



**SOMERSET
CHURCHES
TOGETHER**

Newsletter

No 82

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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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HON TREASURER Mr Tom Dunne, 3 Forester Avenue, Bathwick,
Bath BA2 6QD (01225 462981)

AUTUMN FORUM

Christians Together in a Spiritual Age

Saturday 17 October 2009

10.00 am – 3.45 pm (Registration from 9.30 am)

Locking Castle Church, Weston-super-Mare BS24 7BW

Keynote Speakers:

Revd David Grosch-Miller,

Moderator, South Western Synod, United Reformed Church

Steve Hollinghurst, Church Army

Booking forms and further information available at

www.sctog.org.uk or sctog@blueyonder.co.uk

WINTER FORUM and ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Ecumenical Vision Today

Thursday 28 January 2010 from 4.30 to 6.00 pm

Glastonbury Abbey House, Chilkwell Street, Glastonbury

Guest Speaker: Revd Paul Avis

(General Secretary of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity, Canon Theologian of Exeter and Chaplain to HM the Queen)

**The Annual General Meeting of Somerset Churches Together
will precede the Forum at 2.30 pm**

Further information from Robin Dixon at sctog@blueyonder.co.uk

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Healing our Memories – A Way Forward in Ecumenical Dialogue?

Meeting one's heroes is a risky business. During a recent visit to Zimbabwe for the enthronement of my old friend and colleague Chad Ghandiya as Bishop of Harare, I sat near to one of the few white clerics present at the ceremony. After it was over, we got into conversation, and I discovered that this was no ordinary 'white man' but the Rev. Michael Lapsley, an Anglican priest who had been a strong opponent of apartheid during that period of government in South Africa.

Many attempts were made to silence him, and one of these resulted in him being sent a parcel bomb which blew both his hands off. Today he operates with two artificial 'hands'. We talked for a short while that day and agreed to meet for a longer conversation the next day.

As we sat drinking coffee and coke in the VIP lounge at Harare Airport, Michael told me of his work in the *Institute for the Healing of Memories*, which he founded to help both victims and perpetrators of crimes against humanity. Among the principles of the Institute are the following:

- We believe all people are spiritual beings and of infinite worth
- We share responsibility for the past and are therefore responsible for shaping the future.
- We are capable of being both victim and victimiser
- We should face history and face ourselves
- We seek to be fully inclusive and respectful of diversity and of different faith communities.

In many ways today, formal ecumenical dialogue is in a place of stasis. In other words, it is not going anywhere fast. At the same time lay people coming into the church, or indeed already its members, are like hungry people seeking bread. They will go and eat it where they find it regardless of history, tradition or denomination.

I wonder if our ecumenical dialogue was to take place along the lines of the principles of the *Institute for the Healing of Memories* whether we might make more progress. Far too often, instead of seeing ourselves as sharing responsibility for the past, we seek to share blame in respect of the past. Certainly we are all capable of being victim and victimiser, but most often we present ourselves as exclusively victim. There is history to be faced, as well as ourselves. All too often we use history as the reason we cannot move on, but is that just an excuse rather than a reason? And is perhaps the truth not closer to this question: can we in reality not face ourselves?

I have been in email dialogue with Michael. I have learnt a lot about him. He is still a hero, but he would not wish to be dismissed so lightly. Perhaps in reality he is a true martyr (people don't have to die!) because he bears witness to deep truth, that salvation is healing, and healing of the memories is the first step to a deeper and richer wholeness. Why don't we try it?

The Rt Revd Peter Price, Bishop of Bath and Wells.

Faith Communities' Response to Major Emergencies

The July 2005 London bombings highlighted the need for Faith Communities to unite in a practical and coordinated response to any and all major disasters.

