



**SOMERSET
CHURCHES
TOGETHER**

Newsletter

No 75

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www.sctog.org.uk



Advance Notice

SOMERSET CHURCHES TOGETHER ANNUAL GATHERING 2008

**Locking Castle Church, Bransby Way, Weston Super Mare
BS24 7BW**

**Saturday, 8 November 2008
10.00 am – 3.30 pm**

Churches in Community From Vision to Action

All who are interested in churches of different traditions
sharing their life together to reach out into the community
are invited to this **special gathering** which is held every year.

There will be **worship, displays, presentations.**

Opportunities to share experience and **small group discussion.**

A choice of **workshops** will be available in the afternoon.

**For further information phone 01225 872903 or e-mail:
sctog@blueyonder.co.uk**

Booking forms available in May 2008

**COPYDATE FOR THE APRIL NEWSLETTER: 10 March 2008 Please
send copy to Robin Dixon, County Ecumenical Officer, 25, Claverton
Road West, Salford, Bristol BS31 3AL. e-mail: sctog@blueyonder.co.uk**

From the Chair of Somerset Churches Together

OK, Christmas came and went – nothing unusual in that, you're thinking. It always arrives on time, doesn't it, whether we're ready for it or not!

Certainly, writing during Advent for a piece in January is an interesting experience – at this stage, there's very few shopping days to Christmas. However, with my son's wedding taking place before (two big days in one week), it means Christmas is not exactly uppermost in our thoughts. However, by the time my thoughts come to print, both events will be over – phew! Yet, in another sense, I seriously hope neither event is truly over. The wedding marks the beginning for Tom and Rachel's marriage. Christmas marks the beginning of Jesus' life on earth. Jesus came 'full of grace and truth' and 'made his dwelling among us' to begin something new in people like us. So, let me ask – where are you this January in relation to the Jesus who has made his dwelling among you/within you/around you? I'm sure the point was made over Christmas, but where is Jesus now – for you?

It seems to me we must ask the same question in terms of our relationships with one another – especially as Christians from different traditions and experiences. After all, isn't the fundamental issue supposed to revolve around Jesus? We are in a period of ferment for the ecumenical movement. Some who hankered after visible unity are feeling disappointed. Others, however, are experiencing a greater openness than ever before to others across the various Christian traditions. Here in Somerset there are many vibrant expressions of our Christian unity – it's interesting that most of them revolve around doing something together. What seems apparent to me is that the structures have been lagging behind where the real life is. We hope, however, that Somerset Churches Together will soon have a more flexible way of working which will enable life rather than stifle it.

Whether it's in our personal walk of discipleship with Jesus, in the life of the church to which we belong, or in the inter-denominational relationships we engage in, the focus needs to be the same – upon Jesus. As ever, this is usually easier said than done because we find it easy to be distracted. We must be wary of ever accepting that's just the way things are. Jesus had little time for religion devoid of the reality of God and if we are to be true followers of Jesus we must be equally wary of it. It is always a sad irony when the Church stifles the life of its founder and source, but that is too often the case. We are living through a crucial time in Church history and the uppermost concern in our hearts and minds needs to be for the vast majority who are beyond the boundaries of the Church. Can Somerset Churches together help facilitate such a concern?

Revd Nigel Coles, West of England Baptist Association

HOPE 2008 in Weston-super-Mare

Emma Smith is a Youth and Community worker for Milton Baptist Church in Weston-super-Mare. She says: 'We as a church are excited by what God can do through Hope08 and the ways in which the church can engage with the local community in word and deed. The local youth workers are also excited to see young and old working together to build God's Kingdom, to work across the denominations and 'traditions' and to have the opportunity to empower the young people as they seek to discern what God is asking of the church in our areas.'

Keith Hallet is the Chairman of Weston Bible Week and also part of a group of clergy and ministers from Weston-super-Mare who are currently considering how best to respond to Hope. This year at the Bible Week the main speaker will be Revd Robert Amess whose latest book will focus on Christ as the Hope of the World. He will be teaching on the theme of 'Christ the Hope of 07 and 08', linking up with Hope 08.

