

Meetings

The Council met 7 times in the course of the year with an average attendance of 13 (varying from 9 to 15). The meetings were held at the Irish School of Ecumenics, for whose hospitality the Council continues to be extremely grateful.

Activities

Churches Forum Day 2009

Facilitator: Dr. Geraldine Smyth Speaker: Fr. Seán Healy of CORI Justice.

Keynote Address by Fr. Seán Healy

Introduction

Fr. Healy pointed out that we always have choices. He described how Ireland was currently going through 5 crises.

- Banking - due to the mismanagement of the banks the taxpayer was exposed to liabilities amounting to billions of Euro.
- Public Finances – we have to budget on a falling income.
- Economic – unemployment is rising.
- Social - Money is not there to provide the necessary services. [This is affecting voluntary groups such as the St. Vincent de Paul, who at the same time are coming under pressure due to unemployment.
- Reputation – Our economy may no longer be viewed as a good place to do business.

What caused these crises?

These crises had been caused by the policies of the late 70s and early 80s when economic growth had declined. The answer had been to seek larger growth rates in the economy via deregulation. This did work for a while but growth started to slow again. To sustain the growth, new markets were then sought in China, India and Eastern Europe. However, these countries started to build up their own capacity.

A new approach was taken; instead of producing goods, a new market in financial products was created. In effect this was pyramid selling. The trigger that was to pull this apart was the failure of the first bank.

Another cause, unique to Ireland, had been the way we approach taxation. A proportion of state income was derived from taxing transactions via methods such as VAT and stamp duty. People were encouraged to sell houses and trade up. Growth rates of 10% per annum were achieved, but people were in reality paying more than their houses were worth, and investing in an asset that was not worth what it was valued at. At a time when we needed to build 45 000 houses a year to maintain our housing stock, 90 000 houses were built. Of these, only 2 500 were available for social housing. When houses were no longer needed the tax revenue generated by selling them was reduced. This meant money was not available in the budget for services. As a result we have 16% of the population living below the poverty line, which is above the EU average. We have 56 000 on housing waiting lists.

There are 3 underlying issues, autonomy, anxiety and greed.

Autonomy

Our value system says that the individual is the primary and only important unit in social reality.

The rise of individualism has meant that we believe that if you are in trouble that is your problem. The individual is unaccountable and owes nothing to anyone and cannot depend on anyone. In economic terms, the individual is worth whatever they can earn in the marketplace. The individual's main concern is what they have to do in order that they may survive. Why should they spend time caring for the weak, the environment, children or the community?

We are locked into how we count statistics. Our GDP is measured by our economic worth. This can lead to anomalous situations. For example, if you put a child in gaol, it will cost €70-80 000 a year. This is added to GDP as it is viewed a market transaction. A child minded by its parents will not show in GDP at all. If work cannot be counted in monetary terms, it does not exist. Environmental disasters actually add to the GDP. These anomalies are the result of a lack of rounded understanding. True justice comes from a right relationship with God, the environment and other people, both individually and institutionally. We need a broader understanding of the interconnectedness of everything.

Anxiety

If we consider we are on our own, we are bound to be anxious. We feel we have not enough resources and that we are continually under pressure. We perceive threats, dangers and insecurity everywhere. We end up producing more, but this only serves to increase our anxiety.

Greed

An autonomous person can only resolve to do more and accumulate more. This generates a ravenous acquisitiveness when enough is never enough. Surveys suggest that, whatever our income, we always want 20% more.

What should our response be?

Covenant /covenantal relationship

Our biblical faith is an invitation away from autonomy to one that binds us to a holy and faithful God. This is a relational view rather than an autonomous view.

Abundance of God

We would not suffer from scarcity if distribution were fairer. St Basil pointed out that if everyone took enough to meet their own needs, there would be enough for everyone. This is a model that is difficult to sell to economists.

Generosity

Our biblical faith is an invitation away from greed to generosity.

Life in these contexts is about abundance, where brothers and sisters live in a way that all is shared. Human dignity is at the core of our biblical and Christian response. Compassion, which has no place in a world of individualism, anxiety and greed, is central to this new understanding.

Meeting with Metropolitan Dr. Mathews Mar Timotheos, St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church

We were delighted to meet as a Council with His Grace, the Metropolitan of the St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, Dr. Mathews Mar Timotheos and members of the St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, on June 9th 2009. This gave us the opportunity to share the role of the Council, and also to learn more of the history of the St Thomas Indian Orthodox Church, one of our newest members.

Lecture on Christian Zionism

The chairperson was invited, as chair of the Dublin Council of Churches, by the Reverend Alan Martin to chair the study day lead by Dr. Stephen Sizer, an Anglican vicar who has studied this topic for many years. This was organised by the Board of Overseas affairs of the Irish Council of Churches and held on 17th June 2009 in Trinity College Dublin and was co-sponsored by the chaplains in Trinity. Dr Sizer provided an overview of the history of Christian Zionism, a talk on the theme of who are God's chosen people, whether the land should be exclusive or shared and how peace could be developed.

Advent Walk of Light

For the fifth year in a row participating local congregations and the Dublin Council of Churches have come together for an annual walk of witness in Dublin's Leeson St. area.

The participating 9 local congregations were St. Anne's and St. Stephen's Church of Ireland, the Roman Catholic University Church on St. Stephen's Green, Adelaide Road Presbyterian Church, the Dublin Korean Church, St. Finian's Lutheran Church, the Romanian Orthodox congregation in Christchurch Leeson Park, Centenary Methodist Church, Leeson Park, St. Bartholomew's Church of Ireland, Clyde Road and St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Haddington Road.

