

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

7 May 2005

9.30 am – 1.00 pm

COVENANTING FOR MISSION

Speaker: Revd John Cole
Church of England National Advisor for Unity in Mission

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

The morning will include worship, a keynote presentation, an opportunity to share our experience together and small group discussion.

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

Further details will be sent to participants before the event.

NEW TREASURER

Sue Lloyd has been Treasurer for Somerset Churches Together for several years. She now has other responsibilities and we need a successor. If you have financial expertise, or know someone who has, please contact Robin Dixon on 01225 872903 or at sctog@blueyonder.co.uk

COPYDATE FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER: 10 JUNE 2005

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

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Why We Need Local Ecumenical Partnerships?

Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) have been recognised for many years as a creative and challenging part of the English ecumenical scene. An LEP is the sharing of particular aspects of worship, life and mission by congregations from different denominations acting under the supervision of a local ecumenical body and with the agreement of their church structures. There are currently nine LEPs in Somerset, all of which act under the supervision of Somerset Churches Together.

*In the following article, **Michael Robertson, Ecumenical Officer for the Diocese of Clifton**, outlines the Roman Catholic view on why Local Ecumenical Partnerships continue to be an important part of ecumenical life.*

Introduction

Local Ecumenical Partnerships are not merely convenient organisational structures. The shared life of an LEP can be a powerful statement of the nature and purpose of Christ's Church. Many LEPs are communities which draw Christians into an ever closer fellowship in which they support one another along their journeys of repentance, renewal and mission.

Why the Church?

God calls all people to become his children, sharers in his divine life. Catholics believe that the grace which God gives to help us to respond to his call comes through visible signs, 'sacraments'. Although we commonly speak of the *sacrament* of Baptism or the *sacrament* of Marriage, the word 'sacrament' can also be used of other signs of God's will for our salvation. The sacramental principle — that visible signs disclose God's saving work — is fundamental to Catholic theology.

The Second Vatican Council, in its great teaching document on the Church, declared that God established the Church to be the “visible sacrament” of the unity of all who, “in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace”. (*Lumen Gentium* [LG] n.9) Catholics make no distinction between an invisible Church known only to God and a visible institutional church. Although suffering from the disputes and divisions of past centuries, it is the one Church, as established by God in Jesus Christ, which exists here and now on this earth. Pope Paul VI, reflecting on Vatican II's teaching, described the Church as “the visible plan of God's love for humanity,” because God desires “that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit.” (quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n.776)

For Catholics, therefore, the Church is a

visible (is experienced here on earth)

sacrament (a sign used by God for our salvation)

of *unity* (shows God's will that we be one with him and each other)

A Real, Though Imperfect, Communion

While the Church is a sacrament of unity, we live in an age when Christians are disunited. For over 40 years the Catholic Church has worked alongside other churches and ecclesial communities to end the scandal of disunity, playing a full part in the ecumenical movement. It understands the goal of that movement as being visible unity in which there will be full communion among all Christians.

Even in the present situation of Christian disunity the Catholic Church believes that a real, though imperfect, communion already exists among Christians. Vatican II acknowledged that Catholics share with other Christians the practice of prayer and worship, reverence for the Bible as a rule of faith and of life, and belief in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are united in a particularly close way with those Christians who celebrate the sacrament of Baptism. (LG, n.15)

Because of the importance which they attach to the sacramental principle, Catholics wholeheartedly support those initiatives which make explicit their communion with other Christians. At the national level Catholic bishops have entered into a covenant with other Christian leaders: "to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which is his body; and to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world". (*Constitution of Churches Together in England*, article 1) Each bishop, through county ecumenical bodies, is a member of one or more covenants with regional Christian leaders within his diocese.

At the local level Catholic parishes make visible their communion with other Christian congregations in a variety of ways. Some are members of *Churches Together* groups, others enter into the more formal covenant of a Local Ecumenical Partnership.