Visit www.hope08.com and www.freshexpressions.org.uk

The Sanctuary Marquee at Glastonbury Festival

Would you like to be part of a community helping at this year's Glastonbury Festival? And become part of the Christian Church willing to demonstrate the love of Christ in action by offering festival goers a warm welcome, space to reflect and a willingness to listen?

The Sanctuary Marquee - the 'Church at the Festival', needs people to look after it while the festival is running - and we're looking for volunteers to cover the days and nights from 7am on Thursday 26 June to 1.00 pm on Monday 30 June.

So if you think that you could help be part our team, please get in touch by emailing Doug Lowe honestdoug@worldonline.co.uk by 16 March.

You'll need to be able to commit to some important training days on 6 and 7 June, be over 18 (on 6 June 2008) and live in the south west, whilst the Sanctuary Marquee will provide you with quality training, and perhaps the opportunity of a lifetime to enjoy Glastonbury's world class festival.

The Sanctuary Marquee works with Somerset Churches Together and provides the 'Church at the Festival' which can be found on Church Lane on the festival site.

Lent 2008

Pathways of Prayer: Exploring Six Major Traditions of Christian Spirituality

Join us on a spiritual journey for Lent with this prayer guide from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, in partnership with BBC Radio 4 and BBC Local Radio.

We will be exploring six pathways to come to God, each offering a different perspective on approaching God through prayer.

Each pathway will start with *Sunday Worship* on BBC Radio 4 (0810-0850), complimented by additional programmes on the Daily Service (0945-1000 BBC R4 LW), BBC local radio and downloadable resources for groups and individuals.

Pathways of Prayer is intended to be accessible by anyone who is interested in spirituality and prayer, wherever they may currently be on their journey with God. And if this is a new spiritual experience for you, we will suggest ways to continue the journey.

BBC Radio 4 Sunday Worship

Start each week with *Sunday Worship* at 0810 on BBC Radio 4.

BBC Radio 4 Daily Service

Follow the readings and prayers from *The Daily Service* at 0945 on BBC Radio 4 (198 Long Wave), or use them as part of your own daily reading.

Resource / study materials - for groups and individuals

Explore each of the pathways with the weekly prayer guide.

For more information, visit www.pathwaysofprayer.org.uk



CHURCHES IN COMMUNITY

Somerset Churches Together's well attended Annual Gathering at Locking Castle Church in Weston-super-Mare on 20th October 2007 was a chance to share ideas for working with each other, the police, local authorities, primary care trusts, other faiths and other agencies to build good and lasting community life.

Ian Chisnall (Chair, Churches Regional Network, and Co-ordinator, Hope 2008) presented the aims and activities of Hope 2008. He emphasized that the activities are aimed at the whole community.

Jo O'Farrell (Bridport Churches Together) outlined work that churches can do individually and in groups such as providing safe spaces to support parents in meeting their children, tackling green issues and supporting carers. Peter Kershaw (Bridport Churches Together) spoke about employing a youth worker to reach out to local schools and find ways to welcome young people into the church.

Ian Peddlesden, (Weston-super-Mare Churches Together) discussed his role as faith representative on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) of North Somerset. He noted that this level of representation is increasingly required of local authorities, and other public bodies are seeking faith input too. This creates opportunities to get involved in a wide variety of areas including, education, working with young people, nursing provision and health issues.

Heather Pencavel, (SW Churches' Regional Adviser, and Director, *faithnetsouthwest*) began by quoting 'Look - I have set before you an open door'(Rev 3) and spoke of the importance of churches building relationships with each other, with people of other faiths, and also of the many ways in which faith can work with public bodies.