An opportunity for leaders of faith communities & their nominated representatives to attend a FAMILIARISATION DAY introducing the Major Emergency Plan:

**Wednesday 7th October , Avon and Somerset Police HQ,
Portishead**

**Wednesday 21st October , Avon and Somerset Police HQ,
Portishead**

from 9:45am to 3:00pm but prior registration is essential.

There is no charge for these events which run by ISR in co-operation with Avon & Somerset Constabulary. For more information, contact Sheila Tubey on 0117 9557430.

Changing World, Changing Church

From 7 to 9 September, more than two hundred people gathered at Swanwick for the three-yearly Forum of Churches Together in England. It is the broadest representation of Christian traditions in the country. As part of its central theme, the Forum looked at four specific areas: environment, crimes of violence, interfaith relationships and doing church differently. Stories were told of what it is to be a disciple today in a variety of very different places including Birmingham and a village in the Forest of Dean. It was a thought provoking time for everyone.

After the Moderator, Bishop Declan Lang of Clifton Diocese, had opened the Forum and described its purpose, Revd David Cornick, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, reviewed the progress of our ecumenical journey. Ecumenism only holds together, he said, if we remember that our unity is rooted in the life we share in Christ and in the passionate love of God, the only alternative to the slavery of the brickyard. He also said that the achievements of the ecumenical journey over the past century greatly exceed the disappointments. However, this success may have led to a current watershed in ecumenism and the big issues which remain – primacy, episcopacy and the Eucharist – will not be resolved quickly. He suggested that, in the meantime, we should be open to doing things differently, be willing to receive the gifts that God has given Christian communities other than our own and share together with one another in mission.

The small groups, which were an essential part of the Forum, sought to discover signposts for the way forward not only for Churches Together in England as an organisation but also for the various Churches which it serves. The four Presidents of Churches Together in England, Archbishop Rowan Williams, Archbishop Vincent Nichols (at his first Forum as Churches Together in England President), Commissioner Betty Matear and Bishop Nathan Hovhanissian, renewed their personal ecumenical covenant to work towards the visible unity of the Church through common discipleship, worship, witness and service.

Father Timothy Radcliffe offered some challenging reflections on the question of how Christianity can survive in a hostile climate. Part of the answer, he suggested, was a confident Christianity which not only runs counter to our present culture but is also open to it. As part of his conclusion, he warned us that the enemies of the body of Christ are capitalising on the disunity of its members. Later, as a clear sign of all the progress achieved on the ecumenical journey, Archbishops Rowan Williams and Vincent Nichols sat together in front of two hundred people to lead a Bible study on 1 Corinthians 1.10-31.



Archbishops Rowan Williams and Vincent Nichols lead a Bible Study

In the Forum's major act of worship, Revd Dr Martyn Atkins, General Secretary of the Methodist Church, preached on our response to God's presence and challenge. Mission and ecumenism, he said, are like the two wings of a bird. Various groups presented their work in a busy and well stocked display area. The Forum elected its representatives to the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England and appointed Janet Scott and Bishop Doye Agama as Moderator and Deputy Moderator of the next Forum in 2012.



The Four Presidents of Churches Together in England.

Important themes emerged from these two valuable days. In the stories, presentations and conversations we shared, it became very clear that the growing unity of the church is the result of the lengthy and patient work of the Holy Spirit rather than the efforts of human institutions. Signposts for the future also emerged. Essentially, ecumenism is about mission and rooted in Christ. It is about relationships with other people and with God, about making time to cherish them and receive from them. Often, therefore, it can be costly and inconvenient. This was a positive, challenging and energizing Forum which offered exciting glimpses of the way ahead for the ecumenical pilgrimage not only in the country as a whole but also among the churches here in Somerset.

