

# DUBLIN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

## ANNUAL REPORT

June 2023 – June 2024



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



*St. Patrick's Day Service 2024, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin*

*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*

## 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 fulfilment of Jesus' prayer '*that all may be one*' (John 17:21)

To encourage co-operation between churches and inter-church groups, at both local and district level

To facilitate an exchange of information and views of member Churches on matters of concern

To support joint study and action

To disseminate information on ecumenical activities and resources.

## MEETINGS

The Council met six times during the year, June 2023 to June 2024 inclusive, in addition to our AGM. To facilitate members we agreed to alternate on-line with in-person meetings; with in-person meetings at the Luther Haus (Sep, Nov) and Blackrock Presbyterian (Feb). We are grateful for the warm hospitality of our generous hosts on each occasion. Overall, and regardless of our mode of meeting, it has been observed that attendance has been lower and less representative than in previous years. To some extent this has been due to personnel changes within representative churches, as well as increasing responsibilities for others. Nevertheless, it would appear that interest and/or understanding is flagging in certain quarters and this is a matter of concern.

## ANNUAL OFFICERS

The following were elected to serve in 2023 - 2024

Chairperson: **Rev. Alan Boal**

Hon. Treasurer: **Edward Lewis**

Vice-Chairperson: **Deacon Eamonn Murray**

Hon. Secretary: **Cherry Poynton**

We record our gratitude for the many ways in which these office bearers have fulfilled their various roles with cheerful efficiency during the past year.

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Hon. Treasurer: **Edward Lewis**

Vice-Chairperson/Minute Sec: **Deacon Eamonn Murray**

Hon. Secretary: TBC

## INTRODUCTION

As ever it has been the cheerful willingness of Council members to give of their time, talents and energy that has made it possible for the Dublin Council of Churches to continue to function during this past year. Each member brings his or her personal gifts and viewpoints as well as those of their own denominations. We are very grateful to every one of them as well as appreciating the co-operation and commitment shown to us by our Patrons.

## MEMBERSHIP & REPRESENTATION

Antiochian Orthodox:	Fr. John Hickey
Armenian Apostolic:	Dr. Paul Manook, Ayda Lundon
Church of Ireland:	Edward Lewis, Rev. Philip Heak
Ethiopian Orthodox:	Not currently represented
Greek Orthodox:	Yvonne Luven
Lutheran Church:	Pastors Florian von Issendorf, Martin Sauter, Yvonne Langebach
Jacobite Syrian Orthodox:	Fr. Dr. Jobymon Skaria, Jiby Jacob, 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, Eilis O'Malley (rtd)
Romanian Orthodox:	Fr. Raul Simion
St. Thomas Indian Orthodox:	Fr. Abraham Koshy, John Mathew
Salvation Army:	Major Margaret Fozzard

## KEY ACTIVITIES

### **National Day of Commemoration** 9<sup>th</sup> July '23

Each year the Government invites the DCC Chairperson and the Hon. Secretary to the National Day of Commemoration which is normally held in Dublin but in Collins Barracks, Cork in 2023. The Hon. Secretary was able to travel to Cork and represent the DCC.

### **Forum Day** 14<sup>th</sup> Oct '23

For those who were able to attend, the Forum Day proved stimulating. Under the title: "Theology without Passports", Dr. Johnston McMaster (Methodist) offered a theological and personal exploration of 'Cosmopolitan theology', concluding with these words:

*Kosmopolites, citizens of the cosmos takes us beyond the anthropocentric boundary. Our eyes are opened to a new way of seeing ourselves, seeing all creatures great and small, a new way of seeing nature and relating to all of nature and living with the Earth and all that is. How profound also is the prologue to the Torah, the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 1-11 as the Genesis of justice, justice for all and all that is. That is nothing short of planetary love, the heart of cosmopolitan theology.*

### **Reformation Day** 27<sup>th</sup> Nov. '23

The DCC was represented by invitation to this lovely evening service hosted by the Lutheran Church to mark Reformation Day. The combination of music and liturgy combined beautifully with Pastor Stephan Arras homily. And the celebration supper afterwards was superb.

### **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** 18<sup>th</sup> Jan. '24

Our hosts for the annual Inaugural Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was the parish Church of Our Lady Mother of the Church, Castleknock

Our dear friend, Fr. Damien, orchestrated the Taizé liturgy with his usual warmth, and the good turnout of parishioners, patrons and members made it an evening to remember. Rev. Livingstone Thompson (Moravian), gave the address, and the evening ended with another sumptuous supper.