The panel discussion raised several points for consideration. Churches could proactively use the skills of their congregation; increasing diversity in the population challenges the way churches offer support in the community; churches should consider taking a more active role on LSPs and other strategic alliances; faith groups are under-represented on voluntary and community sector networks. Conversely many public bodies do not know about the kind of contribution to community support that faith groups can make.

As the event was so successful, a follow up group will be working to take action on some of the issues raised in the near future.

HOPE 2008

A major evangelistic initiative to bring hope to our villages, towns and cities. For more information visit - <http://www.hope08.com>

Unity in Action, Shared Purpose in Contemporary Britain

At Swanwick in November, ecumenical officers from the Baptist, Methodist and URC churches met together for the first time.

For most of us, the highlight of the consultation was the opportunity to hear the General Secretaries of our three denominations talk about the challenges faced by the church today. In this so-called post-modern society, where there is mistrust, even outright hostility, to any kind of institution, how does the church respond? How do the churches, not renowned for coping with change, respond to a rapidly changing culture driven by the phenomenal growth in information technology. How does the church minister to the diversity and pluralism caused by migration into and around the country and to the fragmentation caused by the breakdown of so many families? How do we respond to the challenges of inter-faith dialogue? This is the situation in which we find ourselves, so how might we respond?

We need to find new ways of provoking spiritual discernment, to tell people that God is ever present and that God is suffering and redemptive love. We need to engage in unpretentious service of the poor and vulnerable. There is an urgency to engage in apologetics with a gentle, reflective, reasoned response to the militant atheist. Not matched aggression but qualities of humility and flexibility are required if we are going to discover radical ways to relate to the current culture which is far, far different from the one most of our congregations are used to. We must travel, and travel 'light on our feet'. The shape of ministry, the way we recruit, train, service and resource our churches must change. Our buildings need to reflect the real needs of today. New church communities based around common interests and meals need to be grown and nurtured.

Some of the themes raised by the three Secretaries and others were discussed further in a plenary session and in groups. Among these, in some rough order of popularity, were the following: How to contact people who are spiritual not religious? Are we too concerned with internal reorganisation at the expense of ecumenism? What are the Faith and Order issues and are they important for our congregations? What are the different ecumenical visions? How best should we support LEPs? How do we contact the internet generation? Altogether there were about twenty groups set up and, like the above popular ones, they covered the practical, the institutional and the pastoral. I have the report sheets from these groups if anyone is interested in having them sent to them by email.

Revd John Emmett, Ecumenical Officer, Bristol Methodist District e-mail: emmettj@fish.co.uk

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 18 – 25 January 2008



Pray Without Ceasing

2008 is a special year, marking the 100th anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Week of Prayer was first marked by Father Paul Wattson, an Episcopalian Franciscan priest in the USA. The resources have therefore been produced in this centenary year from within the United States of America. The image is from Ground Zero and symbolizes the sense of praying for peace and reconciliation, both within the Church and the world.

The aims are:

- To pray as Christ prayed "that they may be one".
- To pray for the unity of all Christian people as we share in Christ's ministry.
- Readings and meditations focus on Paul's advice to "pray without ceasing". Resources for the week, produced by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, include a service pamphlet, prayer cards and poster.

The Week of Prayer offers opportunities to meet and pray with fellow Christians of different denominations in your locality. Often new local initiatives emerge out of meeting and praying together in this way. There will be a **Service of Celebration and Commitment** to mark the Centenary at **Westminster Abbey** on **Friday, 18th January 2008, at 5pm**

Centenary 2008: Pray without Ceasing (1 Thes. 5-17)

How did the Week of Prayer begin?

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries renewal movements in the Pentecostal and Evangelical movements of North America, Scotland and then England led to the first days of prayer for Christian Unity. Then fresh thinking in Catholic circles inspired closer contacts with Anglican and Orthodox Christians, especially in England. By the 1890s, both the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury were recommending the time between Ascension Day and Pentecost as a special season for prayer for unity.

