

# Chairperson's Address 2023

Welcome friends to our annual meeting for 2023.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Revd. Paul Arbuthnot for celebrating Holy Communion earlier and the Select Vestry of St Ann's for hosting us. We are very grateful to be back here once again, somewhere that we have always been welcomed, and for which we as an organisation have great affection.

## Looking Back

It has been three years since we last met together like this, due to the hiatus necessitated by the pandemic, from which we have all but emerged.

However, now that we are emerging increasingly from beneath its pall, CAI have begun to reorganise and fashion our strategies for the short, medium and long terms. This has resulted in:

## Committee Meetings

- From September last year we have met regularly via zoom.
- In November, we issued a survey to our members seeking their opinions on what we do well and what we can do differently, as it were.
- December saw us meet and review the results of the members survey. As a result, we agreed that we would hold a retreat with the intention of reinvigorating ourselves and the committee.
- In January we were delighted to welcome the Revd Kevin O'Brien and Kris McCaffrey to the executive committee.
- February this year, the committee took off for an overnight sojourn in Birr, for our retreat and here we are today – for our first AGM since 2019. I'll say no more about the retreat - as I'm aware that Karen will give us a report on that, in due course.

## External Events

Since last we met like this, several significant developments have taken place, across the Anglican Communion, all of which have consequences for the work of CAI:

2021 The Church in Wales voted to introduce blessings for same-sex couples who had entered into civil marriages.

Similarly, the Methodist Church in the UK voted in favour of offering marriage to same-sex couples.

2022 The Church of Scotland introduced a marriage rite for same-sex couples.

2023 The Church of England, passed a vote in General Synod, permitting clergy who are minded, to offer blessings for same-sex couples who have contracted civil marriages. A momentous event, indeed!

## Concerns

Over the last few years, despite representations made to Armagh, the Church of Ireland (CoI) declined to condemn anti-gay legislation and incidents both domestically and internationally.

In 2021, Ghana attempted to pass draconian anti-LGBT laws. A coalition of religious leaders, including Anglican bishops, pressed for introduced of a bill (the Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill) in the Ghanaian parliament. This bill seeks to legislate against homosexual relationships of all kinds, across Ghana. York and Canterbury released statements and the Archbishop of Canterbury engaged with the Ghanaian Anglican bishops on the matter. However, the Col remained silent, despite requests to comment.

Also, in 2021, Uganda began to debate the introduction of equally severe legislation, going one step further by prescribing the death penalty for homosexual acts. This was and continues to be supported financially by American fundamentalist religious organisations and their supporters, who continue to fund questionable extremist pastors, churches and initiatives.

In 2022, two horrific murders – anti-gay hate crimes – that shocked the country, were committed in one weekend in Sligo town, by a young Muslim man. There were many public condemnations from religious quarters (RC, Muslim etc.) but despite communication with the Col press team and calls on our hierarchy, no public statement emanated from the Church of Ireland at either local or national level.

And in just the last week, the Ugandan parliament passed the long-threatened bill legislating for the introduction of the death penalty for what it terms “aggravated” homosexual acts. Condemnation has been forthcoming from various religious sources across GB but thus far, there has been no comment from the Col. This silence – on such heinous anti-gay persecution contrasts with several mission partnerships between the Col and dioceses in Uganda, even when called for by me, on behalf of CAI, at the most senior level within our Church.

One cannot but ask oneself, Why?

Within the domestic sphere and in the Col in particular, there has been no engagement since 2015 (at the time of the publication of The Guide to Human Sexuality in the Context of Christian Belief), on the issue of the recognition of same-sex (SS) relationships, the blessing of SS marriages, nor the provision for SS marriages within our denomination. At last year’s General Synod, a motion on the general issue of Inclusion, in its broadest context, received a very hostile response. Recently, and in casual exchanges, we have heard that “the mood has changed”, there is “little appetite” to revisit the SS relationship issue and that it would be potentially counterproductive to push the issue at present. In a similar vein, we failed to secure a stall space at this year’s GS, on the grounds of lack of space.

## **In conclusion and looking forward**

It is only through listening to the wisdom, gained through direct experience of LGBT+ people, their families and friends that the Church can begin to reform, repent and repair the damage to which it has subjected LGBT+ members over the centuries and continues to do so, even today.

At a time of renewed violence towards gay, lesbian and transgender people especially an upturn of hate crimes here in Ireland, as well as the ongoing persecution of our brothers and sisters in Africa, and with the Church’s complicity in such acts, the need for organisations such as CAI is surely evident.

For groups such as ourselves to be successful in addressing these injustices we need the support of our members. We are only as strong as our membership base and only as active as we have members to help us in the work. I am therefore appealing to you to get involved, we have urgent need of people to assist with administration, website maintenance, fundraising and pastoral care. We desperately need committed committee members. If you can help, please let us know. If you know of a friend who would be interested in joining, put them in touch with us: our contact details are on our website [www. Changing attitude Ireland.com](http://www.Changing attitude Ireland.com) and any of the executive committee will be delighted to hear from potential new members.

Finally, I want to thank the members of our executive committee for their consistent commitment to this cause. Their dedication, hard work and indeed forbearance with one another (like any family we can sometimes step on each other's toes having worked together for so long) is to be commended.

I've been trying to recall when I was asked to be Chair of CAI. I think it must have been around nine or ten years ago. I have often remarked to myself that, all of these offices have a natural life-cycle, and sometimes it is wise for incumbents to review their tenureship of such chairs – and if they feel they have reached their natural end to step down gracefully – in other words, to jump before one is pushed, when folks are sick of the sight of you LOL.

So, it is with a sense of gratitude at having been given the honour of this office for so long, that I want to make it known that I will not be putting my name forward for another term as Chair of CAI. I'm confident that the committee will extend the same support to my successor as they showed me over such a prolonged period as will I.

I look forward to a time when the fruits of our labours will render all of us on the committee of CAI redundant.

Sincere good wishes to you all,

*Scott Golden.*

**Chairperson**



**CHANGING ATTITUDE  
IRELAND**