in any form is almost always productive and creative, and leads quickly to the sharing of experiences and best practice on many social issues facing us all.

I commend the Report to you.