

IRISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

TRUSTEES' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

The Trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's governing document, the Charities Act 2011 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

Objectives and activities

a. Public Benefit Statement

The Irish Council of Churches is committed to the advancement of the Christian religion and the promotion of religious harmony. Its vision is to be a benchmark of unity in Christ for churches and communities globally by developing and providing a channel for Ireland's churches to connect through a common belief in Christ. Five values underpin its work:

The goal and grounding of all that we do is our shared Faith in Jesus Christ; we seek to be faithful to God and committed to our journey together.

Holiness: willing to be opened and changed by God as we connect with each other and meet together in the Lord; experiencing God's holiness as we spend time together in prayer and seeking to be reconciled in Christ.

Respect: respecting and seeking to understand each other's beliefs; we are aware of our diversity while recognising the presence of Christ in each other as we seek to understand the fullness of God's revelation for the world.

Hope: hoping in Christ and living in the power of the Holy Spirit sustaining us and fueling our courage; we are courageous in our vision and mission having the strength together to fulfil our reason to be.

Witness: witnessing to God's kingdom of justice, peace and reconciliation through word and action; to our common discipleship in the way we live and work together; and as we listen to the world in which we live and serve.

The Irish Council of Churches meets the public benefit requirement in two ways:

1. The advancement of religion:

The formal ecumenical body in Ireland, established in 1922, its current membership reflects the changing landscape of Christianity in Ireland across Protestant, Orthodox, Reformed, Independent and Migrant-led churches. Since 1973 it has coordinated the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, a formal dialogue between the Irish Council of Churches and the Irish Episcopal Conference. Together, the Council and the Meeting bring together senior leaders representing the majority of Christian traditions in Ireland. Member churches express their Christian witness working together for the benefit of all peoples, in Northern Ireland and internationally. The direct benefits which flow from this purpose include the ability of member churches to work together to raise awareness and understanding of their religious beliefs and practices. The Irish Council of Churches provides an opportunity for member churches to better understand each other; promoting co-operation, joint working, and greater efficiency. The direct benefits are demonstrated through regular evaluation of the Irish Council of Churches' services and activities and through feedback from representatives of each of the member churches. The Irish Council of Churches is accountable to all its member churches and its work is reported to their governing bodies. This purpose does not lead to harm. The beneficiaries of this purpose are the member churches of the Irish Council of Churches. The beneficiaries also include the public generally in Northern Ireland specifically those involved in or associated with the Christian faith. There is no private benefit.

2. Through reconciliation and the promoting of religious harmony:

The Irish Council of Churches enables churches to work together to promote reconciliation across the historic political, social, ethnic and religious divides in Northern Ireland and through the island of Ireland. The direct benefits which flow from this purpose include the promotion of political, social, ethnic and religious harmony by promoting good relations between people of different Christian traditions, building cooperation and understanding, and sharing information with the general public. This purpose does not lead to harm. The beneficiaries of this purpose are the public generally in Northern Ireland especially those who look to their church and the Irish Council of Churches to provide guidance on how they should treat others in society. There is no private benefit.

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TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

The Trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

Achievements and performance

Principal Activities

Key activities of the Irish Council of Churches include:

Formally bringing together senior representatives from across our member churches to meet, dialogue and plan activities of mutual concern, at least quarterly.

Promoting reconciliation across historic political, social, ethnic, and religious divides.

Facilitating joint co-operation through our liaison groups, enabling collaboration, co-operation and the sharing of information by bringing together representatives with specific responsibilities for a wide variety of aspects of the mission and ministry of our members.

Coordinating working groups which advise on topics of mutual concern, bringing together nominated experts representative of the diversity of views expressed by our members.

Enabling dialogue, sharing and joint action with the Irish Episcopal Conference through the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, representatives of which meet at least quarterly.

Highlighting the work of member churches before each other and the wider public in Ireland through disseminating resources, aggregating news on our website, sharing information on initiatives and communicating joint statements.

Engaging with government and civil society on issues of mutual concern and advocating on public policy issues, as requested by our members, for the benefit of society at large.

Working with our member churches on externally funded projects which fulfil our charitable purposes. Assisting the churches in relating to newer migrant-led churches and building informal relationships with leaders of other faiths.

Working closely with other national and international ecumenical bodies, particularly those established to work in England, Scotland and Wales, as well as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.

Representing the member churches at keynote public events, including supporting joint public worship. Exploring the ongoing development of our networks to achieve our purposes.

Full details of Council activities are available at: www.irishchurches.org.

