

**Somerset Churches Together Annual Forum
Wells United Church
Union Street, Wells**

21 October 2006

9.30 am – 1.00 pm

TOGETHER IN THE COMMON LIFE

Keynote Speakers:

Colin Brown, Fresh Expressions of Church Team

*Peter Lynch (Chair of Weston-super-Mare Churches Together)
and others from the churches in Weston*

All who are interested in churches of different traditions sharing their life together locally are invited to this special gathering which is held every year.

The morning will include worship, two presentations on life among churches in partnership together locally, an opportunity to share our experience and small group discussion.

To book your place, please contact Robin Dixon on 01225 872903 or at sctog@blueyonder.co.uk

Further details will be sent to participants before the event.

COPYDATE FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER: 10 SEPTEMBER 2006

Somerset Churches Together Newsletter appears four times each year in October, January, April and July.

Please send copy to **Robin Dixon, County Ecumenical Officer, 25, Claverton Road West, Saltford, Bristol BS31 3AL.** e-mail: sctog@blueyonder.co.uk



In the Power of the Spirit

I was listening to a radio report the other day in which it was pointed out that the overall crime rate in England and Wales has fallen for the past eleven years. Yet the perception is different. Many people think that the crime rate is on the increase and this instills fear.

Fear paralyses relationships. People put up barriers towards one another and live behind locked doors both literally and metaphorically. Neighbours are strangers to one another. Newcomers into an area can be regarded indifferently or even suspiciously. People become isolated and a sense of community is not present. But we are not made to be lonely. We are made for community, for friendship, for love.

The feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the followers of Jesus, is about opening doors to life not closing them. We hear how the apostles were hiding behind locked doors because they were afraid. The Spirit of God comes to set them free, to enable them to live.

We celebrate the feast of Pentecost because that same spirit comes to set us free from our fears and enables us to live. Pentecost is not about yesterday but about today – what God wishes to do for us.

We are in a different world from the first disciples. We live in a different society. We have to face our particular challenges which can seem to threaten us but which can be faced.

At a recent conference of Churches Together in England, four challenges were identified as needing attention. They were the challenge to build community in new housing areas so that people do not feel vulnerable and lonely; the challenge to build up good relationships between different faiths and cultures; the challenge to face up to modern forms of slavery such as the trafficking of women for the sex industry; and the challenge to care for the environment so that we can hand on to future generations a world that has been cared for and not exploited.

These four challenges can seem overwhelming. We can do something about them if we are willing to allow the Spirit of God to take away our fears and enable us to renew the face of the earth.

Rt Revd Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton and Chair of Somerset Churches Together



PRAYER FOR SOMERSET

Prayer for Somerset will be a dynamic beacon prayer event and will draw together hundreds of Christians from across the county to pray for the re-evangelization and social transformation of local communities within Somerset.

This prayer event will be held on **Friday 22 September 2006 at 7.30 pm** in Wells Cathedral, a very beautiful, historic and significant place of worship within the county.

Our vision is to inspire and support Christians, to promote the spread of God's kingdom and to inform local leaders of the impact on communities through lives changed as a result of coming to faith in Christ.

The event will be dynamic and interactive. It will include:

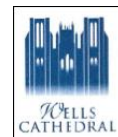
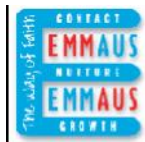
- Worship in a contemporary style led by a band and organ.
- Key-note speaker, Bishop John Finney, author of the exciting new book, *Emerging Evangelism*, and co-author of the Emmaus courses.
- Stories from people whose lives have been transformed through attending Alpha and Emmaus courses.
- Dynamic prayer and also contemplative prayer stations.

Please make this a date for your diary and plan to come along with a group of friends. It will be a significant event for the county.

If you need more information about the event, please contact:

Revd A Alden (01934 621120) revandrewalden@btinternet.com

A Farley (01935 425141) alpha4yeovil@aol.com



SCT Environment Conference had the Right Mix

Hope for the Planet, last month's environment conference organized by Somerset Churches Together Sustainability Group, proved a very popular event despite the heat and England v Paraguay.

The one hundred and twenty delegates who spent the day at The Kings of Wessex Community School in Cheddar came from across Somerset and beyond.

