

# **DUBLIN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

## **ANNUAL REPORT to Patrons and Members**

**June, 2021 – June, 2022**

**[www.dublincouncilofchurches.ie](http://www.dublincouncilofchurches.ie)**



Antiochian Orthodox Church – Armenian Apostolic Church – Church of Ireland – Ethiopian Orthodox Church -  
Greek Orthodox Church– Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Church – Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church - Lutheran  
Church – Methodist Church – Presbyterian Church – Religious Society of Friends – Roman Catholic Church –  
Romanian Orthodox Church – Salvation Army

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## **OBJECTIVES of the DUBLIN COUNCIL of CHURCHES**

- (a) 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 fulfilment of Jesus’ prayer ‘that all may be one’ (John 17:21).
- (b) To encourage co-operation between churches and inter-church groups, at both local and district level.
- (c) To facilitate an exchange of information and views of member Churches on matters of concern.
- (d) To support joint study and action.
- (e) To disseminate information on ecumenical activities and resources.

## **MEETINGS**

The Council met eight times during the year, from September 2021 to June 2022 inclusively, and in addition to our AGM in June 2021. Except for the June 2021 and June 2022 meetings, all meetings were held on *Zoom*.

The Council continues to be grateful that this online technology has allowed us, despite ongoing pandemic concerns, to conduct our business safely and to meet with the regularity that is part of our objectives.

## **ANNUAL OFFICERS**

Elected to serve for the year June 2021 to June 2022:

Chairperson: Martin Sauter	Vice Chairperson: Paul Manook
Hon. Treasurer: Edward Lewis	Hon. Secretary: Cherry Poynton

We record our gratitude for the many ways in which our office bearers have been able to fulfil their various roles with continuing commitment and tenacity.

The following were elected to serve from June 2022 to June 2023:

Chairperson: Martin Sauter	Vice Chairperson: Eamonn Murray
Hon. Treasurer: Edward Lewis	Hon. Secretary: Cherry Poynton

## INTRODUCTION

After the harshness of the pandemic conditions during the previous session, the 2021/22 session was marked by a bumpy but gradual return to forms of physical presence engagements. While keeping its regular meetings online, the Dublin Council of Churches was able to hold all its events and worship services in physical presence, which was noted with a palpable sense of joy by all participants. Thanks to the amazing advance in the production of vaccines and the very impressive uptake among the people of Ireland of the opportunity to get vaccinated, life has emerged from the narrow confines of our sequestered existence in the previous period. This has been received with great gratitude. Nevertheless, we as church and as members of society continue to deal with the legacy of the pandemic with the loss of so many loved ones, with health issues for so many, both as a direct result of COVID infections and of the healthcare system's long partial shutdown, plus the psychological and social issues that have arisen as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, navigating the "new normal" requires ongoing vigilance in relation to health and safety, and sensitivity to the psychological effects of the long period of social seclusion in all age groups, but particularly among children and seniors, who suffered most from the isolation that was required of them. All of this has put added strain on those working in most fields and not least on those in the church serving the spiritual and social needs of their flocks.

The second half of this session has been overshadowed by the breaking out of war in Europe for the first time in more than 75 years. President Vladimir Putin's ordering of Russia's invasion and brutal war against the Ukraine with its genocidal incidents and complete disregard of humanitarian considerations has shaken the foundations of the European post-Second World War order of peace and stability. The ramifications of this are still in complete flux. It has created a spiritual wound that requires us to deepen both our personal and community prayer life, deepen our efforts to seek new theological guidance, as well as a strengthening of our commitment to do works of peace and to support the vulnerable. Ireland together with its European partners has taken in an unprecedented number of refugees from Ukraine, mostly women and children and elderly persons. All our churches have been organising peace prayers and various fundraising and other practical activities to support and welcome the arriving traumatised Ukrainians.

The representatives of the Dublin Council of Churches during their meetings kept each other informed of the way in which member churches met these new challenges.

The DCC meetings continued to take place on zoom with the notable exception of the AGM of 2021 when we were able to meet in a socially distanced manner in the Church Hall of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Blackrock.