Robin Dixon

Text and audio files of the main sessions of the Forum are available at www.churches-together.net

Frome Area Christians Together

Frome Area Christians Together is the Ecumenical Body representing 37 congregations from 8 denominations in the town of Frome and the surrounding area. Our boundaries are the same as the Frome Anglican Deanery. These congregations range in size from less than 10 to nearly 400. I am chair this year - the first Roman Catholic to hold the post - and chose as my motto *Unitas Cum Diversitate/Unity with Diversity*. This reflects my conviction that the best ecumenical work is done when we respect each others' diverse traditions and practises, and do not try to make everyone fit into one box. We work together in three ways – Witness, Worship and Service.

We **witness** to our area by our annual Walk of Witness for Pentecost. We held an Advent Light Relay - like the Olympic torch, the light was passed around the churches - which involved singing carols in 24 public venues throughout last December to bring the true message of Christmas to the people. You would be surprised how many people were taken aback by us not collecting money!

Our **worship** together is not confined to the Week of Christian Unity and we hold 6 joint acts of worship together during the year. We also run a joint Lent course- same course but at different times and venues. Last year, there were twelve venues used fourteen times!

Our **service** comes in a variety of forms, mostly through our “daughter” organisation, HOPEFrome, which grew out of the HOPE08 initiative. Through this work we do mass litter picks and tidy ups, run a fishing club and youth club, provide a coffee van for the late night clubbers (a bit like Street Pastors) and help with community projects like the Carnival. We also provide school holiday Bible Club and a quarterly Teddy Bears picnic which reach out to many non-church families. A large part of our budget goes on employing a youth worker who works in the town and its schools.

Over the years, the clergy and leaders have developed an extremely close way of working and a real relationship. We meet together for a working lunch every two months and the Executive, which also includes a lay representative from each church, meets

together on the alternate month. We are doing so much that packed agendas are the order of the day, and we now operate a time limited system for each item!

Working with such a diverse group of congregations brings it joys and challenges, but a spirit of honesty has built up amongst members so that when we disagree no-one takes offence. This year all Christians in Frome are being encouraged to go and experience the worship of another denomination, in order to develop this relationship further. Each year we hold a successful pulpit exchange and this year the Week of Prayer will be a genuine week with each church putting on an act of worship for us all to go to, in their tradition (no watering down allowed) so that we can further learn about each other.

One big project coming up in October, which encompasses all three of our streams of Worship, Service and Witness, is a Sponsored Bible Reading Marathon for Zimbabwe. The whole Bible across 3 days and nights!

David Brinn



Advent Carol Singing at Frome Station

SERVICE - A Good Chat (Chaplaincy about Town) Goes Down Well in Weston-Super-Mare

A cup of coffee and a safe space in which to share sorrows and joys is the everyday work of the ecumenical Chat community, based in a shop in the centre of Weston-Super-Mare. An example of Fresh Expressions, the shop is open every day, except Sunday, and sells locally made crafts which attract passers-by as well as those who want to chat over a 'cuppa'. The shop also houses a chapel used for morning and evening prayer including intercessory prayer for anyone who requests it. Staff includes one lead chaplain and volunteer chaplains, both lay and ordained.

As well as being on hand to listen to those who come into the shop, the chaplains can be seen about the town in their bright yellow jackets, either listening or signposting people to other agencies. On Fridays during the summer there is a Listening Post in a gazebo in the main thoroughfare in Weston-Super-Mare. The chaplains also attend many exhibitions and fun days held on the sea front. Chat has the support of businesses in the town and has been invited to offer a listening service to staff at the Town Hall.

All volunteers have attended an Acorn Christian Listening course. As they extend their work they continue to grow into a supportive, caring community having taken part in a weekend retreat and holding monthly supper and prayer evenings.

Pam Pembro

Pastor Frank Harper

The death has occurred of Pastor Frank Harper, formerly of Batheaston Congregational Church. He worked closely with Revd Martin Broadbent and Revd Paul Lucas to help create Batheaston Local Ecumenical Partnership. He worked tirelessly for the Partnership and cared deeply about the unity of the Churches.

