

English and Welsh Anglican -Roman Catholic Committee

REPORT ON THE QUINQUENNIUM 2018 - 2023

At the start of the quinquennium it was decided to rename the group as “The English and Welsh Anglican - Roman Catholic Committee”. The Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference covers both countries, while the Anglican Church in Wales is disestablished, and separate from the Church of England. Although there have been representatives of both Communion from Wales in previous “ARC’s” we were anxious to emphasise the Welsh dimension of our work. It has been interesting to note the differences between the Church in Wales and the Church of England in a number of areas.

- During the last five years, slightly extended because of Lockdown, we have experienced the reality of “affective ecumenism”. We have “grown together” as a group, which has enabled us to tackle some very sensitive issues in a genuinely ecumenical way. This was especially evident in our discussions around the questions raised by “IICSA” (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.) The Archbishop of Birmingham and the then Anglican Bishop of Horsham, Mark Sowerby, reported and reflected on their personal experience of being quizzed by the inquiry. That experience was at once painful and thought provoking. It was very striking that both Catholics and Anglicans had had similar experiences.
- For EWARC members it led to a quite remarkable degree of shared reflection. There was no sense of “them and us” as we recognised both common failings and common challenges for the future. It was significant that members felt able to be completely honest with each other about our respective anxieties and the need for change in our approach to the issues raised. One member, who had been a member of an earlier “English Arc”, reflected that such a degree of honesty and openness would not have been possible ten years ago.
- Some of these issues came up again in one of our most recent meetings when we discussed the question of the “Seal of Confession”. We were conscious that the “IICSA” report strongly recommended mandatory reporting of all cases of abuse, and the demand that this should include information learned in the confessional. We devoted a considerable amount of time to this matter, seeking advice from a Catholic Canon Lawyer and an Anglican with experience in “safeguarding”. Although not all Anglicans have the practice of the “Sacrament of Reconciliation”, it was clear from our discussions that there was a common concern to uphold the confidentiality of the confessional, whilst emphasising the Christian duty to safeguard the children and vulnerable adults in our care. It was agreed that we should not be seen to be demanding special exemptions for the clergy, but rather pointing out that protecting the confidentiality of the confessional could serve to support the work of safeguarding.
- We had intended to look more closely at the question of “joint schools”, but our attempts to contact the schools was overtaken by Covid and the problems of the national “lock down”, which meant that the schools had no time to respond to

enquiries whilst struggling to keep the schools open and functioning. At our final session in October, we came back to the question of education. We felt that the role of “joint schools” should be an ongoing concern for the next quinquennium as well as the wider quest of the role of religion in education more generally.

- We were able to give some time to the problems and possibilities for “InterChurch Families”. The Association of InterChurch families have been working on new publication reflecting on their experience of marriage between two Christians from different traditions. Several of us were able to take part (via zoom) in their annual conference. We listened to various couples recounting their personal experiences both positive and negative. We had the benefit of having one of their members as a member of “EWARC”, which gave us useful insights into the issues that can arise in such marriages. We reflected on the ecumenical possibilities and the need for sympathetic pastoral care and the understanding of these opportunities by the clergy of both partners.
- The question of synodality in the life of our two Churches became a feature of every meeting in the last period of our remit. The presence of Fr Jan Nowotnik as a member meant that we were able to understand a great deal about the “Synodal process” initiated by Pope Francis in the Catholic Church. Providentially during this period, Fr Jan was actively pursuing his own doctoral studies on the whole subject of “synodality”. He also led us in reflecting on what it might mean both for us as Catholics and for its ecumenical implications. It was important for all of us on the committee to recognise the difference between the Synodal process in the Catholic Church and the General Synod of the Church of England. Several of our number were members of the General synod.
- We had an opportunity to meet with university chaplains and discuss some of the issues facing them in an increasingly secular environment. It was felt in that the university authorities did not fully understand or appreciate the purpose of a Christian chaplaincy. Experience on the part of some members suggested a similar situation in the area of hospital chaplaincy in some areas.
- On two occasions we looked at the issues around climate change and its implications for both public life and the life of our Churches. This is a huge topic and probably demands much further reflection. It was evident from our limited discussions that this is an area where ecumenical reflection might lead to shared action and a common witness.
- The question of “same sex marriage” and the blessing of “same sex couples” was the major focus of one meeting, following the discussion in the General Synod of the Church of England. We had a report from the Reverend Jeremy Morris who was present at the Synod debate, and a contribution from Dr. Pia Matthews outlining the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The Anglican Bishops were keen to maintain the Church’s teaching on Marriage whilst allowing the blessing of “same sex couples”. Whether this would be possible was open to question. This would

allow the blessing of individuals but not the relationship. To most of us this seemed a distinction without difference.

The Anglican Church in Wales did not feel the need for this distinction. It was also pointed out that with the Roman Catholic Church similar issues are arising, and the official teaching is being questioned.

- Our final meeting in October 2023 was marked by a visit to St Albans Cathedral where we were warmly welcomed by the Dean and other clergy for Evensong, and for a guided tour of the ancient Abbey Church concluding at the Shrine of St Alban with a time of prayer together. It seemed especially appropriate to gather in St Albans where our Anglican Co Chairman, Bishop Christopher Foster served as Sub Dean for many years before his appointment as Bishop of Portsmouth. It was good to be able to join together in prayer at the shrine of England's first Christian martyr.
- At this meeting we welcomed Cardinal Michael FitzGerald who led us into a discussion on "Inter Religious Dialogue in an Ecumenical Setting". The Cardinal's wide experience over many years in this field helped to illustrate how vital this dialogue is in a world where religion is often used to divide people. It also shows how important it is for people to know about other faiths.

Canon Tony Churchill
Roman Catholic Co-Secretary
November 6th 2023