As churches of all denominations prepared for a "new year" with the coming of Advent, this journey was planned as a simple sign of our belonging together as Christians. We set out as one to declare publicly that Christ is the light that has come into the world at Christmas. The darkness of the November night reflected the darkness that is felt in so many different ways around us in our economic, political and social lives, in our relationship with nature and in many of our personal relationships and past histories. We yearn for the true light of Christ that in forgiveness removes our fear, so that our hearts can rejoice anew and take courage to deal with the challenges we are facing.

The motto for this year's journey was taken from St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians 13, 13: *And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.* We explored each of the three realities of Faith, Hope and Love as we visited three churches, the Roman Catholic University Church on St. Stephen's Green, Centenary Methodist Church, Leeson Park, and St. Bartholomew's Church of Ireland, Clyde Road. In each church we received a warm welcome, and words of encouragement based on the themes of Faith, Hope and Love. We sang and prayed together, and in walking between the churches, had fellowship with each other.

We were preceded on our walk by the banner designed for last year's walk. The processional lanterns, which were first, used during the 1932 Eucharistic Congress, and were kindly lent to us by Canon. John Flaherty, the Administrator of the Pro-Cathedral, lit our way, along with other lanterns.

This year a video has been made by the Dublin Korean Church, which provides a wonderful record of our walk. We are most grateful to them.

We are thankful to all who helped us with the walk, especially the committee who worked so hard to put it together, the congregations who welcomed us, the graphical designer, Martine Maguire

who put so much effort into the poster, flyer and service booklet, those who lead us in worship and An Garda Siochana who helped to keep us safe as we walked, and all who came and joined us on the Walk of Light on a dark and cold November night.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2010

This year we created a brochure for distribution, with information provided by those holding different ecumenical services in the Greater Dublin area in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. While this was not comprehensive, we were delighted to see so many activities occurring in the Dublin area, from Taize style service in the Lutheran Church to a family service in Bray.

Inaugural service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2010

This year, the inaugural service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was held in the Church of the Assumption, Booterstown, to whom we are very grateful for their warm welcome and kind hospitality. The theme was based on the gospel story of the road to Emmaus and the text was *You are witnesses of these things* Luke 24:48.

The Parish Priest, Mgr. Seamus Conway, and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin warmly welcomed us. Representatives of the churches on the Council participated in a beautiful liturgy based on the walk to Emmaus as told in Luke's Gospel. Mrs Gillian Kingston of the Methodist Church in Ireland was the speaker and she spoke on the theme of witnessing.

Fittingly, at the end of the service, we were presented with copies of Luke's gospel, part of a joint Roman Catholic and Anglican initiative to distribute 100,000 copies of the Gospel of Luke throughout their Dioceses in Dublin.

Methodist Dublin Synod

The chairperson was asked to preach to the Spring Synod of the Dublin District of the Methodist Church on March 13th 2010. This was a wonderful opportunity to share the work of the Dublin Council of Churches with the wider Methodist community. The address was based on Mark 9 38-39, *Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us*.

St Patrick's Tide

We were delighted to help organise another ecumenical worship event for St. Patrick's Tide. This year it was held in the Church of Immaculate Heart of Mary, City Quay.

The service commenced with St Patrick's Rowing Club rowing up the river in the twilight and presenting the Church leaders with symbols of the Arrival of Christianity in Ireland, the bible, a lantern and a banner with a cross. Then, lead by a piper, we processed into the church where a beautiful liturgy was held, based on the words of Patrick and participated in by members and patrons of the Dublin Council of Churches. Inspiring and beautiful music was lead by Sharon Lyons, Denise Kelly and Sebastian Petiet. The Reverend Julian Hamilton preached a homily on what we in Ireland can learn from the story of St. Patrick today. After the service, shamrock was distributed.

A wide variety of people of different ages and denominational backgrounds attended.

We are most grateful to the Parish Priest, Fr Paul St. John and congregation of City Quay Church for their warm welcome, St Patrick's rowing club for providing a wonderfully symbolic start to the service, all the musicians, the graphic designer who provided the publicity material and all who worked so hard to bring it together.

Contacts with the Wider Church

Memorial for Egyptian Copts

The chairperson attended a memorial service on February 15th 2010, for six Coptic Orthodox, aged between 16 and 29, who were killed by terrorists with machine guns, when leaving Christmas Eve Midnight Mass on January 6th 2010 at the Church of St George in Southern Egypt, (Nag Hamadi). Many others were seriously injured. Those martyred were:

- Bishoy Fareed Labib
- Paula Attef Yasse
- Mina Heli Sai'd
- Abanoub Kamal Nashed
- Rafik Refaat William
- Ayman Zakaria Luka

The memorial service was held at the Church of St Mary and St. Demiana, Bray Co. Wicklow. Fr Thomas Flanagan, of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, who led the liturgy, welcomed us, and the preacher was Fr. John O'Brien of the Parish Church of St Fergal on behalf of Bray Churches Together. It was a moving experience to join in liturgical prayer with a community for whom martyrdom is still a regular occurrence. It was also a chance to show Christian solidarity with those undergoing persecution.

Contacts with the Irish Council of Churches and the Inter-Church Meeting:

The Council continues to develop its relationship with the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. We are grateful for the attendance of Mr. Michael Earle, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, at some of our meetings. We thank him for his support over the years to the Dublin Council of Churches, and wish him well on his return to New Zealand.

We were delighted to learn of the appointment of Mr. Philip McKinley as the part time Dublin-based Ecumenical Officer of the Irish Inter-Church Committee. We are grateful that he supports our events whenever he can, and also keeps us informed of ecumenical activities that he is aware of in the Dublin area.

Contacts with the State

The Chairperson was requested to sit on the committee for the National Day of Commemoration 2009 held in Dublin on July 12th 2009. She attended the preparatory meetings and the ceremony.