LEPs: Visible Signs of Communion

The participation of a Catholic parish in an LEP is a clear sign of the close fellowship which it enjoys with its partners. The shared life of an LEP can be a sacrament of local communion: both an eloquent statement to the wider community of the extent to which these Christians from different traditions are united in faith, and the means through which God brings his people in this locality into closer unity.

Disunity is an impediment to mission; it undermines the Church's call to humankind to become one People of God. Conversely, a growth in communion strengthens mission. When it is widely known that the different churches in a town or district work and worship together they are more likely to be listened to because they live what they preach.

The journey towards Christian unity is one of repentance and renewal. In their Decree on Ecumenism the bishops at Vatican II wrote, "There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart". (*Unitatis redintegratio* n.7) The commitments made in an LEP covenant provide opportunities for repentance and renewal to take place. As Catholics join with other Christians in a spiritual ecumenism of worship, prayer, study, and service in the community, so together they are confronted by the demands of the Gospel. From whatever tradition each has come they enter into a deepening dialogue with one another, and so acquire the confidence honestly to share their failures to follow Christ. Out of that shared repentance comes the will to support one another along the path of renewal, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:2-3)

LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS IN SOMERSET

BATHEASTON (Anglican/Methodist/Roman Catholic). Ministers: Revd Alison Fry (A), Revd Brian McEvoy (RC); Revd John Emmett (M).

BOURNVILLE (Anglican/Methodist). Ministers: Revd Bethan Guttridge (A), Revd Norman Wallwork (M).

BREAN (Anglican/Methodist). Ministers: Revd Stephen Hill (M); Revd Sally Lacy (A).

LOCKING CASTLE (Anglican/Baptist/Methodist/URC). Ministers: Revd John Bolton (A); Revd Robert Channon (M); Revd Brian Lawrence (B); Revd Brian Townsend (URC).

PILL (Anglican/Baptist/Methodist). Ministers: Revd Barry Bishop (M); Revd Ruth Legg (A); Revd Brian Scott (B).

MILBORNE PORT (Anglican/Methodist/Roman Catholic). Ministers: Revd Tim Huc (M/URC); Revd Barnabas Page (RC); Revd John Perry (A).

SANDFORD (Anglican/Methodist). Ministers: Revd John Abdy (A); Revd Pam Pembro (M).

WORLE (Anglican/Methodist). Ministers: Revd Colin Blake (A); Revd Matthew Frankum (A); Revd Carol Gill (M); Revd Preb Neville Kent (A).

YEOVIL (Anglican/Baptist/Methodist/URC). Ministers: Revd Margi Campbell (A); Revd Nigel Coke-Woods (M); Revd Ivor Hughes (A); Revd Sandra Pickard (URC); Revd Will Thompson (B).

Ecumenical Canons for Wells Cathedral

Rt Revd Dom Richard Yeo, Abbot of Downside, and Revd Norman Wallwork, Superintendent Methodist Minister for the Weston-super-Mare & Burnham on Sea Circuit, were installed as the first ecumenical Prebendaries of Wells Cathedral and became members of the Cathedral's College of Canons on 26 February 2005.

The Collation and Installation were made in the Quire of the Cathedral. Evensong followed in the Cathedral Nave, during which the Cathedral Choir sang Tippett's anthem 'Steal Away'.

During the Collation, the Bishop of Bath and Wells said that the event was a step towards the reality we all long and pray for – the unity of all believers in Christ. It was 'a statement of faith, an activity of hope and an intention of love'. A challenge that faced the whole Christian community was 'to work together for the unity of all believers in Christ'. Today, he said, was 'a step toward the reality we long and pray for', 'a symbol of our intention to love one another as we have been loved by God in Christ Jesus'.

What is Unity?

