



**SOMERSET
CHURCHES
TOGETHER**

Newsletter

No 84

April 2010

www.sctog.org.uk

SOMERSET CHURCHES TOGETHER

Seeks

- to provide both information and a personal link with local ecumenical groups, Councils of Churches, Churches Together and churches in a local area working together on a more informal basis.
- To encourage and nurture all local ecumenism in the area and to initiate such activity where appropriate.
- To maintain communication with Churches Together in England, the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland and the World Council of Churches and the ecumenical movement in the wider church and between local ecumenism and the parent denominational bodies.
- To encourage and enable the formation of new Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Local covenants and to be the first source of reference for advice, approval and support.

MEMBERSHIP

The Forum has representatives from:- The Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton; The Anglican Diocese of Bath and Wells; The South West Province of the United Reformed Church; The Bristol District of the Methodist Church; The Plymouth and Exeter District of the Methodist Church; The West of England Baptist Association; The South Western Baptist Association; The Religious Society of Friends; the Salvation Army; The Congregational Federation; The Greek Orthodox Church; Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Churches Together Groups in Somerset.

THIS NEWSLETTER seeks to keep you in touch with what is going on. The newsletter, or any material in it, may be freely reproduced and distributed in any way you see fit. Contributions for future issues should be sent to the

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Edinburgh 2010
WITNESSING TO CHRIST TODAY

Lord Jesus Christ,
thank you for your presence in the world.
You touch our pain and warm our hearts with hope.
Fill us with the joy of your Spirit and make us
faithful messengers of your Gospel

Looking Forward More and Looking Back Less

As I scraped the frost off my car for the umpteenth time this winter, I decided that winter had gone on long enough. I suspect that I am not alone in longing for the Spring to come and with it, some warmth!

And yet, despite the cold, the snowdrops and the crocuses have still managed to push their way through the chilly earth to brighten up the landscape and to herald the onset of Spring. I like this time of year. It feels full of hope and potential and promise, and those words seem to me to point to the heart of the Easter story.

Two years ago, around this time, I remember catching sight of an interview with Colin Parry, the father of the teenage boy, Tim, who had been killed by an IRA bomb in Warrington some years before. Colin refused to give in to the grief and despair that accompanied Tim's death and, instead, he and his wife travelled to Northern Ireland to discover for themselves the root of the conflict there.

That journey led them to create a charitable trust in memory of Tim that has developed centres of peace and reconciliation in trouble-torn communities here and across the world. 'It is about looking forward more and looking back less,' he said. Looking forward more and looking back less is a good enough description of the reality that lies at the heart of our Easter faith.

I think that phrase needs to be written on our hearts and to be one of the guiding principles in the life of our churches because, too often, we are bound by the past and forget the God who goes on ahead of us, beckoning us into a new and uncertain future.

As I write this letter, I am also conscious that we are soon to say goodbye to Robin Dixon, who has served us so well over these past years. I want to express my gratitude to him on your behalf and I sense that, as he leaves, he too would be encouraging us to look forward more and look back less, as we begin to imagine the next chapter in the life of Somerset Churches Together.

Rt Revd Peter Maurice, Bishop of Taunton and Chair of Somerset Churches Together

Some Thoughts from the County Ecumenical Officer

How can our ecumenical work locally and across Somerset remain life-enhancing and life giving? How can our Churches Together groups, informal ecumenical groups, our Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Somerset Churches Together itself remain energy-releasing organisations which keep in step with the Spirit? Here are some possible answers, based on my experience as County Ecumenical Officer in Somerset over the last twelve years.

First, **prayer**. In the continuing search for unity, I believe we need to constantly seek those situations which enable us to share together in prayer which is rooted in the relationship of Jesus with the Father. Time and again, through being in silence with others I have become aware of possible ways in which we can begin to share our Christian journeys together. Despair and a sense of failure have almost always given way to a sense of hope. I strongly believe that, in every aspect of our work, we need to create regular opportunities for these moments of understanding to take place. There are so many ways in which this can be done – through ecumenical groups sharing silence together, Churches Together awaydays and retreats, in moments of prayer during our various committee meetings and in other ways.