The Church Unity Octave and the Week of Prayer

The Week of Prayer as we now know it was founded in 1908 by two Anglican priests, Spencer Jones in England and Paul Wattson in the United States. Despite all the setbacks and problems to efforts in the late nineteenth century to reconcile the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox Churches, they refused to give up hope that the whole Church could once again be seen to be one. So they committed themselves to intensified prayer for Unity. Their 'Church Unity Octave' hoped to achieve reunion between the Anglican Church

and the Roman Catholic Church. Indeed, the Octave was soon adopted throughout the Catholic Church. But its focus mainly on the Roman Catholic dimension to the exclusion of other traditions meant it did not catch on widely.

But in 1933 a priest from Lyon in France, Paul Couturier, understood that prayer for unity had to come from all hearts and minds. So he recast the Octave as the Week of Universal Prayer for the Unity of Christians. By the time he died in 1953, Christians in scores of countries had adopted the Week of Prayer, tens of thousands of individuals worldwide were on his mailing list for the annual leaflets, and people of many denominations, and indeed in other religions, had joined him in the universal prayer for 'the unity of humanity in the charity and peace of Christ'.

The Week of Prayer Today

With the development of the World Council of Churches, the Faith and Order movement, and the calling of the Second Vatican Council, the various strands and movements of prayer for unity began themselves to come together. So the old Church Unity Octave begun by Paul Wattson, and the 'universal' Week of Prayer designed by Paul Couturier were formally united, as were the traditions of whether to hold the season of prayer for unity in January or between Ascension and Pentecost - the choice is left to each country or region and in any case both seasons are promoted everywhere as opportunities to pray and hope for unity in Christ and in his Spirit.

Nowadays the annual observance of the Week of Prayer is a joint effort between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity at the Vatican and the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission, a different region or country of the world each year choosing the theme and devising the prayers and worship.

So, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is one hundred years old in January 2008. There is no turning back on the road that leads to unity and Christians in all the churches have become close friends and collaborators over the last hundred years. In 2008 the Churches will once again commit themselves to the complete re-integration of Christianity, in obedience to the prayer of Christ on the night before he died, "that they all may be one, as the Father and the Son are one, so that the world may believe it was You who sent me."

Resources from www.ctbi.org.uk

Growing in Unity and Mission

In October, an interesting overnight conference presented and highlighted the latest report of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) called "Growing in Unity and Mission" This report very clearly identifies the direct link between unity and mission.

Some key points in the report are:

- Ecumenism is not an optional extra. It needs to be self critical so that it is energy releasing and not energy absorbing.
- Our divisions hurt the mission to which we are all called.
- Respecting diversity enhances mission. We need to be very careful to avoid claiming that something is an incompatible difference when it may well be part of the God-given diversity which we are struggling to identify.
- There is a problem with being asked to 'sacrifice' some dearly held historically based tenet of faith when it is opposed to what another Christian group sees from a different perspective. We need to look for diversity being the accommodation of compatible difference. To quote #96 of the report: 'Discerning a common faith challenges our churches to recognise that elements of sanctification and truth exist in each other's ecclesial lives, and to develop those channels and practical expressions of co-operation by which a common life and mission may be generated and sustained.'
- We live in an age that is increasingly aware of the spiritual dimension of life but which does not fit easily into the older institutions we call church. Our 'squabbleness' gets in the way and discourages 'fringe' enquirers from taking their nascent spirituality into a committed and worshipping way of life that recognises the need for the disciplines which nurture us in order to grow as a healthy community of faith.
- Overall, there are still differences of recognition of each other's ordained ministries but at local levels there is a growing respect one for another.

Growing in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 Years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue (ISBN 978-0281-05939-3, £7.99) is available from all mainstream Christian bookshops

Revd Nick Williams, Ecumenical Officer, Bath and Wells Diocese



faithnetsouthwest

faithnetsouthwest works to support all faith groups in the south west region which provide any kind of community support to the wider community. We were delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to Somerset Churches Together's Annual Gathering recently. Given the theme of community involvement and the enthusiasm shown by those attending to develop the work of their church in the community, we hope the following events will be of interest.