In the morning, they heard the two key-note speakers outline how Christian faith gives energy and vision to caring for the planet. The challenge from Revd Dave Bookless, director of the UK branch of A Rocha, the international Christian conservation charity, was the need 'to put God back into the centre', not least in the teaching at bible and theological colleges, 'if creation was to have its rightful place once again.' God, he said, is committed to a physical creation. To him the physical world is as important as the spiritual world.

He quoted Martin Luther: 'If Jesus was coming tomorrow, I would plant a tree today.'

For Jo Rathbone, who runs the Eco-Congregation project aimed at encouraging 'greener' churches, the way into tackling the environmental challenge was 'to live the life' and for each one of us to get on and do something. She backed this up with many practical examples and a whole list of individuals and church communities across the UK who had already done something, often with impressive results.

Reinforcing their messages in many practical ways was a range of interest groups each led by well-known experts in their own field. There was advice and encouragement in tackling the challenges and opportunities facing individual Christians and church communities. Topics ranged from ethics to renewable energy and from fair trade to recycling and healthy food to healthy soil.

Brian Kellock

An outline of Dave Bookless's talk is available at www.sctog.org.uk. Links to the A Rocha and Eco-congregation websites can also be found there.





**The Glory of God is a Living Person....
Churches Together in England Forum 12-14 May 2006**

On a warm weekend in May, over three hundred people from a very wide range of church traditions gathered together from all over the country at Swanwick Conference Centre near Derby for the tri-annual Churches Together in England Forum 2006.

At the heart of the Forum were these words from St Irenaeus:

The glory of God is a living person and the life of humanity is the vision of God. If the revelation of God through creation already gives life to all living things on earth, how much more does the manifestation of the Father through the Son give life to those who see God?

For me, one of the greatest gifts of the conference was the glimpse we had of some of that glory in the great wealth and variety of experience and faith which we were all able to share at meals, in discussions and workshops, and during the formal presentations, prayer-time and worship.

Tom Stuckey, President of the Methodist Conference, shared some of his vision and experience in the opening keynote address. Though beset by many problems, he said, the Churches in this country had reached a *kairos* moment in their pilgrimage together. The central ecumenical question of the last century seems to have been: *How can we demonstrate visible unity between diverse and divided Churches?* He wanted to suggest an alternative question: *How can we together as Churches celebrate unity and diversity for the common good of the planet and for all people everywhere?* The Churches should put God's mission first, remember that it is to the whole of creation and together play their part in it in covenantal partnership with one another.

In a sermon during the closing worship held in the Orthodox tradition, Archbishop Rowan Williams shared his reflections on the Forum's central theme. The life of human beings, he said, is the vision of God and we are made to be fed by God's glory and the beauty of his truth. So we have to lead others to that fullness of life and be a source of beauty and glory for them too. We are called to set free the image of God in one another and go to places where that image is imprisoned in order that we can begin to set it free. We are to be part of the work of the Spirit, giving and receiving God's beauty, power and glory.

Community is only being created when its members recognize that their greatness is to accept their insignificance,...and thank God for having put in a small body the seeds of eternity which are visible in small daily gestures of love and forgiveness.

Jean Vanier

There was also much to learn from the experience and enthusiasm shared in the workshops and small group sessions. In one workshop, I discovered much about the work of the Churches Rural Group, a Churches Together in England coordinating group which works to keep rural issues on the Churches' agenda. People exchanged their experience of ministry in rural areas, particularly in places where the Churches were working together to assure a Christian presence in every rural settlement. In another session, arranged by the Churches Spirituality Group, I joined others to explore and share together what we found had nourished our spiritual lives. This led us to think about what people hunger for outside the churches. Later we heard about the recent *Spirit of Life* event at Coventry Cathedral, a mind, body and spirit celebration to which the un-churched were invited and went in significant numbers

Another great gift from the Forum was the challenge it presented to us all. A mixed and difficult situation faces the Churches in this country. England is changing and we are experiencing influences from Christians in other parts of the world. Beyond the churches there is a complex mixture of nominal faith, ignorance, interest and a search for spiritual nourishment. There are enormous issues to be tackled such as human trafficking, the growing threat to the environment, terrorism, natural disaster and famine. There is also the need to relate to Islam and other faiths. Bill Snelson, General Secretary of Churches Together in England said these were among the reasons why the Churches should be engaged together. In fact, he said, we really have to decide how ecumenical we want to be. He raised other tough questions: Is there sufficient ecumenical collaboration on the ground? Do we value our ecumenical relationships and bodies enough?

