

The report of the Church of Ireland Council for Mission was presented to General Synod this afternoon (Friday May 13).

Proposing the report the Revd Patrick Burke spoke of what it means to be missional. He spoke of the Egyptian Coptic Christians who were captured and beheaded by Islamic State in 2015. He said the men were given a chance to renounce their Christian faith when they did not reject Jesus they were executed.

“The courage and faith of these 21 martyrs sums up, I think, what it means to live a missional life. It means being willing to die for Christ. All around the world new martyrs are being created every day. They are mostly in what we in the West sometimes condescendingly call the ‘third world’. Yet that is where the Church grows fastest, adding thousands of new brothers and sisters in Christ every day; while we in the West agonise over our declining attendances and falling numbers,” he said.

Seconding the report, Mr Derek Neilson highlighted the Council for Mission conference at Dromantine. Following on from this the council has agreed to organise a conference on global mission. He said it would take place in two venues on November 5 and 12 in Enniskillen and in Tullamore. The council encouraged everyone in the church with an interest in mission to attend. “We are convinced that everyone who attends the conference will benefit and that this will be advance global mission within the Church of Ireland.,” he stated.

Contributions to the debate on the report included the following points:

- The question was asked why so many churches were open for just one hour a week. In this busy world people would long to enter church buildings if only we would let them.
- The Dublin and Glendalough Link with the Diocese of Jerusalem was highlighted and it was stated that the link was about friendship and partnership with the Diocese of Jerusalem. The link also impacts concerns for migrants. A pilgrimage to the diocese is planned to build a real relationship with the people there.
- The importance of enabling people to grow and be nurtured in their faith was stressed both at home and overseas.
- The 24/7 Prayer initiative was highlighted.

The report was accepted by Synod.

Motions relating to the Council for Mission were made to Synod.

A motion on the membership of the Council was passed.

A motion expressing solidarity with persecuted Christians and urging prayer for them was proposed by the Revd Patrick Burke. He said people thought of the days of martyrdom as being in the early church but added that it occurred today and genocide was taking place today against Christians. “Our lack of action against genocide in the past is a dark stain. We can do nothing about the past but we can do something about what is going on at the moment to help Christians,” he said.

Speaking to the motion the Dean of Ross, the Very Revd Christ Peters, said the issue really got to the heart of justice but was often just given lip service. He said the statistics of persecution were horrific. He said that as a Church we should be very concerned about this. “While there might be very little we can do, we can at least pray,” he said. He encouraged

people to make the situation of persecution of Christians and other groups a priority in their intercessions.

Trevor Sargant (Cashel, Ferns and Ossory) said that the scale of the issue was important to know – 165,000 Christians were killed for their faith last year and there are currently 200 million being persecuted. While there was an enormous need to pray, people could do more than that and suggested organisations like Church in Chains which make it easy for people to do something practical including writing letters.

Bishop John McDowell said that the Irish Interchurch Meeting this year would have its theme persecuted Christians.

Dean Gregory Dunston (Armagh) said he did not want to deny the suffering or witness of Christians but said the motion excluded many other people who were also persecuted. Bishop Harold Miller said there was a need to recognise that we live in a generation where many people were choosing to die for their faith in Jesus Christ and we should stand by them as we stand by other persecuted people.

Dr Tim Jackson said that the majority of Muslims rejected the actions of extremism. In reply to the comments Mr Burke said that it was a statistical fact that Christians are most likely to suffer persecution for their faith.

The motion: “That the General Synod recognises that Christians are among the most persecuted body of people on the planet; expresses its solidarity with its brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world who are persecuted for their faith and commits to supporting them in prayer; and charges the Council for Mission to raise awareness of this issue within the Church of Ireland and also in wider society in an effort to put an end to what is effectively genocide in certain parts of the world” was passed by Synod.

A third motion, proposed by the Revd Andrew Quill looked at the protection, resettlement and integration of refugees and asylum seekers. He said the response to the refugee crisis was often informed by self interest and misinformation – what about our jobs, could terrorists be among the refugees. “As Christians our lives should be shaped by the words of God which could sometimes be countercultural. God challenged his people in Leviticus 19:34: ‘The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.’ As a more long-term goal, the root causes of conflict and inequality must also be addressed but those who are currently seeking refuge need help now – countries with open arms not closed borders,” he said.

Seconding the motion the Revd Patrick Burke spoke of the rations given to people living in refugee camps.

The motion: “That General Synod would ask the House of Bishops to remind the Government of the Republic of Ireland to implement the key recommendations of “Protection, Resettlement and Integration: Ireland’s Response to the Refugee and Migration ‘Crisis’”, a report compiled by a consortium of Irish advocacy and aid agencies, including Actionaid, Christian Aid, Trócaire, Oxfam Ireland, the Irish Refugee Council, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, and many others, and of which the Church of Ireland is a signatory; these recommendations including:

- (A) Enhance legal channels for migration, and take our fair share of refugees;
- (B) Develop community approaches to reception conditions and the long-term integration of asylum seekers and refugees; and to

(C) Uphold in Ireland and in the European Union a strong commitment to human rights, humanitarian aid and to addressing the root causes of conflict and inequality,” was passed by Synod.