- On 27 February 2008, ***faithnetsouthwest*** will hold a seminar on faith and strategic representation between 10.30 am and 3.30 pm. This free event which takes place at the Albemarle Centre in Taunton will be of interest to anyone representing their own faith community or faith communities in general on strategic bodies or networks. It will also be of interest to anyone who wants to learn more about representing faith in this context.
- Seminars for faith groups on bidding for public service contracts are planned in South Gloucestershire and Somerset. If you are interested in such an event, please do let me know. We hope to firm up further details in the near future.
- On 10 March 2008, ***faithnetsouthwest*** is holding a free training event for faith groups on community development. This will be run by Sara Ikles, an experienced trainer from VISTA training, which provides training for voluntary and community organisations. It will take place at the Albemarle Centre in Taunton from around 10.30am to 3.30pm.
- We are currently preparing a bid to Capacity Builder's Improving Reach programme for 2008-11 to support faith networks across the region. This will include giving advice on organisational development, governance, training and funding. The bid will also include feeding relevant developments and good practice into regional and local strategies for the south west in terms of infrastructure development and promoting the contribution that faith groups can make. The bid, if successful, will also enable us to develop our work within the various local authority areas contained in the south west region.

If you want more information, if you wish to discuss any of these developments further, or if you would like to suggest work you would like ***faithnetsouthwest*** to be doing – please do not hesitate to contact me.

Alistair Beattie, Development Officer – *faithnetsouthwest*
Tel: 0117 304 2298 Email: alistair@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

Encourage One Another

The recent climate change talks in Bali may have failed to reach international agreement on levels and rates of carbon emission reduction. But here in Somerset real progress is being made. Not least among the churches.

In December two of its Anglican churches gained national recognition for their achievements. And the month before that a Baptist church on the Somerset levels gave a public viewing of a pioneering project it has been involved in using ground-source heating technology as part of its new building programme.

The two award-winning churches were taking part in the *Church Times* Green Awards. Holy Trinity, Cleeve gained first prize as Green Church of the Year for its range of environmental activities, as well as achieving the Best of the Best Award. And Saint Barnabas's, Queen Camel got the Action in the Community award. Church Times editor, Paul Handley says, 'The object of the awards was to celebrate the action churches had already taken to preserve the environment. In the face of countless reports about the severity of the problem, what people responded to was not exhortation but example. Even the runners up could take encouragement from the fact that their stories had been told in the Church Times and were thereby giving a lead to others.'

For '*giving a lead to others*' we could read '*encouraging one another*' which is what scripture tells us as Christians to do, at an individual level, in church communities and in society as a whole. As concern grows over the effects of climate change so the church has both a responsibility and an opportunity. And the Somerset churches already mentioned have demonstrated clearly they are taking both seriously; and they are being recognised for it. Nor are they alone. A search of the Eco-congregation and Christian Ecology Link web sites will reveal a large number of churches up and down the country that have embarked on schemes designed to improve the environment and reduce carbon foot print and in a large number of these being part of the local community has been a major feature.

Some have involved the use of technology. This is certainly the case at Bagley Baptist where the 3.5kW installation in its new 700 square metres church building uses remote-action systems that enable the user to check and change operating conditions over the internet. While the benefits after the investment have to be seen as long term, the running costs are equivalent to 0.7p kWh off-peak.

Little wonder that a group of school children visiting the Bagley open day were said to have been surprised that a church would get involved with such advanced technology. It seems they found it hard to make the connection

between a planet that needs saving and a rural church eager to play its part physically as well as spiritually.

At the other end of the scale there are schemes that involve no technology at all, just imagination and a desire to serve the wider community, as is the case with both Holy Trinity in Cleeve and Saint Barnabas in Queen Camel. Holy Trinity's winning application concentrated mainly on the walking-bus scheme, which has eliminated the school run for the families who joined in.