Second, **pilgrimage**. In 1985, the *Not Strangers but Pilgrims Inter-Church Process* began. Since then, the idea of pilgrimage has become an important part of the ecumenical movement's vocabulary. In a prayer first used at the Swanwick Conference in 1987 and often part of ecumenical worship today, we affirm that we are 'strangers no longer, but pilgrims together on the way to your Kingdom.' We should cherish this vision. So much of what is essential to 'pilgrimage' is also integral to the ecumenical journey – the building and deepening of relationships, sharing meals and making space and time for others, listening carefully, not knowing exactly what lies at the journey's end, appreciating, receiving and using other people's gifts and being willing to accept and live through times of difficulty and confusion. People often ask me how things are going among the forty plus ecumenical groups across Somerset. Usually, I reply that some are flourishing while others are in great difficulty. If we put this patchy picture in the context of pilgrimage, we can be positive about our difficulties. Not seeing them as failure, we can remain hopeful for the future. On most long journeys, there will be times spent in the wilderness.

And being on pilgrimage means being prepared to go into the unknown and face the new. How important that is for ecumenism in Somerset! We always need to be ready for change.

Third, **celebration**. Some of the most memorable moments in the past twelve years – the ones where I have felt closest to my ecumenical brothers and sisters – have been at times of celebration. How many of you remember Somerset Churches Together's Millennium Celebration on the top of Glastonbury Tor in 1999 with four or five hundred people present or the lively Celebration of the Anglican Methodist Covenant in Wells Cathedral in October 2004? Nor should we forget Wellington Churches' Living Flame Celebrations in the centre of the town a few years ago at Pentecost with workshops on spirituality available to all or Paulton Churches' 'Party in the Park' which is open to the whole village and drew 1400 people in 2008. A useful model for us may be *Kirchentag* in Germany where people gather together to discover what it is to be a Christian and to celebrate it. Celebration gains the attention, interest and enthusiasm of people outside the churches and gives us a sense of unity and joy.

Finally, **service**. We need to continue to share together in mission in depth at all levels. Our communities are crying out for help and support and, as faith audits are showing, we already do a great deal together in this way – supporting the poor and marginalised, in particular. Many have found that there is so much more that can be done when churches serve together like this rather than when they serve the community alone. Sometimes, even more can be achieved when the work is also in partnership with local secular organisations. Frome Churches Together has recently organised two town wide litter pick days and runs a coffee van for those out on the town on weekend nights. Somerton Churches run a Mustard Seed Food Bank to support needy families in the area.

So, it is through PRAYER, CELEBRATION, PILGRIMAGE and SERVICE that ecumenism in Somerset and beyond can remain life-enhancing and energising – life sources which Archbishop Rowan Williams called the 'four pillars of ecumenism' in a speech I heard him give in 2003. I also believe that in these ways we may come to reflect in our journey together a little more of the everlasting glory of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Robin Dixon

Christians Together in Minehead

Following a few years during which some difficult inter-church relationships had been faced and mostly resolved, it was felt that the direction – and indeed the very existence – of the ecumenical partnership needed to be re-assessed. A comprehensive questionnaire was distributed to all member churches in mid 2009, to establish what was happening on a daily and weekly basis, and how individuals within those churches viewed the role of Churches Together in Minehead (CTiM). The group which analysed the returned answers identified a strong desire for the partnership to continue and revealed a resolve to establish more effective communication with member Churches, with other Churches in the town and with the wider community, by word and action.

As a result of this feedback a new, more flexible constitution has been adopted to aid this, with suggested ways of working. Using the survey of church activities to help identify gaps in our mission, groups are being set up to address how best to use our communal resources to fulfil all aspects of mission.

A renewed missionary emphasis is evolving in a number of areas. For some members' churches, this is through exploration of linking into the proposed Street Pastors' Initiative, or through affiliation with the Transition Town movement (for environmental concern).

For many years CtiM has been the umbrella organisation for MASH (Minehead Action for Single and Homeless people). This has recently been wound up due to changing requirements, and tribute must be paid to Max Thomas who ran the scheme for so long. To move on in their support for the homeless, CtiM is now supporting the award-winning work of the Minehead Baptist Church 'Hope Centre'.

Also within our community, many churches are involved in leading devotions at the various residential homes for the elderly in the town, and our input has been invited regarding a Quiet Room at our new hospital.

Many of our usual events of worship and witness took place during the year, although the place of these regular events in our mission will be constantly reviewed. We look forward to 2010 as a time of renewed enthusiasm for ecumenical working in our town.

Taunton Christians Together – A Reflection on the Last Two Years

2008 – 2009 has been a significant period for Taunton Christians Together (TCT) – the ecumenical expression of church life in Taunton and the surrounding villages.

