

Good morning,

Please find a press release below about a service of worship taking place this Sunday 22nd January at 3.30pm in St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast, to celebrate the centenary of the Irish Council of Churches and the 50th anniversary of the Ballymascanlon Talks, which led to the establishment of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

After the service the following people will be available for interview:

ICC/IICM:

Rt Rev Andrew Forster, ICC President  
Most Rev Brendan Leahy, IICM Co-Chair  
Rt Rev Sarah Groves, ICC Vice-President

Preachers:

Most Rev Eamon Martin, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland  
Rev Dr Harold Good, former President of the Methodist Church

Kind regards,

Damian Jackson

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## PRESS RELEASE

For the attention of newsdesks, photodesks and religious affairs correspondents for immediate release.

THURSDAY 19 JANUARY 2023

*CELEBRATING OUR RECONCILING VISION OF HOPE*

A joint service of worship to celebrate the centenary of the Irish Council of Churches and the 50th anniversary of the Ballymascanlon Talks, which led to the establishment of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

This Sunday, the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) – one of the world's oldest national representative church bodies – will mark its centenary with a joint service of worship in Belfast Cathedral.

With the theme of *Celebrating our Reconciling Vision of Hope*, the service will take place at 3.30pm and members of the public are welcome to attend. The purpose is to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Irish Council of Churches whose first meeting took place on 23rd January 1923, during the height of the Irish Civil War.

The special service will also celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Ballymascanlon Talks, which led to the establishment of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting. In 1973, in the midst of The Troubles, the Council began ground-breaking historic talks in Ballymascanlon Hotel in County Louth with senior members of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. Over the course of time, these became formalised as the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM), the

Irish Council of Churches  
Irish Inter-Church Meeting

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means by which the ICC continues to engage and collaborate with the Catholic Church. The IICM is co-chaired by the President of the ICC and a representative of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.

During the livestreamed service the congregation will hear from the Most Rev Eamon Martin, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, and the Rev Dr Harold Good, former President of the Methodist Church, who will each deliver an address. The service will be led by the Dean of Belfast, the Very Rev Stephen Forde.

Looking forward to the service, Church of Ireland Bishop Andrew Forster, President of the ICC and Co-Chair of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, remarked: 'The Irish Council of Churches was born at a time of great change and uncertainty in Ireland; likewise the Irish Inter-Church Meeting began as an effort of the Churches to respond to the divisions in our society during the worst days of the Troubles. This year we celebrate how the Churches of our island have sought to bring hope in difficult days and together share the good news of Jesus Christ. We delight in celebrating these significant milestones in our history of deepening connection and look forward in hope as we continue to journey together.'

Bishop Sarah Groves, from the Moravian Church, who serves as Vice-President of the ICC, added: 'We naturally want to remember and commemorate anniversaries of the tragedies of our past but it is just as important to celebrate anniversaries of historic moves towards understanding and reconciliation. The creation of the Irish Council of Churches 100 years ago and the talks with the Catholic Church that began 50 years ago has led to an atmosphere of mutual respect between the Churches and enabled us, as brothers and sisters in Christ, to work together for the good of society.'

Bishop Brendan Leahy, Co-Chair of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting representing the Roman Catholic Church, said that we should never take what has been achieved for granted: 'The past fifty years have provided us with an amazing symphony of persons and groups, conversations and initiatives, studies and documents, all focussed on the pathways of peace, unity and reconciliation with a profound recognition of our Christian siblinghood. But now we must go forward improving even more in learning to do good, seeking God's justice and fostering a dialogue of life based on the law of one for one another.'

'We can never take what has been achieved in the past for granted. Past gains serve a purpose – to foster together a common witness so that the world will believe and, in our specific context, will strengthen our fragile peace. Each new generation has to be won over to the cause of peace, unity and reconciliation. While each new generation can understand the past more by exploring it together, they always need to be looking together to the future, taking up the responsibility of carefully laying the building blocks in their generation of a world where we truly are sisters and brothers to one another.'