I continue to be grateful for the vision, the gifts, and energies of my fellow members on the council, for their very active input in the lively conversation during meetings, and the hands-on practical up-take of the work of the Dublin Council of Churches as described below. Likewise, the council lives from the active support we receive from our patrons, our 14 local church leaders.

A highlight of our deepening conversation and trust among each other was the Study Day in October 2021 when members responded from the heart to the excellent presentation on the spiritual landscape of our time which the organisers of the day had prepared. (see below)

We continue to evolve our website that Jiby Jacob looks after, for which we are very grateful. Various ideas how to improve the website's content have emerged over the course of this period that await implementation from the autumn, including the idea that members create "thoughts of the month" on ecumenism and unity. Thanks to the Hon. Secretary Cherry Poynton's ongoing diligence in collating new material, we continue to expand our collection of liturgical and prayer resources online.

Several projects are at various stages of fruition, such as

- the sending out of a joint Christmas message by Dublin Church leaders,
- the participation of the Dublin Council of Churches in Culture Night,
- a project involving a form of visitation between Dublin congregations of our member churches starting in the Week of Prayer 2023, as well as
- an evening of cultural encounter for members of our churches to meet with each other and share some of our rich cultural traditions.

Such new departures require thorough preparation and creative energies, and like with the seeds sown in late winter, patience, and alertness, and last but not least, God's blessing, are required to see them through to realisation.

Sadly, we had to say good-bye to our Lutheran Patron and member of the Council, Pr Stephan Arras who was elected *Propst* (A kind of regional bishop) in his home church in Hesse. His farewell was celebrated in a worship service in St. Finian's Church on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021, at which the council was well represented. In the meantime, the Lutheran Church is undergoing a 10-month vacancy, the new patrons will be an ordained married couple, Prs. Anja and Florian von Issendorff, who will begin their service in Dublin in September 2022.

Likewise, Tanya Ohlhausen and Alistair Doyle, both representatives of the Church of Ireland could no longer serve on the Council for different reasons.

We have been extremely grateful for these three members' input into the work of the Council during their tenure and we wish them God's blessing on their onward faith journey.

We are very grateful that over the course of this period our representation has been restored in most cases.

In September of 2021 we welcomed back Ayda Lundon (Armenian Apostolic Church) from her study leave, as well as our former Hon. Secretary Maj. Margaret Fozzard (2005-09) who has returned to Dublin for service in the Salvation Army.

In October of 2021 Deacon Eamonn Murray and Eilís O'Malley (re-)joined the Council for the Roman Catholic Church.

In January of 2022 Rachel Harper joined the Council for the Church of Ireland, and in the last couple of weeks Rev. Philip Heak has been nominated as the third Church of Ireland representative.

As chair I am fully aware that the work of the council, which is a voluntary body, can only be carried out in as much as its members can give of their time and energy. Our members do so in full measure, an uplifting reality.

As chairperson I continue to be gratefully indebted to my predecessor as chair, Cherry Poynton in her role as Hon. Secretary.

I thank her, as well as Paul Manook as vice-chair and Edward Lewis as treasurer for their faithful support of our work and for the continuing great atmosphere of trust, collegiality, and collaboration among the team of officers.

The world that surrounds us is in the throes of multiple overlapping crises. The churches, too, can feel the tremors of the ground shaking on which our civilisation, and indeed, the church stands. All the more

reason, to lift our hearts to the One who has created us and called us to live in God's light and by the grace of God's strength and gifts. As we do this together, time and again we realise that God's blessings continue even during all the afflictions of our day. May we continue to grow together in love and respect for each other and to the glory of the Triune God, our Creator, Redeemer and Breath of Life, regenerating all that is.