Highlights have included:

- The Open Door Charity has stepped out in faith and been rewarded with expanded premises better suited to serve the needs of the most vulnerable and homeless in our community. Everything is now geared to giving people a 'hand up' not a 'hand out' as General William Booth once put it so succinctly.
- The expression of practical Christian love by Taunton's Street Pastors was launched in May 2008 and expanded in February 2009 to include Friday night revellers as well as the patrons of the town centre on Saturdays. Indeed, such is the community's appreciation and increased demand for the services of these unpaid Good Samaritans that a training course to recruit many more was launched in January 2010.
- The year generally gets underway with the annual service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which is not always well supported but provides one of four opportunities in the calendar for united worship and a gathering to hear a pertinent address from a preacher.
- The provision of an opportunity for Christians to meet in small study groups during Lent has continued with a small number of people choosing to take advantage of the scheme coordinated each year by TCT. No pressure is applied to Churches to participate but the project seems to have found a niche market and works well.
- The traditional Good Friday silent vigil was revised to provide a better opportunity to witness to the significance of the Crucifixion of Christ. This event now takes place in Taunton's town centre for an hour immediately following acts of worship hosted by two local churches. Half a dozen sombre looking

people have been superceded by a crowd of 350 sharing positively in the mix of song and reflection on the words spoken at The Cross.

- Christians unite under TCT's banner to ensure a vibrant presence at Taunton Flower Show, the biggest event in the town's cultural calendar every August. Long term free participation in the show has recently been secured by an imaginative offer from the churches to display publicity for the show to the mutual benefit of the churches and the event.
- A consultation and planning process to develop Town Centre Chaplaincy has been taking place over the two years, which to many people seems a long while but these things require patience and prayer. It is hoped that a part time post will be advertised early in 2010 to start the development of a team that can build on the good will of existing chaplaincy work for the Police, youth organisations and local supermarkets as well as other church-based initiatives such as The Open Door, Street Pastors and Youth for Christ.
- On the winding up of the local Evangelical Alliance Fellowship in 2009 TCT took over the coordination of providing copies of Scripture Union's helpful book, 'It's your move', to primary school leavers. Harnessing the willingness of individual Christians and churches to fund the provision of a book for each year 7 pupil in the district as they face the transition to secondary school, over 500 books were presented by local church leaders in partnership with 16 local schools at the end of the summer term.
- Until 2008 the united act of worship in summertime was held indoors in picturesque rural locations attracting some 60 committed participants. Having reviewed the purpose and potential of the event, it was decided to relocate to the Town's Park to provide a Summer Songs of Praise with a Salvation Army Band and short but inspirational testimonies from local Christians. The first of the new –style events attracted 350 and drew in many of the members of the public who happened to be in the vicinity on the day. The second had to decamp to a wet weather venue but still involved a couple of hundred enthusiasts.

- A small but committed team volunteered to offer a free Christmas Gift wrapping service on each of the 5 late night shopping evenings in the run up to Christmas 2009. This provided a base from which to engage with shoppers and share something of the true significance of the season. Invitations were extended to local pre-Christmas Carol Services and other events. Valuable lessons have been learned which may enable the project to develop more effectively in subsequent years.
- After mounting a 'Living Nativity' presentation for seven consecutive years Taunton had no big festive focus in the centre of the town in 2008. After discussions with the Town Centre Management an opportunity was taken for all the town's churches, TCT members and others to unite to present a multi-faceted programme of music, drama, dance and even puppets to share what lies at the 'Heart of Christmas' to visitors to the town on the last late night shopping evening. The cost was considerable (£3000+) and the logistics almost overwhelming but the event went well and 5,000 high quality leaflets were shared with interested bystanders.

Not everything that has been suggested during the two years has found acceptance. One notable proposal, that of a big, open air, free concert by a Gospel Choir was felt to be too ambitious by many churches and never got off the drawing board. However even the willingness to consider such a venture indicated a sea-change in the way in which churches now face the prospect of moving beyond their comfort zone to engage with contemporary culture.

All in all it has been an eventful period with some encouragements for the future. We have sought to travel light, providing only those activities for which we have enthusiastic conveners and the likelihood of good support. As it turns out, by God's grace, we have largely been blessed with both.

Adrian Prior-Sankey

News from Faithnetsouthwest

Faith Audits

Faithnetsouthwest is keen to promote faith audits in the South West region. Faith audits are a survey of the work in the community that churches and other faith groups are currently engaged in. They show the great variety of social support services and projects they provide. The extent of this support is not well known or understood by many voluntary and community organisations or public bodies. So audit reports often act as a 'shop window' to make the case for more resources and support for faith group's work in the community.