The service will be livestreamed at [www.facebook.com/belfastcathedral](http://www.facebook.com/belfastcathedral)

ENDS

For further information contact Damian Jackson, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches: +353 (0) 86 851 6485 E: [damian@irishchurches.org](mailto:damian@irishchurches.org) W: [www.irishchurches.org](http://www.irishchurches.org)

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## **Note to Editors:**

### **Irish Council of Churches**

The Irish Council of Churches was founded in 1923 at the height of the Irish Civil War and is the formal national body through which our member churches formally engage, dialogue and act on a wide variety of issues. We are established by our member churches and funded by them.

The ICC Executive meets four times a year and is made up of church general secretaries and other nominated representatives from across the range of Protestant, Orthodox, Reformed and Independent church traditions. The President is the public representative of the Council and serves for two years.

### **Irish Inter Church Meeting**

In 1973 in the midst of the Troubles the Council began historic talks in Ballymascanlon with the Catholic Church which over the course of time became formalised as the Irish Inter Church Meeting. The meeting is coordinated by a committee which also meets four times a year. This Inter Church Committee is formed from the leadership of the churches made up of 50/50 representation from the Irish Bishops Conference and the Council.

### **ICC Membership**

Our constitution describes us as “Christian Communion in Ireland willing to join in united efforts to promote the spiritual, physical, moral and social welfare of the people and the extension of the rule of Christ among all nations and over every region of human life”.

This mandate stems from the original constitution that established the United Council of Christian Churches and Religious Communities in Ireland in 1922. There were seven founding member churches at the Council’s first meeting in January 1923 (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church, Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Moravian Church, Congregational Union, and the Religious Society of Friends/Quakers).

This historical background is significant as it indicates that the Council’s ecumenical beginnings were shaped by the aftermath of World War One and the period when partition and the border had just been created on this island.

This Council was one of the earliest pioneers of National Councils of Churches throughout the world and six of its seven founding churches continue in its membership today. The original Council started in the context of momentous changes in Ireland. It served at the cutting edge for those churches wanting to express their Christian witness in working together for the benefit of all peoples, both locally and overseas. Its mandate covered the whole island and continues to reflect the all-Ireland focus of the majority of its member churches.

### **Participants in the centenary service**

The main addresses will be given by Most Rev Eamon Martin, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland and the Rev Dr Harold Good, former President of the Methodist Church, the following will also take part in the service:

At different parts of the service prayers will be led by:

- Rt Rev Andrew Forster, ICC President and Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry and Raphoe

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- Most Rev Brendan Leahy, IICM Co-Chair and Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick
- Most Rev John McDowell, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland
- Very Rev Kieran McDermott, IICM Co-Secretary and Administrator of St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Dublin
- Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary, Churches Together in England
- Rev Fr Anish John, Indian Orthodox Church
- Rev David Nixon, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland
- Pleasaunce Perry, representing the Clerk of Ireland Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
- Rt Rev Lena Cockroft, Moderator of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church
- Very Rev Fr Ioannis Pantelidis, Greek Orthodox Church in Ireland
- Col. Neil Webb, Divisional Commander of the Salvation Army Ireland Division

Scripture readings will be read by:

- Pastor Anja von Issendorff, Lutheran Church in Ireland
- Rt Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick, Moderator, Presbyterian Church in Ireland

The Benediction will be given by:

- Rt Rev Andrew Forster
- Most Rev Brendan Leahy
- Rt Rev Sarah Groves, Moravian Church and ICC Vice-President
- Rt Rev George Davison, Church of Ireland Bishop of Connor

Photos of Bishops Andrew Forster, Sarah Groves and Brendan Leahy are attached. For media queries, please contact Damian Jackson, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches on +353 (0) 86 851 6485. Website: [irishchurches.org](http://irishchurches.org)

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