So we went home encouraged and strengthened to continue helping to bring God's vision to life – his glory in the life of humanity. We were left, too, with a clearer understanding of some areas which are in particular need of the Churches' joint attention, prayer and action: for example, modern slavery in all its forms, a denial of the dignity and value of all human beings; the ecological crisis which threatens the entire planet; the creation of a faithful presence in the new housing areas which are developing rapidly throughout the whole country; a Christian engagement with people of other faiths.

Robin Dixon

Some Useful Websites

The Living Spirituality Network	www.living-spirituality.org.uk
The Churches Rural Group	www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk
The Centre for Studies in Rural Ministry	www.bangor.ac.uk/rs/pt
The Christian Enquiry Agency	www.christianity.org.uk

Education Resource Centre, Wells

**Short of Ideas for your Youth Group?
Looking for Inspiration for the Next Sermon?
Doing a Course of Academic Study on Religion
Hoping to Raise Money for our Church?**

The Education Resource Centre was established over 20 years ago in The Old Deanery, Wells by the diocese of Bath and Wells to provide a religious library for the people of Bath and Wells. Today, in this lovely old building, just opposite the Cathedral, you will find a treasure trove of resources available on free loan to anyone who lives or works within the geographical boundaries that define the diocese. From Portishead in the north to Exmoor in the south, Porlock in the west to Martock in the east, *anyone at all, from any church or denomination*, can use our service – you will be very welcome.

Such a huge geographical area obviously presents problems of access to some. We have tried to overcome this in various ways:

- You can access our catalogue online at www.bathandwells.org.uk You will see a link to the resource Centre on the Home Page.
- You can telephone for advice on resources – 01749 685129. There will always be a friendly voice on the end of the line with the time and experience to answer your questions.
- When you have chosen what you want, we can get the resources to you via your local library where you can collect them. You can send them back to us using the same system. If you are in a hurry for them, we can put them in the post if you are happy to pay postage.

We have over 9,000 items on our catalogue – books, videos, DVDs, CDs, posters, study packs, artifacts. They cover all aspects and denominations of the Christian faith and there is a substantial section on World Religions. Teachers, worship leaders, church administrators, students, individuals looking for a challenging or a comforting read will all find something of interest.

We are open all year round, including school holidays and we always look forward to meeting new visitors. Please ring if you would like more information.

The Faith Communities' Response to Major Emergencies Emergency Plan Familiarisation Days 2006

September 21 (Portishead), 27 September (Taunton), 9.45 to 3.00 pm

An invitation to leaders of the faith communities and their nominated representatives to participate in an introductory one-day event in Taunton or Portishead. Contact ISR on 0117 9557430 or Sheila@ccisr.org.uk

Faith Representation and Local Strategic Partnerships

The Government requires **Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs)** to be created for county council, district council and unitary authority areas. Many towns and villages are also producing community plans. This means that in Somerset there is a Local Strategic Partnership for the county area plus one for each of the district councils. There is also a Local Strategic Partnership for North Somerset and another one for Bath and North East Somerset. There are some town and village community partnerships within the county and each of the unitary authority areas.

What is a Local Strategic Partnership? Set up by most Local Authority areas in accordance with the Local Government Act, 2000, they are partnerships of statutory, private and voluntary organizations which aim to improve the planning and delivery of existing services in an area, to build on the best of the past and to provide opportunities for individuals and groups to have their say. Part of their role is to produce a Community Strategy which gathers together the ideas, plans and strategies for improved local areas and services. Some LSPs are now to have a key role in deciding how to spend Regeneration and Neighbourhood Renewal Funds. LSPs are expected to make real efforts to involve people from the faith communities and black and minority ethnic communities. Many LSPs have either one or two 'faith' places. In some areas, the local interfaith body has been asked to nominate someone for the faith place on the LSP.