North Somerset Council has just agreed to fund a faith audit in North Somerset and questionnaires will be sent to faith groups within the next few months. It is also possible to give the information by phone or one to one interview and a number of volunteers and paid staff from voluntary and community organisations have agreed to make themselves available to conduct phone or one to one interviews. Weston Churches Together and David Maggs – Social Justice and Environment Advisor to the Diocese of Bath and Wells - are members of the Steering Group.

Bath and North East Somerset: A faith audit in Bath and North East Somerset has been carried out by the Bath Faith Forum and is now in the final reporting stage, with around a third of the faith groups in Bath and North East Somerset responding to the faith audit survey. It is hoped to produce a final report within the next few months and to hold a public launch of the report later this year. It is also intended to give a special presentation of the report to the Bath Local Strategic Partnership.

Somerset: Somerset Council has also supported the idea of a faith audit in Somerset and is trying to identify funding to carry it out, in conjunction with the Somerset Faiths and Beliefs Forum.

Encouraging Participation

Faithnetsouthwest is currently working on a project to improve the engagement in local community activities of young people aged 16-25 and Black and minority ethnic communities. The project covers a number of local authority areas in the South West, including North Somerset. As part of this work, an event has been

held to showcase some of the good practice examples of faith groups engaging with young people and other projects faith groups could learn from. The event was held in Bristol on 30 March 2010, at the Knowle West Media Centre. Presenters included Clarence Park Baptist Church in Weston and SparkSite – a community radio and website for young people in Wiltshire.

For more information on any of these projects, contact Alistair Beattie at Faithnetsouthwest, tel: 0117 304 2298, email: info@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk (www.faithnetsouthwest.org.uk)

I'm Sceptical of the Sceptics

There is a political cartoon that pictures a platform speaker listing all the benefits to be gained from taking action against climate change; basically resulting in a better world to live in. From the floor a sceptic interrupts. *'What if it is a big hoax and we are creating a better world for nothing?'*

Results of a poll carried out for the BBC on the 5th February revealed that the number of people who are sceptical about the reality or causes of global warming is growing. That is despite the overwhelming scientific and meteorological evidence it is happening and is caused largely by humans.

Of the 1001 people polled 25 per cent thought climate change was not happening compared to 15 per cent in a similar poll in November. And 38 per cent believed that although climate change was happening, it has not been proven to be largely man-made, compared with 32 per cent in November.

So why is the scepticism growing? It can't be mere coincidence that the change has taken place since December's Copenhagen meeting of world leaders to discuss climate change. The catastrophic failure of delegates to come to a consensus – which I think says more about human nature than about the realities of climate change – has resulted in a palpable sense of depression within the environmental and conservation movements.

And I suspect that the attitude amongst many others as a result has been that if these top world leaders can't agree on the action to be taken the problem can't be that serious. The shameful business of the leaked e-mails from the University of East Anglia

and the errors concerning glacial melting made in an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report hasn't helped.

As Christians we are used to dealing with scepticism. And in some respects it should be welcomed as a healthy quality. It is a form of doubting, which theologian Hans Kung called the error destroying force of truth. Honest sceptics use their scepticism to help them sort out the reasonable from the unreasonable. And for many that is what is probably happening concerning climate change. They are simply not yet sure what to believe.

But at another level we know that scepticism is often a way of avoiding the truth. This certainly the case for many people faced with the claims of the Christian gospel, which we would regard as good news unlike global warming which is bad news. It has even been suggested, by journalist and environmental campaigner George Monbiot, that it is a symptom of people not willing to admit they are mortal.

Having recognised that there are two types of scepticism, one useful and the other false, I have to say that the urgency is such that both are dangerous. As with acceptance of the gospel there is no time to delay. Now is the accepted time. I am reminded of those lines from Andrew Marvell's poem To his coy mistress:

*'Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime'.*

The tragedy is we have neither world enough nor time.

Brian Kellock

New Books

Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue by Walter Kasper is a summary of recent Roman Catholic dialogues with the Anglican, Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist Churches and focuses on the major issues. Published by Continuum at £9.99.

Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole? by Paul Avis points to a deeper and more personal engagement with the major traditions of the Christian Church as a way to a fuller unity and more effective mission. Published by T & T Clark at £19.99

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Voluntary contributions are encouraged towards the costs incurred by Somerset Churches Together in providing support and assistance to Churches and Christians Together Groups throughout the County. The guideline for your contribution is £5 per worshipping congregation per year within each LEP or Churches / Christians Together Group.