MENTAL HEALTH 2009

Mental health issues have been in the news this year in a variety of ways. Many high profile people, such as Ruby Wax, Stephen Fry and Alastair Campbell have spoken very openly of the experiences they have had of mental illness.

This publicity has been inspired by the launch of the **Time to Change: Let's End Mental Health Discrimination** anti-stigma campaign. Headed up by the national charity **Rethink**, that seeks to work to help everyone affected by serious mental illness, along with other mental health organisations including **Mind** with support from **Comic Relief**. In addition there has been extensive media coverage and programmes on both radio and television have introduced story lines to help us understand more fully the issues surrounding mental ill health and stigma.

Posters, leaflets, bookmarks etc to promote **Time to Change** can be found on their webpage: www.time-to-change.org.uk. Whilst we hope churches will use these materials, they are suitable for individual use as well – any of us can send a postcard to a friend who may be experiencing stigma or put up a poster in our workplace to remind our colleagues to be sensitive to any who feel on the margins of society.

Although World Mental Health Day (10 October annually) falls on a Saturday the Diocese of Bath & Wells is encouraging churches to mark it on Sunday 11 October. Dick Acworth, former Archdeacon of Wells, and now chair of ReThink South West, together with Fay Wilson-Rudd, a Lay Chaplain with Somerset Partnership, have put together materials that they hope any church or fellowship will feel able to use. Further information can be found on the Diocesan webpage: www.bathandwells.anglican.org

At this time please pray for all who experience mental illness and those who seek to support them – Doctors, Nurses, Carers, Chaplains and so many more.

Finally, if you feel you would like to offer support to someone – an individual or a family – affected by mental illness, then please feel free to contact Fay on faywilsonrudd@msn.com or 'phone 07712581903 for further information.

Pray for Hope and Virtue in Copenhagen's Winter.

One clear memory I still have of a winter visit to Copenhagen some years ago was the sight from the aircraft window of large expanses of frozen sea along the Danish coast. I am told by a friend who has family in Copenhagen that the sea no longer freezes there.

If that is true, I cannot think of a more powerful sign of the challenge that the world's government heads will be facing in that city at the Climate Change Conference in December.

As Christian Aid says in its current campaign urging Gordon Brown to be in Copenhagen and to demand a fair deal for the world's poorest, *Our actions are destroying more than just icebergs.*

Some 180 member countries of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change will be meeting for the last time at government level before the Kyoto Protocol agreed upon in Japan in 1997 runs out in 2012. It is essential for the world's future that the conference ends with a Copenhagen Protocol that commits all countries to drastically reducing CO2 emissions.

Pressure and advice has come from every direction in an attempt to influence for good the outcome of the conference. Some have said that since all the documentation has already been drawn up in advance it is now too late to influence the outcome. Many others like Christian Aid and other religious and charity groups and church leaders continue to make their views felt.

As I write this, UK church leaders have again urged support for unceasing prayer for the Copenhagen conference. One leader, the Revd John Marsh, moderator of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church said:

In the weeks leading up to the Climate Conference, it is essential for Churches to give clear spiritual leadership. The well-being of creation is a spiritual issue for all humanity; for Christians it is also a biblical imperative and a gospel priority. Now is the time for us to pray our way into the hearts and souls of all those world leaders who will gather there. So let us pray – and pray without ceasing.

Church people do not seem to have been slow in pointing out omissions in the topics being covered. An example is the Catholic Institute for International Relations' attempts to have the vital topic of water supplies included on the agenda. It is right that the pressure is kept up until conference closes and the outcome is made public. But what will really count in the end is not external pressure but the integrity and level of concern of the delegates.

Individual delegates will have an eye on the voting population and their own political future back in their own countries. But the success or failure of Copenhagen will in the end depend on the integrity of the delegates themselves. Their decisions will affect the long-term future of our planet, which will survive, and of its inhabitant species many of which will not.