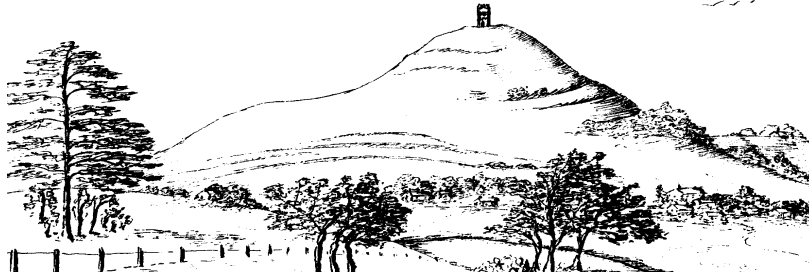
Agreeing to tolerate one another is good but it is not unity. Agreeing to try to offend one another is good but it is not unity. Agreeing to talk only about some subjects and not others when we are together is diplomatic but not necessarily unity. 'If I adopted that approach to the unity of my marriage, my wife would be quick to whack me round my head,' he said

So reckons Revd Peter Lynch of Worle Baptist Church and current Chairman of Churches Together in Weston-super-Mare. He was preaching at the final meeting of the town's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

'Unity', he said, 'is about something that goes on in our hearts towards our Christian brothers and sisters'. The good news is that there is something we can focus on that is appropriate to the achievement of that unity; something that will unite us despite our differences. It is simply the person, words and works of Jesus.

Christian Aid

Walk the Tor



A sponsored walk and service for Christian Aid Week
Sunday 22 May 2005 **2.30 pm**

A sponsored walk to raise money for the world's poorest communities and a good afternoon out for all the family!

This year, Michael Eavis will lead the walk which starts at 2.30 pm. We will assemble at St John's Church, High Street, Glastonbury from 1.30 pm. Light refreshments will be served in the church and there will be face painting for the children. Car parks are nearby and toilets are in the church. We will proceed to the top of Glastonbury Tor where we will stop for a hymn and a prayer, then walk back into Glastonbury to finish in the grounds of Glastonbury Abbey. Strong footwear and warm clothing are recommended as it can be muddy underfoot and very windy on the top. The walk is two and a half miles long and steep in places but there are good footpaths and steps on the Tor.

An ecumenical service will follow at 4.30 pm in the Abbey ruins. The service will feature the MAKE POVERTY HISTORY campaign and Michael Eavis will talk about his visits to Africa. Music will be provided by the Kindred Spirits Jazz Group and there will be a collection for Christian Aid. Anyone unable to take part in the walk should meet in Silver Street at 4.15 pm for entry to the service.

Those who take part will send the money they raise to Christian Aid through their own church representative or, if this is not possible, through Jane Gardner, Christian Aid, 3, College Green, Gloucester GL1 2LR (01452 309115). For sponsor forms and details of the walk, or for more posters and leaflets, contact Roy Ellis, 29, Downside, Street, Somerset BA16 0DL tel: 01458 442313, e-mail: royellis@fish.co.uk

Chard Churches Together

Chard Churches Together is made up of eight congregations, two Anglican, one Methodist, one Baptist, one Roman Catholic and three free assemblies. The association we have goes back many years; it has always worked well, and is now working even better than ever.

We have had two major things on our mind during the past year: one, the coming into our town of a large group of Portuguese workers employed by the local meat-processing factory. They often endure some considerable hardship, with low pay, expensive accommodation which they have to vacate anyway if they find work elsewhere, and an inability to attend church because of working times for them, also to help them in learning English and to sort out more worry-free accommodation for them.

Our second preoccupation, in many ways much more challenging, has been our decision to appoint a Youth Worker who will work on our behalf in the schools and evening centres, to help young people with their problems, moral and spiritual, as so many young people find life today difficult to cope with. We have now, after some two years work on the project, appointed a young American man, who has accepted the appointment initially for three years: as a group of churches, we have to fund this project on a continuing basis, which is quite a difficult challenge to us all. His need at the moment is for a car to enable him to get around more easily, as Chard is a widespread town, and we are working on this. His commissioning was at a joint service on 18 March when we committed him and the work among the young of our town to God; our hopes are high, your prayers will be welcome.