*Martin Sauter* (Chairperson)

## **MEMBERSHIP and REPRESENTATION**

Antiochian Orthodox:	Fr. John Hickey
Armenian Apostolic Church:	Dr. Paul Manook, Ayda Lundon
Church of Ireland:	Rev. Philip Heak, Edward Lewis, Rachel Harper,
Ethiopian Orthodox Church:	Abba Berhanemeskel Gidey, Tigist Deju, Deacon Siltan Berhe
Greek Orthodox:	Fr. Ioannis Pantelidis, Dr. Yvonne Luven, Manuela Kulaxizi
Lutheran Church:	Pastor Stephan Arras, Pastor Martin Sauter, Yvonne Langebach
Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church:	Jiby Jacob, Fr Dr. Jobymon Skaria, Santheep Kallungal,
Methodist:	Elizabeth Kelly, Rev. Andrew Kingston, Lesley Rankin
Presbyterian:	Rev. Alan Boal, Cherry Poynton, Denis Poynton
Religious Society of Friends:	Niamh Hardiman, Colm Harte
Roman Catholic:	Fr. Damian McNeice, Deacon Eamonn Murray, Eilís O'Malley
Romanian Orthodox:	Fr. Raul Simion
St. Thomas Indian Orthodox:	Fr. Anish John, John Mathew
Salvation Army:	Maj. Margaret Fozzard
Irish Council of Churches	Damian Jackson, (observer status)

## **KEY ACTIVITIES**

The Dublin Council of Churches is grateful that thanks to the great uptake of vaccinations and the relative decline of the virus' serious effects we were able to hold all our activities in physical presence. They are listed below in chronological order

## STUDY DAY

On Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2021 the Council met for a Study Day on *The Religious Disaffiliated in Ireland*. We gathered in the Lutherhaus 10-1pm. Our members Yvonne Luven, Niamh Hardiman and Lesley Rankin had prepared a thought-provoking presentation and led through the morning in a carefully balanced combination of presentation and small group and plenary discussions on various aspects of this virulent phenomenon of the rapid process of secularisation that Ireland has been undergoing over the course of the last 20 or more years.

The presentation carefully elaborated the sociological make-up of this growing number of fellow citizens, as well as the main tenets of their outlook on life and the world. It was very helpful that the organisers emphasised the points of possible contact where people of faith, church groups and congregations can indeed re-engage with the disaffected and present them with a refreshed message that is made relevant to their concerns in life that for so many has become precarious in the unstable world we inhabit.

The conversations in small groups and in the plenary were marked by the fact that participants spoke from the heart and indicated in all honesty what they would see as good ways to respond. It was also clear that the topic is of equal relevance to all our member churches.

The success of the Study Day could be measured by the way in which aspects of the morning's findings and conversations kept resurfacing in discussions in subsequent business meetings. We look forward to further our understandings over the course of the coming period where we hope a public lecture might through further light on this phenomenon.

## WALK OF LIGHT

The annual **WALK OF LIGHT** (in its 17<sup>th</sup> year) once again had to be rethought in the light of the uncertainty whether an event with many people would be possible or not.

It was held on Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021 beginning at 4pm in St. Ann's Church of Ireland, Dawson Street and visiting Newman University Church on St. Stephen's Green and finishing up in Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church. Its theme was chosen from the Gospel of Matthew: *In His Name, the nations will put their hope*. (Matt. 12:21). Once again, the Walk of Light was conceived of as one act of worship in three stations, with a *gathering* liturgy at station one including a welcoming message by the Chair, a *message* liturgy at station two including the Gospel and an address by Fr. Gary Chamberland of Newman Church and a *sending* liturgy at station three, including reflections by David Boyd of Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church. The components were prepared and executed by teams spread across the denominations.

In the end the organising team decided that only 15 nominated walkers (pilgrims) should actually walk between three churches. Participating churches encouraged their members to choose one church to attend. Videographer George Griffin once again played a major role in this year's event in that he recorded the entire Walk of Light and its footage was edited into a 45 minute video. It was released on the DCC's YouTube Channel to coincide with the beginning of Advent. It has been viewed approx. 200 times.

While those on the actual walk were delighted to be on the streets of Dublin again with lanterns and our banner, bearing witness to the message of God's Advent, it was keenly felt that the larger number of

fellow pilgrims was missing. Meanwhile those gathered at the different stations of course only benefited from a partial participation in the event.

Under the pandemic conditions prevalent at the time this was seen the best possible way. However, it is hoped that the Walk of Light 2022 may be able to revert to fuller participation. The organising team is grateful for the planning input of the participating churches, especially Rev. David Gillespie and Rev. Andrew McCroskery at St. Ann's, to Fr Gary Chamberland at Newman University Church, and to Rev. Sam Mawhinney and David Boyd at Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church, to George Griffin's excellent videography and editing; to Fr. Gary Chamberland and his team at Newman University Church for their great help with the cost, design and printing of publicity material, and also to the Walk of Light congregations of the greater Rathmines/Leeson Street area for their strong financial support.

## THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

The Week of Prayer 2022 material was prepared by the Middle Eastern Council of Churches on behalf of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. It took its theme from the story of the Magi from the East: *We saw his star in the East* (Matt. 2:2).



Altar with crib and star in St. Anthony's Church

Unfortunately, the once again very excellent material was rather late arriving which made the preparation time shorter than in other years. Nevertheless, the Dublin Council of Churches was able to conduct two services this year: A televised service on RTE One and our annual inaugural service

### TELEVISED SERVICE 16 January 22

Following on from the service created and executed by the Walk of Light team in 2021, RTE approached the Dublin Council of Churches to create this year's televised service for the Sunday preceding the Week of Prayer.

A team of Dublin Council of Churches members set to work in October 2021 to create a script for the 44-minute live worship service: Tigist Deju, Yvonne Langebach, Ayda Lundon, Eamonn Murray, Lesley Rankin, Martin Sauter. They were joined by Hannah Ayissou, intern at the Lutheran Church, as well as

Kevork and Aydah Gerges Malkhasian and Boon Beng Shu who together with Yvonne Langebach helped with the music. The process of devising a good TV script from the material was very creative and involved everyone bringing their talents and the spiritual wealth of their tradition to the table, a great experience of living Christian unity. Including hymns sung in Arabic and in Armenian helped to connect the service not only with the traditions of the Churches in the Middle East but also allowed to give a strong voice to their churches and members in Ireland.

The service was recorded live at Kairos Communications, Maynooth. All contributors were very happy with the cooperation with RTE staff on the day.

### **THE INAUGURAL SERVICE 18 January 22**

The pandemic situation in January 2022 allowed that once again a service in physical presence could take place. St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church in Clontarf was approached and Fr. Larry White, and his team at St. Anthony's were most helpful and hospitable. A good turnout could be accommodated safely as the church, while being a prayerful space, has a good capacity for numbers.

The sense of Christian unity and joy of worship together was very palpable as church leaders and participants prayed and sang together. Very Rev. Dr. Trevor Morrow gave an excellent homily, his first-hand experience of the Holy Land enabling him to make a special connection with the concerns of the Churches of the Middle East. A door collection was taken up for the work of the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Heartfelt thanks to our hosts, Fr. Larry White and his team, to Very Rev. Dr. Trevor Morrow, to our patrons for their participation, and to Cherry Poynton and Maj. Margaret Fozzard for their work on the planning team.



Church leaders and DCC representatives

## ECUMENICAL CELEBRATION OF ST. PATRICK'S DAY

As with the Week of Prayer services, so also with our Ecumenical **ST. PATRICK'S DAY** service, once again, after two years' absence we were able to hold it in physical presence.

The Council is grateful for the ongoing connection with St. Patrick's Cathedral who welcomed us back most warmly.

A planning team comprising Eamonn Murray, Cherry Poynton, and Martin Sauter set to work in January. Preparations this year were facilitated by the fact that the script devised for 2020 was never used. With some small changes it could be adapted to be used this year.

We were able to reengage the great musicians that were involved in creating *The Long Lament* video in 2021. Rev. Andrew Kingston gave an excellent and energising sermon.

Approximately 130 participants came, and everyone consulted felt that the service had a special spiritual concentration and presence. We were grateful for the door collection for Barnardos Ireland of € 750. The sum was in no large part the result of the excellent introduction to the charity given by Nigel Swanwick of Barnardos.

Our deep gratitude goes to all that were involved in this creation:

The Dean and Staff of St. Patrick's Cathedral for their legendary hospitality and support.

The musicians for their perfect choice of music and its exquisite rendition: Cathedral organist David Leigh, Maeve McCann, Uilleann Pipes, Luke Webb, harp, as well as Siofra Kildee Doolan and Pierce Cullen, Members of the Palestrina Choir.

Rev. Andrew Kingston for his excellent sermon.

To Rev. Damian McNeice for his role as the voice of St. Patrick

Our patrons and members for their active participation in the execution of the service.