**St. Patrick's Day**  
17<sup>th</sup> Mar. '24

As usual the DCC organised and conducted an evening service to mark St. Patrick's Day in the Church of Ireland's St. Patrick's Cathedral. The turn-out and engagement was very encouraging. Fr. McDonough's homily was inspirational and warmly received; as also were the contributions by our musicians and our in-house 'St. Patrick', Rev. Andrew Kingston. Proceeds on the evening went to the Simon Community's Usher's Island Project (€653.90). Fr. McDonough closed with these hope-filled words:

*It is the Holy Spirit who taught this young man how to pray on a wet hillside. The Holy Spirit called him back to be the apostle of Ireland, a missionary in the land of his captivity. The Holy Spirit led young men and women to respond to his teaching, and gave them courage to do so in the face of opposition. The Holy Spirit has been active in every generation since then in this land, shaping the landscape with crosses and towers, shaping the soundscape with bells and the praise of God, shaping the national story with saints in every generation. And this same Holy Spirit is at work in us, making us into apostles of Ireland in our time, apostles who are ready to do as Patrick did: to listen to the God who teaches us, to give thanks always for God's saving work in us, and to work in our turn with the Spirit who dwells in us.*

**Anniversaries**  
Date &  
24<sup>th</sup> Jun. '24

Members of the DCC happily accepted invitations from the Revd. Canon Paul Arbuthnot, to attend the 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Ann's Church Dawson St, and the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Stephen's Church (the Pepper Cannister), Mount Street Crescent. The latter taking the form of a Choral Evensong.

**Ordination of  
Fr. Donal Roche**  
26<sup>th</sup> May '24

Our Chairperson, Rev. Alan Boal, attended the Ordination of Fr. Donal Roche on behalf of the DCC. Fr. Roche is now one of two Auxiliary Bishops to our Patron, Archbishop Farrell. The service in St. Andrew's Westland Row combined pomp and ceremony with an intimacy befitting the occasion. With a swathe of bishops in their regalia on one side, choirs and 'trad' musicians on the other, and brass and church organ in the balcony, it was an event to remember. Archbishop Michael Jackson (another of our patrons), together with representatives from the COI and Methodist Church, made up the Protestant contingent. We wish Aux. Bishop Donal well in his duties.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

With the early resignation of our faithful member, Eilish O'Malley; the resignation as Chairperson of the indefatigable Pastor Martin Sauter; and the impending resignation of our ever-willing and reliable Secretary, Cherry Poynton, it was only natural that a review of our activities be undertaken. The reduced representation and participation of members at both stated meetings and events reinforced this undertaking.

Having listed the many activities that the DCC has either organised or participated in, we moved to consider what we *should* do (in view of our Objectives) and what we *could* do, given the reduced resources at our disposal. This brainstorming exercise was followed by consideration of our Chairperson's brief paper: "**Ecumenism: the revolution that has been tamed**", in which he explored the meaning and implications of Jesus' prayer (and our first Objective) - "*that all may be one*".

*Overall, the revolution that Jesus began through his life, death, resurrection and ascension, is nothing less than God's Kingdom reign on earth as in heaven. It is the establishment of the single family of God promised to Abraham; the Jew-plus-Gentile family in the Messiah Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit; the re-establishment of the original image-bearing vocation of stewarding creation to the praise of the Creator. This revolution is, and can only be, the revolution of love: radical, generous, serving, self-denying and suffering love.*

*So first and foremost we are talking about the unity of the Jew-plus-Gentile relationship through Israel's Messiah. Once we have that firmly locked in place, we can then consider what most of us have assumed to be the main (or only) dynamic of ecumenism; namely, the unity of the Christian denominations...*

*our attempt needs to be more humble yet also more radical. **More humble**, in the sense that we are unlikely to contribute much to advance a doctrinal/ institutional convergence... **More radical**, in the sense that believing in and living out the resurrection hope in preparation for and in anticipation of the New Creation, is by nature the most human way to be. To the extent that Christians of whatever denomination commit to this endeavour, there will be a dynamic unity even if there remains a measure of doctrinal/institutional divergence.*

Members gave the paper careful consideration and made several valuable comments. It was noted, for example, that ecumenism has become so embedded (for the most part) on this island that it is simply assumed. We must therefore continue to nurture and sustain it. Perhaps the future role of the DCC in that endeavour is to take *practical* steps to reconnect with our existing membership, and to research and encourage local ecumenical manifestations wherever they may be (without our having to initiate or sustain these). A research questionnaire is being framed to that end. With an expanding local ecumenism, DCC might garner fresh attendance at and participation in the main events we run: the Inaugural Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and the St. Patrick's Day Service. If this proved successful, DCC could reconsider future events such as RTE services and/or broadcasts etc. This review process is ongoing and it will inform and shape the DCC in the coming year.