Our town supports Project Romania, which is a particularly Chard-based charity, having close links with the village of Seica Mare in Romania; the churches also help this project financially, with various fund-raising events and collections at joint services. Now two Baptist friends have made their home for the foreseeable future in this village, helping in various projects such as the construction of new premises, school breakfasts, medical help, and generally helping an impoverished population to recover its dignity and identity.

As a group of Churches we always, of course, join together for the Service of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, for a Procession of Witness through the main street of Chard on Good Friday, for a sunrise service on Easter Day on a hill outside the town (have not seen the sun for three years on this occasion but such is faith!), and for many social occasions such as a ramble, treasure hunt, barbeque, Barn Dance, Quiz, skittles, which a sub-committee arranges to keep us amused throughout the year. At the moment, we are enjoying ecumenical house groups for the Lent Course, 'Better Together', from York Courses. After Easter, we joined together for a post-Course supper, to feed and feedback.

In November of last year, we put on a Celtic Workshop day. We invited Alison Adam to lead this event. She and her music colleague, Emily, a member of the Iona Community, worked for many years with John Bell, but Alison now runs an organisation herself, called Worship Works.

The day gave us all an opportunity to learn about ways of making our worship more meaningful, changing mindsets and seating arrangements, times of teaching and questioning and times of quiet. We were -surprisingly – taught to sing in harmony, without music or even words in front of us! This is one of the things that they do so well. The Celtic ethos, underlying Alison's leading of the day, is becoming ever more appreciated, helping us to see loving God and our neighbour in a new way.

We have welcomed a new vicar to our town during this past year. In fact, among our churches only the Roman Catholic Church has had its leader for more than three years, so we are a 'young' team, and all are keen to work together for God and our neighbour in our town.

We really value the support given to each other by getting to know people from other churches, by appreciating their problems and their joys, and by sharing in joint ventures of many kinds.

It is so much 'Better Together'!

Iris Castleton



Caring for the Environment

'The Church of England has debated **environmental issues** at the General Synod. The United Reformed Church had a similar debate last year, as has the Methodist Church in the past, and the Baptist Union has an Environment Policy, all pledging action on creation care. We need to push the church hierarchies to deliver on statements made at the national level, but we cannot do this without working ourselves at the local level. So keep going! You have the backing of organisations'. *Jo Rathbone, Eco-Congregation, www.ecocongregation.org*

At the Assembly of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland in February, Dr Jeremy Leggett, a leading expert on solar energy, challenged the churches to take a leadership role in tackling climate change. He said the **greenhouse effect** should be seen as the single biggest threat to the human future of the planet. A radical reduction in emissions was crucial and green technology should be an important part of the solution. However, he said that 'with the notable exception of some local governments, leadership in making the changes is sadly lacking at all levels. The time is right for the churches to play a leadership role'.

Use **recycled paper** for your church notice sheet/service sheet! And shop around for the best deals. Could you buy in bulk and sell on to other churches in your area? Contact Premier Paper who might be willing to talk! 0121 313 7444.

The Daily Telegraph published a letter from Elliott Morley, Environment Minister, in April which stated that the UK produces enough waste to fill the Albert Hall every hour and **recycling aluminium** uses 80% less energy than extracting new aluminium from the ground. Evesham Methodist Church raises hundreds of pounds through collecting aluminium cans. Could your church get into recycling and raise money at the same time?

Bulk purchasing for churches. Could part of your activity to care for creation involve bulk purchasing and offering cheaper energy efficient bulbs to other churches, community groups or individuals? Ultima lamps is a mail order source that could help.





Green Resources for Churches

Top Tips for Cooler Churches. Use the building efficiently – don't heat the whole church if you don't have to; Install low-energy light bulbs wherever possible; Set heating controls so that comfort is reached as people arrive, and then turn off as the service ends; Take advice on the scope for installing insulation from the church's architect or Energy Efficiency Advice Centre. These tips and others are from the 'Cool Church Toolkit produced by Operation Noah, which offers plenty more advice and ideas on combating climate change. Download it direct from the Operation Noah website: www.christian-ecology.org.uk/noah The site has lots of other resources to help you raise environment issues in your church.