Special thanks to Eamonn Murray, Colm Harte, Denis Poynton, Eilís O' Malley, Andrew Kingston, Lesley and Eric Rankin, for distributing on foot and by hand some 2000 flyers to the hotels and guesthouses around central Dublin.

To the members of the organising committee: Cherry Poynton, Eamonn Murray

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## OTHER EVENTS

Members attended or were involved in various ecumenical events during the year.

### PARTICIPATION IN CONSULTATION OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCES OF DUBLIN

In Summer of 2021 Mgr. Ciaran O'Carroll on behalf of Archbishop Farrell approached the Council inviting our members to respond to a questionnaire by the diocesan taskforce *Building Hope*. Several members responded by answering the questions which the chairperson compiled and passed on to Mgr. O' Carroll.

### MEETING IN RELATION TO ACCOMMODATION ISSUES OF MEMBER CHURCHES

In September 2021 our member church the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church received notice that, due to the report of a health and safety inspection, St. Mary's Haddington Road was no longer able to host their weekly worship and communal activities in their parish hall. The community were given until Christmas to seek another venue.

Likewise, the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Community worshipping in St. Paul's on Arran Quay were also given notice as that church was to be redeveloped to house diocesan offices that had to relocate from Clonliffe College when this was sold.

In subsequent consultations with Mgr. Kieran McDermott, Vicar for Ecumenical Affairs for the Archbishop, it transpired other churches, including our member church the Antiochian Orthodox Community in Dublin, were also on the list of communities seeking worship space from the Archdiocese.

The Chairperson together with the Hon. Secretary Cherry Poynton on 12 November 2021 attended a meeting in the headquarters of AMRI (Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious in Ireland) called together by David Rose, general secretary of AMRI on behalf of the Dublin Council of Churches and Fr. McDermott. The meeting was attended by David Rose and Fr. McDermott as well as Archbishop Jackson. While not being able to generate immediate practical results, it was felt by all sides to have been of great value in helping to coordinate responses so that minority churches could be directed towards suitable spaces. It was stressed that the process leading to hosting a community within an existing church community required great sensitivity and integrity on all sides so that possible cultural misunderstandings could be avoided or else dealt with in a constructive manner and in a spirit of Christian fellowship and mutual respect.

### CONSECRATION OF THE UKRAINE AND RUSSIA TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

Following the brutal invasion and onslaught by the Russian Army, Pope Francis called on the worldwide church to gather on the Feast Day of the Annunciation for the Consecration of the Ukraine and Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Archbishop Farrell extended an invitation to all Dublin Church leaders to join in the Dublin ceremony held in the Parish Church in Donnybrook. The Chairperson represented the DCC at the moving ceremony.

### INVITATION BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF DUBLIN TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SYNODAL PROCESS

On 5 April members of the Dublin Council were invited to participate in a focus listening group on zoom as part of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese's response to Pope Francis call for a global synodal process. Members were met by Fr. Kieran McDermott and Fr. Kieran O'Mahony. They were guided through break-out group conversations on four questions relating to each participant's personal experience of church in positive and not so positive ways. The results of the informal conversations were then recorded and will be fed into the final document which, in turn, feeds into the Conference of Bishop's All-Ireland report on the synodal process. This will be sent to Rome for further distillation.

All participants felt this was a meaningful exercise and expressed their appreciation of the Archdiocese's interest in having ecumenical voices included in its listening exercise.

#### ECUMENICAL WAY OF THE CROSS

Good Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> April 21, an Ecumenical Way of the Cross was organised by the congregations of the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland congregations in Rathmines, Centenary Methodist Church, Leeson Park and St. Finian's Lutheran Church. Many of our members participated.

#### ECUMENICAL BIBLE WEEK

Ecumenical Bible Week in Pentecost Week took place on Zoom 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> June 2022 under the theme of *Listen to the Word*. Many patrons and members attended.

*Martin Sauter*

June 2022

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Our **website**: [www.dublincouncilofchurches.ie](http://www.dublincouncilofchurches.ie)

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This report can be viewed as a pdf version which can be downloaded and printed from

[www.dublincouncilofchurches.ie/](http://www.dublincouncilofchurches.ie/)

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