How are the faith communities responding to the challenge of engaging with all this in the country generally? Faith communities (often just the Christian churches in rural areas of Somerset) are welcomed onto boards of local strategic and other community partnerships. Churches are experienced in partnership working because of their ecumenical involvement. There are three levels of community planning – and, because the churches operate at all these levels, they are in a position to take up places on boards and committees for these. In some areas, the County Churches Together Group has a representative on the County LSP. Local Borough Chaplains and representatives of local Churches Together Groups have places on the boards of district and town level LSPs.

How do others view our contribution? Some believe that the churches have a comprehensive presence across rural and urban areas from which some other bodies and services have withdrawn. We are seen to deliver services and to be in contact with specific groups in the community. Our premises are thought to be of potential use to other agencies and statutory bodies in the delivery of services.

LSPs are another way in which we can make our distinctive contribution to the growth of God's kingdom in our area. For more information on LSPs, visit www.interfaith.org.uk

Robin Dixon

Faith in Action in the South West

faithnetsouthwest was formed in April 2005. The four faith based organizations in the South West Region which created it are the Churches Council for Industry and Social Responsibility (ISR), based in Bristol and Swindon, the Exeter Diocesan Council for Church and Society, the South West Council of Faiths and the South West Churches' Regional Forum. One of the organization's key objectives is to support all churches and faith groups engaging in social and community activity in the South West region.

Last year, **faithnetsouthwest** began to research the formal and informal contribution to civic society that faith groups are making in the South West of England through social welfare and community services. In January 2006, letters and questionnaires were sent to 4,107 faith groups across the South West. 840 responses were received, representing a 20% response rate. 95% of the respondents were from Christian groups and 6% from the region's diverse faith groups. A comprehensive regional summary of the results is now available.

Some of the key findings of the research are as follows:

- Faith-owned premises are used by a range of community groups, including public bodies (local authority, social services etc), community support groups (environmental groups, counseling, family support etc) church/faith group activities, arts and crafts etc.
- Faith groups provided a wide range of community support, including advice and practical help for those affected by homelessness, drugs and alcohol, crime, racism, unemployment and rural issues.
- Faith groups provide services for the elderly, the disabled, farmers, families etc.
- 61% of faith groups have regular links with schools.
- 42% of faith groups work in partnership (e.g. interfaith groups, partnership with community organizations etc). In the case of partnerships with community/voluntary organizations, some of the examples were Citizens Advice Bureaux, Age Concern and groups working with young people and homeless people.

In its conclusions, the report notes that faith groups are a universal presence and in rural areas may offer the only or one of the very few accessible community services. They are a well established presence and provide a wide range of services to many people. They could be more pro-active in seeking funding for their community activities and in establishing partnerships with community and statutory organizations.

For a copy of *Faith in Action in the South West*, contact **faithnetsouthwest** on 0117 3042298 or Email: info@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

The Precious Gift of Water

Since the United Nations held the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the serious risks and consequences of the destruction of natural resources have been heralded by politicians across the world. Yet it sometimes feels like they are only paying lip service to the ideal of sustainable development.

Sustainable development, we recall, is 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' This means that 'it must not endanger the natural systems that support life on Earth: the atmosphere, the waters, the soils and living beings.' (*Our Common Future 1987*). But economic growth ignores the exhaustion of natural resources, and our obsession with short-term wealth leads to long term exploitation of the natural world.

I have recently come across details of a project on the borders of Chile and Argentina where a multi-national company (one of whose members is alleged to be George Bush Sr) is planning to extract huge deposits of gold from under two glaciers. To do this they will need to make two huge holes in the glaciers, one for extracting the minerals and the other for dumping the rubbish created in the process. The glaciers provide the source of pure water for the local communities. If the project goes ahead and the glaciers are destroyed, the two rivers which flow from them will be permanently contaminated by the cyanide and sulphuric acid which is used in the mining process.