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TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

Financial review

The accounts for the year show a deficit of £19,153 which is more than was budgeted (£15,051.63). The primary reason for this larger than budgeted deficit is due to one off costs associated with events marking the centenary of the Irish Council of Churches and the 50th anniversary of the Ballymascanlon Talks. These Talks led to the establishment of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. In January we held a service of celebration and thanksgiving in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. In September we organised "Being Churches Together in 21st Century Ireland": a Symposium at which "Called to be One" - an updated history of ICC and IICM was launched. These events were significant, both in marking the occasions of the anniversaries, and in providing an opportunity for us, as churches in Ireland, to consider how to continue the vision of hope for reconciliation to which our forebears responded decades ago. The Trustees agreed that these events should be funded from reserves.

The Church Leaders' visit to Rome at the invitation of the British and Irish Ambassadors to the Holy See was a particularly significant event. This visit offered the opportunity to speak about the role of the churches in peacebuilding in Ireland, North and South, before and since the Good Friday Agreement at a symposium at which many of the ambassadors to the Holy See were present. Another significant journey was that of the ICC President to the Coronation of King Charles in May.

The theme of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting was "Our Reconciling Vision of Hope: Fifty years since the Ballymascanlon Talks". It explored the context around the Ballymascanlon Talks, including the priorities, challenges and achievements of those early years. There was also a session exploring current dynamics in international Inter-Church Relations. Fr. Martin Browne (Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity) shared about recent developments and directions in international ecumenical relations and how they can inform our journey here in Ireland.

A varied approach to meetings, whereby some are held in-person and some online-only, continues to prove useful and allows for more efficient use of time and resources, whilst also fostering the connection and trust that underpin the relationships essential to the effectiveness of the organisation. We find these relations are only truly developed through in-person encounter.

During 2023 we continued to prioritise partnership working, both with our neighbouring ecumenical organisations, and in our ongoing relationships with Christian Aid, CTBI and the DCU Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations. We are grateful for the continued support of our member churches and their commitment to the work that is done together through ICC and IICM.

Particular thanks are due to the members of the Joint Management Committee, ICC Executive and Irish Inter-Church Committee for their support and careful attention to matters of finance and governance during the year, as well as the staff team for their ongoing diligence and commitment in pursuing the mission of ICC and IICM.

Going concern

After making appropriate enquiries, the Trustees have a reasonable expectation that the Charity has adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. For this reason, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial statements. Further details regarding the adoption of the going concern basis can be found in the accounting policies.

Reserves policy

It is the policy of the charity that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to between three and six month's expenditure. The Trustees consider that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the charity's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. This level of reserves has been maintained throughout the year.

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FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

The charity incurred deficit of £19,153 mainly due to the cost of the anniversary events mentioned above, and expenditure on meetings and travel costs for staff and trustees, which has returned to pre-covid levels.

In response to the underlying deficit, the ICC Trustees have agreed to an increase in membership subscription levels of 5% for 2024, which will reduce our anticipated deficit to about £9,000, with a view to further measures in subsequent years in order to reduce it further. This increase comes after five years in which subscriptions were maintained at the same level, resulting in an effective decrease in funding, as a result of inflation. Nevertheless, due to the cautious management of the organisations' financial resources, despite increasing costs, underlying deficits have been kept at a manageable level up to this point.

Our total reserves now stand at £526,144 and are sufficient to provide for the financial requirements of the organisation going forward.

Structure, governance and management

Irish Council of Churches is a registered charity, number NIC102643, and is constituted under a Trust deed.

The Trustees who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Rt Rev Andrew Forster
Rt Rev Sarah Groves
Mr Jonathan Wilson (Resigned 30/03/2023)
Very Rev Dr Ivan Patterson
Mr William Hunter
Most Senior Apostle Olusola Obube
Ms Georgina Copt
Dr Bridget Nichols (Appointed 17/2/23)
Rev Canon Dr Daniel Nuzum
Mr George Sayegh
Fr Anish John
Ms Yvonne Langebach
Rev Brian Anderson
Ms Gillian Kingston
Rev Dr Heather Morris
Mr Mark Kernohan
Rt Rev Colin Campbell
Rev Helen Freeburn
Rev Trevor Gribben
Rev Barry McCroskery (Appointed 21/3/23)
Pastor Tunde Adebayo-Oke
James Nelson
Fr Calin Florea (Appointed 23/5/23)
Colonel Neil Webb
Fr Dr Jobymon Skaria

The management of the Charity is the responsibility of the Trustees who are elected and co-opted under the terms of the Trust deed.

Funds held as custodian trustee

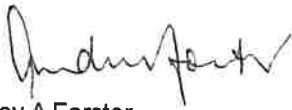
No funds are held as custodian on behalf of others.

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TRUSTEES' REPORT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023

The Trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.



Rt Rev A Forster
Trustee

14 March 2024