Archbishop Rowan Williams gave a very significant and important lecture at the University of Kent on 8 March 05. Available at: www.archbishopofcanterbury.org

For a report on the conference held in Oxford in February – **Climate Change: How Christians Respond** – see www.sageoxford.org.uk/climatechange.htm Useful resources, reports, Power-points, PDFs and photos of the keynote speakers and workshops are available.

Christian Ecology Link's Prayer Guide for April is now online at www.christian-ecology.org.uk

Sharing God's Planet: A Christian Vision for a Sustainable Future is a report which explores the causes and consequences of human damage to the environment and suggests how Christians can respond. It argues that to perceive the earth as alien and inert matter to be exploited is fundamentally wrong. Human beings are part of God's one whole creation in which they have a unique role, as does every other bit of creation. The book contributed to the Church of England General Synod's debate on climate change in February 2005 and includes practical suggestions, discussion points and activities for individuals and churches. Available from Church House Publishing, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ (020 7898 1451) at £5.99.

House Group Study Course. How about using a course for your house group? It is a challenging course, designed to encourage people to make changes in lifestyle which reflect our love for our Creator and the Creation gifted to us. It is available from the Diocese of Coventry website: www.covdioc.webspace.fish.co.uk

Islam Awareness Month in Taunton

Nine months ago, Afif Safieh, the Palestinian Delegate (similar to an Ambassador) to the UK and Holy See, agreed to come to Taunton in February to talk about *Palestine – Present Pain and Future Hope*. None of us could have foreseen that this would be two days after the historic handshake and ceasefire agreement between Israel and Palestine in Egypt. So his address had an added poignancy and urgency, as he eloquently shared with us his personal and communal experiences of the conflict and injustices of the past, and his reasons for optimism about the future.

This was the climax of Islam Awareness Month (although we were surprised to learn from Mr. Safieh that he is himself a Palestinian Christian). Ajmal Masroor, a very impressive young man and Vice President of the Islamic Society of Britain, had shared with us his understanding of *Islam Today*, mainly in a lively question and answer session. Mrs Kauser Ahmed, of the Exeter Mosque congregation, had given us a delightful presentation about *Women in Islam*, challenging many of our preconceptions. And her husband, Shabir, along with their Imam, Muhammad Said, had warmly welcomed 60 of us to their mosque, and explained their beliefs and practices. We were privileged to observe their noon-day prayers, and afterwards to share a buffet lunch with some of the worshippers and talk with them. A reciprocal visit is planned.

So what did we get out of the month? We are certainly much more informed about Islam, particularly in discerning the cultural and political factors which can easily distort our views of its core beliefs and traditions. We understand better the lives of Muslim 'people like us'. And we can more accurately identify both the things that the two religions have in common – particularly since both stem from Judaism – and the ways in which they are different. We are no less committed to our own faith, but we have enhanced respect for theirs.

If you are interested in exploring inter-faith issues, I can strongly recommend a Bible Reading Fellowship publication *Listening to People of Other Faiths* by Claire Disbrey, an OU lecturer and Anglican Reader. This explains the importance of understanding other people's beliefs and traditions, reports conversations with followers of the six main faiths in our country, and explores the implications for our own Christian beliefs and practices.

Don Archer, Publicity Officer, Taunton Christians Together

Churches' Vision for a Just Society

Britain's Churches have united to call for joined-up thinking on social justice ahead of the General Election.

Churches together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) launched their pre-election discussion document *Prosperity with a Purpose*, which calls for an attack on poverty to be driven by wealth creation based on market economics. They said that the fundamental principle of 'nobody left behind' demands a new and wider sense of solidarity in modern Britain, together with a deep renewal of civil society.

Wealth creation is a continuation of God's creative action, the document argues, provided it is governed by a strong commitment to social justice. Work is the participation in this divine action, which must therefore enhance human dignity and creativity. It is crucial to readjust the work-life balance to restore respect for personal and family values. Otherwise increased prosperity will be a hollow achievement.