## **A BIG THANK-YOU!**

Finally, we cannot end this annual report without expressing the Council's deepest appreciation to Cherry, our Honorary Secretary. Cherry has played a full and active part in the DCC for many years, occupying the offices of both Secretary and Chairperson. In these past years she has provided continuity and stability. Her commitment to ecumenism and her all-round knowledge of church life in and beyond Dublin have proved invaluable. So now that Cherry has decided to take a well earned rest, we say a very big 'Thank You'!

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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



## Fr. McDonagh's Address

(St. Patrick's Day 2024)

Brothers and sisters, what a privilege it is for us to be gathered in this place on this day. These buildings have been home to the worship of God without interruption for a full half of our Christian history. Those who laid the foundations of this cathedral were closer in time to Patrick than they are to us. What a privilege to add our voices to the cloud of witnesses who worshipped the Triune God in this place.

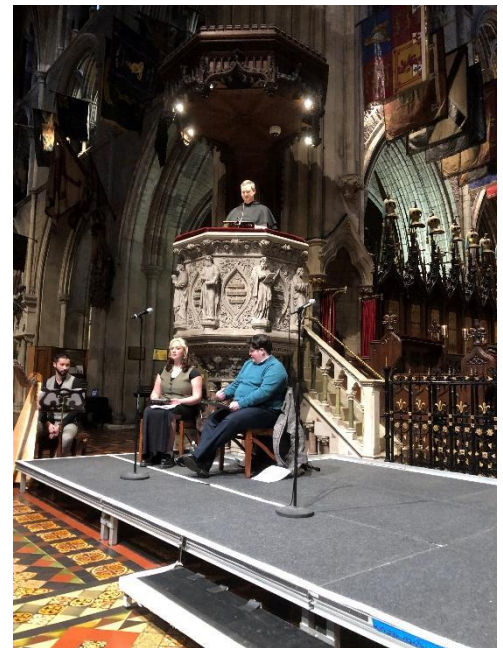
My own earliest encounters with Patrick and his story, though, were far from Dublin, and far from the comfort and grandeur of this cathedral. Every year when I was growing up in Galway, we'd make a pilgrimage in the summer to Croagh Patrick, and on Good Friday most years we went out to pray the stations of the Cross at St Patrick's Bed in the Maamturk mountains. And in those places, as my parents told and retold the story of young Patrick, I felt a very real solidarity with him – I wasn't minding any sheep, but I was out in the rain, on the hillside, doing my best to pray for Ireland.

It was in my late teens, though, that I first learned of the existence of Patrick's own writings – the Confession and the Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus – and when I cracked them open, my mind was blown. Here was a precious survival from the dawn of Irish Christianity, which spoke to me with all the force of a contemporary witness. As a teenager facing all the usual struggles and doubts, and making my first steps in personal prayer, the Confession of Patrick was a vital companion.

And as I grew in my understanding of the missionary vocation of all the baptised, and as I began to discern my vocation as a Dominican friar, as one consecrated to preach the Gospel, the Confession continued to be a wise guide. St Patrick's times were quite unlike our own in many ways, but he has a great deal to teach every generation about Christian mission.

Just as a brief aside, I was a bit unsure how long to preach for today, with such an ecumenical congregation. What time would be short enough to satisfy the Catholics, and long enough to satisfy the Presbyterians? I turned to Twitter with that question, and the best response said: forget about time, so long as you have three points to make, everyone will be happy. So, I have three points to make about St Patrick as a model for Christian mission.

Now, like many missionaries, Patrick was working between cultures, something that we're all familiar with as we engage in mission in Ireland today. And that requires considerable flexibility. St Paul's words are the great blueprint here: 'Though I



am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings' (1 Cor 9:19-23).

This is part of what it means to be a missionary – not just to flourish in your own environment, but to actively consider the hearts of other groups of people so as to present the Gospel in a way that attracts them.

Now, Patrick tells us little about how he engaged with pre-Christian Irish culture as he went on mission, but everything about the later Patrician tradition suggests that Patrick, although he was rejecting pre-Christian beliefs and worship, did a great deal to save what could be saved, to honour what was good in the culture, to be Irish among the Irish, even as he preached a new Gospel.