The Saint Barnabas project involved constructing an allotment within the churchyard. The church recognised a need in the wider community for allotment space and decided to think laterally, using the reserve churchyard plot to create the allotment. All this was in line with the church's 'green strategy', started by its young people wanting 'to celebrate God by caring for the environment.'

Encouragement of others may not be the primary objective of any of these projects, their main aim being to have and show a responsibility for the care of God's creation. But it is certainly a worthwhile spin-off. And the more churches get encouraged the greater the impact on world around. It might even influence those who could not make up their collective minds in Bali. What do you think?

Brian Kellock, SCT Sustainability Group.



ecocongregation

<http://www.ecocongregation.org/>

Eco-Congregation is an ecumenical programme helping churches make the link between environmental issues and Christian faith, and respond in practical action in the church, in the lives of individuals, and in the local and global community.



Christian Ecology Link

<http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/index.htm>

CEL is a multi-denominational UK Christian organisation for people concerned about the Environment

Noticeboard



In 2008, **Churches Together in Keynsham and Saltford** is organising a wide ranging and exciting programme for the whole community - '**More to Life 08**'.

Recognising that God plays in every scene of life, '**More to Life 08**' is

seeking to discover spiritual signposts amidst the passions of life which engage people's hearts today.

Each month of the year will be devoted to a specific theme. For more information visit the More to Life 08 web site - www.moretolife08.org.uk

Lent 2008

The BBC has announced that a highlight of their 2008 Spring schedule will be a drama production on the life of Jesus – **The Passion**. Recently filmed in Morocco, it will be seen throughout Holy Week, culminating in the resurrection appearances of Jesus on Easter Day. Full details from the BBC Press Release can be seen at:

www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/12_december/04/passion.shtml

Hope for Planet Earth is a multimedia presentation exploring the science behind climate change from a Christian perspective and its impact on people and the planet with leading experts from Tearfund, A Rocha, John Ray Initiative, The Faraday Institute and Share Jesus International. Presentations will take place at St Augustine of Canterbury School, Taunton TA2 7EF on Thursday 6 March 08 and at Ansford Community School, Castle Cary BA7 7JJ on Friday 7 March 08. Doors open at 7.00 pm, presentations commence at 7.30 pm. Tickets: Adults £6.00; Under 18s £3.00. For tickets: 0845 0944 414. For general information: 020 8781 1741 www.hopeforplanetearth.co.uk

Churches Together in England's **Engaging Spirituality @theGathering** at the Hayes Conference centre, Swanwick from 30 May to 1 June 2008 will focus on spirituality. There will also be opportunities for people in local and national leadership roles to meet, to hear of what is happening in other places and situations, to worship in familiar and unfamiliar ways and to look at where we are in the ecumenical pilgrimage in this country. Local Churches Together groupings should consider whether they can help with the costs of someone from their area, as The Gathering provides an excellent opportunity for net-working, sharing ideas and seeing the wider context of the local ecumenical endeavour. For booking forms etc, **phone 020 7529 8133 or visit www.churches-together.org.uk**

Dates for Your Diary

JANUARY

- 18 - 25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. www.ctbi.org.uk
- 20 Education Sunday. www.educationsunday.org
- 27 Holocaust Memorial Day. www.holocaustmemorialday.gov.uk
- 27 World Leprosy Day. www.leprosymission.org.uk
- 28 - 3 February Poverty and Homelessness Action Week
www.homelessness-Sunday.org.uk
www.church-poverty.org.uk

FEBRUARY

- 25 - 9 March Fair Trade Fortnight www.fairtrade.org.uk

MARCH

- 2 Tear Fund Sunday www.tearfund.org
- 7 Women's World Day of Prayer www.wwdp-natcomm.org
- 23-29 Mental Health Action Week

MAY

- 11-17 Christian Aid Week www.christianaid.org.uk
- 18 Not for Sale Sunday (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe) www.chaste.org.uk

JUNE

- 8 Environment Sunday www.arocha.org.uk