We can be sure the profits of the mining will go to the multi-national company and not to the people who own the land. The people will just be left with poisoned water, sterile land and the resulting illnesses. The Chilean government has approved this project. It was due to start this year. The farmers have been fighting a long time for their land. A letter asking for the cancellation of the Pascua Lama project – with over 18,000 signatures – was presented to the President of Chile on November 11, 2005 but was met with police violence. If you would like to support them in this life-threatening struggle against the evil 'powers and principalities', then you might like to write (maybe even organise a petition) to the Chilean Ambassador, and send it to The Embassy of Chile, 12 Devonshire St., London W1G 7DS

As the world's population grows, competition for water is also growing. More than a billion people lack access to clean drinking water and water-related diseases kill up to 20,000 children every day. Here, a drought warning has been issued in the south east for the first time in seventy years. Our campaign for sustainable living not only needs to recognize the need for economy in the use of our cars, but also the need to conserve our precious water supplies: we can be much more careful of the ways we use water in our own homes. We all take water for granted; our grandchildren and great grandchildren may not have that luxury.

Cathy Horder

Eco-News

Christian Ecology Links' report on the future of energy supply – **Faith and Power: Towards a Low Consumption, Non-Nuclear Energy Strategy** - was launched in March with support from the Bishop of Liverpool, Fr Sean McDonagh and Elaine Storkey. It received wide coverage in the church press and can be found on CEL's website at www.christian-ecology.org.uk

Peter Hale of **Climate Concern UK** is coordinating a network of speakers who are able and willing to talk to groups about climate change. For more information about the network, contact Peter Hale on 01352 378452 or e-mail: peterhale@climate-concern.co.uk

All **Church of England** parish churches are being invited to carry out an audit of current energy uses so that a benchmark can be established. Once the size of the current 'carbon footprint' of the church has been assessed, the 'Shrinking the Footprint' campaign will roll out initiatives to shrink that footprint. Visit www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr5606.html

A Rocha, the Christian conservation organization, has produced an excellent CD-Rom and DVD containing all sorts of useful resources, including presentations, a six week bible study, and five short films, one containing thoughts from John Stott and others on the theological basis of environmental care. Phone A Rocha on 020 8574 5935 or visit www.arocha.org.uk

SAGE, Oxford's Christian Environmental Group, has made seven bible studies available on their website which could be used with home-groups. Visit www.sageoxford.org.uk/bibstuds.htm



Set all free has been established by Churches Together in England to commemorate in 2007 the bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in ways which challenge modern society to engage with Christian values. The project aims to highlight how the abolitionists values can transform our relationships on an individual, community and society level.

Set all free is focusing on slavery – both historic and contemporary – and encouraging Church and society to be as prophetic and courageous as the black and white abolitionists of the nineteenth century in tackling the legacy of transatlantic slavery such as racism and modern forms of slavery.

You can find out about **set all free** by visiting the website, www.setallfree.net

New Resources

Faithful Cities (Church House Publishing/Methodist Publishing House, ISBN 1-85852-315-X, £9.99) examines the dramatic changes in the nature of urban life in the last twenty years and seeks an answer to the question 'What makes a good city?' Recognizing religious faith as one of the richest and most enduring sources of energy and hope for the cities, the report calls upon government to join with churches, congregations and faith-based communities to work for regeneration that is rooted in a vision of justice and human dignity.

Changing Mission: Learning form the Newer Churches by Stuart Murray (CTBI, ISBN 0-85169-305-9, £8.99) follows *Changing Communities* (Jeanne Hinton and peter B Price) and *Changing Churches* (Jeanne Hinton) in examining the fundamental challenge to the church today: what is God calling us to be and do? Stuart Murray, director and initiator of *Urban_Expression*, believes that the challenges we now face are theological and missiological rather than ecclesiological.

Milton Keynes is Different: The Story of the Ecumenical Movement in Milton Keynes 1967-2005 by Robin Baker and Murdoch Mackenzie (£6.75 + £2.00 p&p from admin@MKCC.fs.net.co.uk or contact 01908 311310). This is the story of a unique ecumenical initiative in what has become one of the fastest growing cities in Europe. From the inception of the new town in 1967 the churches have followed the Lund Principle of doing everything together which need not be done apart.