The failure of the 1997 Kyoto protocol agreement to achieve complete success was largely down to the failure of the USA to ratify it. That must not happen again and the signs are that it will not. Copenhagen will see the integrity of the individuals concerned and those they represent being tested. And when it comes to the key participant at the event, the signs are that they will come good.

Recently, I re-read Barack Obama's Inaugural Address. This is no rhetoric but sincerity writ large by a virtuous man who is not ashamed to look to God for guidance. Quite a bit of what Obama said in Washington is appropriate to what will be happening in Copenhagen. In fact it would be good if some of his statements could be read out on the first day. For example: *'This is the source of our confidence – the knowledge that God calls us to shape an uncertain future.'*

But perhaps among the most powerful and apt of all the words used in his address – with one small but key word change - were those of his fellow countryman, Thomas Paine, back in December 1776. *Let it be told to the future world, that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive, that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to [meet] it.* Equally appropriate would be some other wise words from Thomas Paine: *'The present winter is worth an age, if rightly employed.'* We should be praying that it will happen this coming winter in Copenhagen, whether the sea is frozen or not.

Brian Kellock, SCT Sustainability Group

Noticeboard

One World Week 2009 is between 18-15 October. This year's theme is *Hungry for One World*. What can you do to alleviate the hunger in our world? Plan and hold an event to raise awareness about what is going on in the world, both on your own doorstep and further away. For more information and resources, visit www.oneworldweek.org

A World in Waiting: Advent Hope in an Economic Crisis. Advent resources from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland look at the economic crisis in relation to the roots of our Christian beliefs and values. Web based resources including reflections, liturgical ideas, prayers and pointers to action are available as free downloads at www.ctbi.org.uk

Interfaith Dialogue Facilitation Skills is a weekend course which will be held at the Ammerdown Centre on 6-8 November 2009. It will be led by Justine Huxley of St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace and Jonathan Marshall of Faithnet Southwest. Further information at www.ammerdown.org

This year England is to hold the first ever **Inter Faith Week** from 15 to 21 November with a launch the preceding week. The week aims to strengthen good inter-faith relations at all levels and to increase awareness of the different and distinct faith communities within the UK. Locally, an **Inter-faith Conference** will be held by the Somerset Faiths and Beliefs Forum to profile the work of faith groups in the community. It will take place at the Albemarle Centre in Taunton on 17 November from 10.00 am to 3.30 pm. For further information, contact Alistair Beattie on 0117 304 2298 or at alistair@faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

A major conference will take place in the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh from 2 to 6 June 2010 to commemorate the centenary of the **World Missionary Conference** held in Edinburgh in 1910 – an event seen by many to mark the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement. Further information is available at www.edinburgh2010.org. In the light of the centenary, material for the **2010 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** was prepared in Scotland and can be downloaded at www.ctbi.org.uk Details of a further conference to be held at Swanwick between 11 and 12 October 2010 will be available later.

Dates for Your Diary

OCTOBER

- 2 CAFOD Harvest Fast Day 020 7733 7900
- 4 Climate Change Day of Prayer. e-mail:
dayofprayer@operationnoah.org
- 10 World Mental Health Day
- 17 Somerset Churches Together Autumn Forum. Locking
Castle Church, Weston-super-Mare. 10.00 am to 3.45
pm. e-mail:sctog@blueyonder.co.uk
- 18 Healthcare Sunday. www.healthcaresunday.org.uk
- 18-25 One World Week. www.oneworldweek.org/v2/

NOVEMBER

- 8 Remembrance Sunday. www.ctbi.org.uk
- 15-21 Inter Faith Week. www.faithnetsouthwest.org.uk

DECEMBER

- 1 World Aids Day. www.worldaidsday.org
- 11-14 Lobby of the Copenhagen International Summit.
Contact Christian Aid West on 01454 915923 or
west@christian-aid.org

JANUARY

- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. www.ctbi.org.uk
- 31 Homelessness Sunday. www.housingjustice.org.uk