Somerset Churches Together gratefully acknowledges voluntary contributions received during the past twelve months from LEPS, Churches and Christians Together Groups and Church Congregations in: Bath; Backwell; Batheaston; Bathford; Brean; Castle Cary and Ansford; Chard; Clevedon; Glastonbury; Keynsham and Salford; Langport; Minehead; Paulton; Pill; Radstock; Sandford; Shepton Mallet; Somerton; South Petherton; Taunton; Wellington; Wincanton; and Worle. We also acknowledge with thanks additional contributions received from individual church members. We are sad to learn that Churches Together in Bridgwater has decided to disband but grateful that they have passed on their remaining surplus funds to Somerset Churches Together for the good of the wider county community.

Several of you have written to tell us how much you value the links across the county facilitated by Somerset Churches Together. Thank you for supporting this work in a tangible way.

If you wish to make a donation during 2010 please send a cheque payable to **Somerset Churches Together to Mr Geoff Starling, West of England Baptist Association (WEBA), The Old Forge, Broom Hill, Stapleton, Bristol, BS16 1DN**

General Election: Churches Getting Ready

A general election will be held sometime before 3 June 2010, with predictions for 6 May, the same date as many local elections in England. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland have made available various resources to help the churches and Christians in general to prepare for the election. These materials do not support a 'Church' view or 'party' line but help Christians to engage with a range of important issues facing the country, however they decide to vote. Visit www.ctbi.org.uk for further information.

Noticeboard

Edinburgh 1910–2010: Towards Unity in Mission. This Conference marks the centenary of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, often understood as the beginning of the modern Ecumenical Movement. It was a unique moment in the history and theology of mission and world Christianity. Speakers will include Revd Dr Jeremy Morris (Dean of Trinity Hall, Cambridge), Dr Kirsteen Kim (Associate Senior Lecturer at Leeds Trinity University College) and Fr James Harvey (Lecturer in Systematic Theology, Heythrop College, London). The Conference will be held at The Hayes, Swanwick from 11 to 12 October 2010 and the cost is £85. For a booking form, visit www.churches-together.net

A number of you will have heard Steve Hollinghurst, Church Army Researcher in Evangelism, speak at the Somerset Churches Together Autumn Forum last year. His new book, **Mission Shaped Evangelism: The Gospel in Contemporary Culture** was published in February by the Canterbury Press, Norwich at £16.99. It provides a helpful understanding of what the gospel is for today's radically changing culture.

Action on Asylum and Refugees: The Sanctuary Pledge. In the run-up to the general Election, churches, faith groups and other organisations are asking politicians to sign the Sanctuary Pledge. Christians are being asked to play their part by persuading their local Parliamentary candidates to sign it. The Sanctuary Pledge asks politicians to campaign responsibly in the 2010 election, use 'sanctuary' instead of 'asylum' when communicating with the public and to support policies that will end the detention of children and families for immigration reasons. For more information, visit www.ctbi.org.uk

Edinburgh 2010 is a multi-denominational and international project set up to commemorate the 1910 World Missionary Conference and to provide new perspectives on mission for the 21st century. It offers many ways for Christians all over the world to be part of the movement. It will include a conference from 2 to 6 June 2010 taking place in and around the historic sites of the 1910 Conference, video and podcasts, a study process, online speeches, papers and pictures and a multimedia competition for young people. For more details, visit www.scot2010.org.uk or e-mail contact@scot2010.org.uk

Dates for Your Diary

MAY

- 9 – 15** **Christian Aid Week.** Phone 01454 415923 or e-mail: west@christian-aid.org
- 12 – 16** **Second Ecumenical Kirchentag in Munich.**
www.kirchentag.org.uk
- 17** **Not for Sale Sunday.** Stopping the Pain,
Bringing the Light. www.chaste.org.uk

JUNE

- 6** **Environment Sunday.** For a pack of worship materials, visit www.arocha.org and www.christian-ecology.org.uk
- 14 – 20** **Refugee Week.** www.refugeeweek.org.uk
- 18 – 20** **Retreat Association Annual Quiet Day.**
www.retreats.org.uk

JULY

- 11** **Sea Sunday**



Lord God, we thank you
For calling us into the company
Of those who trust in Christ
And seek to obey his will.
May your Spirit guide and strengthen us
In mission and service to your world;
For we are strangers no longer
But pilgrims together on the way to your Kingdom.
Amen