Set all free and Anti-Slavery International have produced a booklet on modern slavery entitled **Act to End Slavery Now**. This full-colour publication will explain what constitutes modern slavery (debt bondage, slavery by descent, human trafficking, etc) and provides a biblical basis for anti-slavery activity. It also provides ideas on how to take action to make a change. Available from *set all free* on 020 7529 8141 or e-mail info@setallfree.net

The Miracle, the Message, the Story –Jean Vanier and L'Arche by Kathryn Spink (DLT, ISBN 0-232-52594-3, £12.95) is the story of the life of Jean Vanier and of the L'Arche Communities of which there are now more than 125 in more than 40 countries. The author, Kathryn Spink, writes with authority out of her own participation in L'Arche communities and deep conversations with Vanier about his work.

A new DVD looking at new ways of reaching people, **Fresh Expressions** is presented by Dian Louise Jordan and includes thirty minutes of material suitable for home groups, church councils and other small groups. It is available from Church House Publishing on 020 7898 1451 and costs £12.99

Noticeboard

One World Week is to be held in 2006 from 22 to 29 October. Under the title *Mind the Gap*, this year's resources offer the scope to explore a wide variety of 'gaps' which divide our planet and its people economically, socially and culturally and challenges us to find ways to bridge those gaps. This year, for the first time, a CD containing selected extracts from the Action Kit and Worship Anthology will be available. For further information, telephone 0118 939 4933, visit www.oneworldweek.org or e-mail: enquiries@oneworldweek.org

Peacemakers is an initiative of *Feed the Minds*, a charity supporting education worldwide. The project resources aim to make a contribution to overcoming violence here in the UK through improved understanding and communication. Visit www.peacemakers.tv

Racial Justice Sunday is 10 September 2006. For resources, contact CTBI Publications on 01733 325002 or e-mail: orders@ctbi.org.uk

Holy Ground is part of the 21C initiative, exploring the future of the church in the 21st century. It is open to everybody but is designed particularly for people who are willing to think 'out of the box' and explore new ways of living and expressing faith. Holy Ground is supported by AGORA. For further information about local workshops and events, contact AGORA on 0117 9574652 or e-mail: info@agoraspace.org or visit www.agoraspace.org

The South West Churches Regional Forum will hold conferences on 20 January 2007 and 27 June 2007 from 10.30 am until 1.30 pm at the Albemarle Centre in Taunton. It is likely there will be a focus on transport and sustainable energy. For further details contact Revd Heather Pencavel, South West Churches' Adviser for Regional Affairs, on 0117 9557430 or e-mail: hpencavel@ukonline.co.uk

Friends of Somerset Chapels and Churches Sponsored Bike Ride and Walk will take place on 9 September from 10.00 am until 6.00 pm. For further details, contact Peter Cheshire on 01823 254362.

Jail Break, Roger Jones' New Musical, is to be performed on 15 July at 7.30 pm at Wellsprings Leisure Centre in Taunton. Tickets on 01823 333852

The College of Health Care Chaplains Mental Health Resource Group has arranged an In-Service Training Day in the Psycho-Spiritual Approach to Spiritual and Pastoral Care for 27 November at the Albemarle Centre in Taunton from 10.30 am to 4.00 pm. Further information from mark.sutherland@slam.nhs.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

JULY

22-28 New Wine South. Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet. 020 8567 6717 or e-mail: info@new-wine.org

AUGUST

19-23 Soul Survivor. Royal Bath and West Showground, Shepton Mallet. 0870 0543331 or www.soulsurvivor.com

25-28 Greenbelt Festival 2006. Cheltenham Racecourse. 020 7374 2760 or e-mail: info@greenbelt.org.uk

SEPTEMBER

9 Friends of Somerset Chapels and Churches Sponsored Bike Ride and Walk. 01823 254362.

10-17 Bishop's Palace Octocentennial Festival in Wells. A week long festival to celebrate the 800th Anniversary of the Bishop's Palace. Visit www.wells800.uk

10 Racial Justice Sunday. 020 7654 7254 or e-mail: ccrj@ctbi.org.uk

OCTOBER

6 CAFOD Harvest Family Fast Day. 020 7783 7900 or visit www.cafod.org.uk

22-29 One World Week. Mind the Gap. 0118 939 4933 or e-mail: enquiries@oneworldweek.org