We even hear, in the earliest biography of Patrick, that he had four names - Sochet when he was born, Cothriche when he was a slave, since the speakers of Old Irish couldn't pronounce the P with which his name began, Mauonius when he studied, Patrick when he was consecrated.

Whatever the truth of that, it's clear that Patrick was flexible in the way that a missionary ought to be.

But there's a great risk in that flexibility. As you attempt to be present in different cultures, to speak to wildly different groups of people, sometimes you can end up losing the core of who you are, you can end up almost having a divided heart. We've all experienced this in different ways, and we know it's vital as we engage in mission to establishing and safeguarding our own identity in Christ.

How did Patrick do this? It's instantly evident once you read the Confession: he was a great lover of Scripture. Biblical verses pour from his pen.

It's so clear when you read him that he has spent a lifetime reading the Bible, and applying the Bible to his daily life. When he's telling his own story he just punctuates it with lines from the Gospels, Daniel, Acts, Philippians, Tobit, Isaiah, and the Psalms.

This, then, is ***the first way in which Patrick is a model***



**missionary. God's Word is always the word to which he listens first and last, it's the light for his path.** At the edge of the world the Word of God is what held Patrick together, so that he didn't come apart in his missionary labours.

**The second way** in which Patrick strikes me as a model missionary is to do with another feature of the Confession that is instantly striking: **his constant and sincere gratitude for what God has done in his life.**

For some reason that's unclear, Patrick had to defend himself and his reputation – that's why he wrote the Confession – so it's all the more incredible that in the midst of defending himself, which must have been painful to have to do, he's overflowing with joy, and gratitude to God.

'I give thanks to the one who strengthened me in all things. Whatever comes about for me, good or bad, I accept them equally and give thanks to God. I want to give thanks to God without ceasing. I shout aloud in return to the Lord for such great good deeds of his, here and now and forever, which the human mind cannot measure'.

And what he's grateful for, above all, is the conversion he experienced in his youth:

'I cannot be silent – nor would it be good to do so – about such great blessings and such a gift that the Lord so kindly bestowed in the land of my captivity. This is how we can repay such blessings, when our lives change and we come to know God, to praise and bear witness to his great wonders before every nation under heaven'.

What I love about Patrick's constant praise and thanksgiving is that it shows us how much God meant to him. He was so aware of the gifts he had received, and this is vital for any of us who are interested in evangelisation. We should never start with thinking about what people need out there, how to fix them, how to change them. We should start first by asking what difference God makes to my life, being truly attentive to the blessings I receive continuously, and from that attitude of thanksgiving outreach to others will naturally flow. If we lack this awareness of what God has done for us, or if we lose this awareness, then our evangelisation efforts will be hollow. Patrick is an example of an evangelist filled with the powerful knowledge God has done for him. It's his gratitude for all this that drives his mission, as well as his desire to share these blessings with everyone he meets.

So that's point 2!

***The third way in which I think Patrick is a model for us is this: his constant awareness of the Holy Spirit.***

Pope Francis loves to quote one of his predecessors, Pope St Paul VI, on this point: 'The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization'. It is He who impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is He who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood. We see this vision of Christian mission constantly at work St Patrick's Confession. He refers constantly to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit taught him to pray, he says. He even compares a missionary to a letter written by the Holy Spirit: 'Although it is not well expressed, still this letter is genuinely and strongly written in your hearts, not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God'. When he speaks about finding the right words as a missionary he quotes the words of Jesus - it will not be you will speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you (Mt 10). And he says 'the Spirit is living and working in me to this very day'.

He sees the Spirit at work also in the lives of people around him. One young woman enters religious life after experiencing a dream or a vision. Just like Peter after Pentecost, Patrick quotes from the prophet Joel, where God promises to pour out his Spirit 'on all flesh so that sons and daughters will prophesy'.

It is the Holy Spirit who taught this young man how to pray on a wet hillside. The Holy Spirit called him back to be the apostle of Ireland, a missionary in the land of his captivity. The Holy Spirit led young men and women to respond to his teaching, and gave them courage to do so in the face of opposition. The Holy Spirit has been active in every generation since then in this land, shaping the landscape with crosses and towers, shaping the soundscape with bells and the praise of God, shaping the national story with saints in every generation. And this same Holy Spirit is at work in us, making us into apostles of Ireland in our time, apostles who are ready to do as Patrick did: to listen to the God who teaches us, to give thanks always for God's saving work in us, and to work in our turn with the Spirit who dwells in us.

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*Inaugural Service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2024*