'It is the responsibility of those engaged in politics to reconcile the outcomes of the market economy to the demands of the common good,' it declares. Nevertheless the document represents the most comprehensive endorsement of a market economy from any Church source in recent years, and it claims this to be the 'new Christian consensus'. The report admits that previous generations of Church thinkers had seen economic activity as a 'zero-sum' activity, believing that the rich only got richer by making the poor poorer.

The Churches increasingly affirm the contribution to the public good made by business and industry. But they also recognize the new reality of globalization, which demands a new commitment to global solidarity.

This is how we make poverty history in practice,' said the report's principal author, Catholic journalist Clifford Longley, referring to the current campaign by a broad coalition of voluntary agencies for international justice through debt relief, aid, and fair trade. 'And not just how, but why.' The report argues from religious first principles that the prosperity of the human race rests on a comprehensive global network of social obligations, in which 'all are responsible for all'. Thus social justice does not depend only on the efforts of governments: the entire community has to accept responsibility.

There are two documents: *Prosperity with a Purpose – Christians and the Ethics of Affluence* (CTBI £3.99) and *Prosperity with a Purpose – Exploring the Ethics of Affluence* (CTBI £11.99). Both are available from CTBI Publications, phone 01733 325 002.

Noticeboard

World Debt Day is 16 May 2005 which is the seventh anniversary of the Human Chain which raised Third World Debt on the G8 agenda. Debt is one of the issues Make Poverty History campaign is taking to the G8 meeting in July. This year's worship materials draw upon resources from a variety of world faiths as well as words from world leaders. You can go straight to them via www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk

CHAT – Ecumenical Chaplaincy Project is a new charity which has been set up by local Christians to provide a friendly listening ear to businesses, employees, shoppers and anyone who frequents Weston-super-Mare town centre. The project is run by a team of volunteers led by a halftime chaplain based in adapted premises in the heart of Weston-super-Mare. The project would appreciate your help with prayer, raising awareness in your church and fundraising. For more information contact www.westonchat.org.uk or phone Gill Putnam on 01934 416917.

Worship Bridge has been formed by a group of Christians in the Burnham-on-Sea area. The aim is to offer evenings of the latest worship music, principally to churches which do not have the necessary resources in their own congregation. We are building a collection of various individual musicians and bands which are willing to travel to other churches for this purpose. The evenings are focused around worship songs but additional elements can be added at the discretion of the minister. The whole emphasis is to meet the needs of the particular church. If you would like more information, please contact Roger Harvey on 01278 788219.

Make Poverty History is a unique UK alliance of charities, trades unions, campaigning groups, faith communities and celebrities who are mobilising around key opportunities in 2005 to drive forward the struggle against poverty and injustice. One of the key moments will be the People's Global Week of Action for trade justice from 10-16 April. For details, visit www.makepovertyhistory.org or phone Christian Aid on 01935 850326 or CAFOD on 01823 338903.

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY.ORG

Dates for Your Diary

APRIL

10-16 Global Week of Action for Trade Justice. Phone 01823 338903 or 01935 850849.

MAY

7 Somerset Churches Annual Gathering. Wells United Church 9.30 am – 1.00 pm Phone 01225 872903

15 – 21 Christian Aid Week. Phone 01935 850849 or visit www.christianaidweek.org.uk

16 World Debt Day. Phone 01935 850849 or 01823 338903

22 Walk the Tor: A Sponsored Walk and Service for Christian Aid Week. 2.30 pm. Phone 01458 442313.

JUNE

19 Nationwide Quiet Day. Information and resource material available from the Retreat Association on 020 7357 7736.

JULY

2 Make Poverty History Rally - Edinburgh.

Words from a talk by Pope John Paul II on 17 January 2001:

"If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations. Man, especially in our time, has without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric spheres and turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken forms of unrestrained industrialization, humiliating the flower-garden of the universe to use the image of Dante Alighieri (Paradiso, XXII, 151.). We must therefore encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. Man is no longer the Creator's 'steward', but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss".

