



in Buckinghamshire

Contact

The Newsletter of Churches Together in Buckinghamshire

Autumn 2015

**Churches Together in England Forum,
Sept. 28th-30th, The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire**

CTE Forum is an event that brings together a diversity of Christian voices and experience once every three years. I attended the Forum for the first time this year and was there on behalf of Churches Together in Buckinghamshire. For me it was uplifting and encouraging, and I sensed a spirit of togetherness and respect for one another, despite the diversity of our Christian traditions. The Forum was also blessed by lovely early autumn sunshine. David Cornick, CTEs General Secretary, opened the Forum with a talk about the diversity of membership. The original sixteen member denominations/churches have become forty three, so we listen to many voices, voices not often heard in the past. He said that our relationships should be about listening to one another as well as speaking. We listened to representatives from the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, The Free Churches, the new independent churches, the Lutheran and German speaking churches, and the Society of Friends, who talked about their histories and the development of their traditions and practice, which I think enabled understanding and respect. They also spoke about their churches distinctive contributions to communities and what they have given to Christianity as a whole. David Cornick said that what is diversity to some is fragmentation to others and asked the question, "Is the church fragmented and in need of healing, or is diversity good and helpful?" He continued to say that there is no longer a simple agreement of what the goal of the ecumenical journey is, and quoted Pope Francis, "Unity is achieved by walking". We should be walking, talking and praying together. Chaucer's pilgrims told stories to each other about how they responded to God's call and we need to do the same.

Speakers described how churches are working together in many different areas to meet need. Groups had set up food banks, projects with ex-offenders, winter night shelters,

websites to promote communication and connection, and new initiatives in mission and evangelism. In Cumbria there is an ecumenical strategy for buildings, mission and ministry, and in Kent there is co-operation in the churches responses to the development of new housing areas. The question was asked, "Is this conference a glimpse of heaven?", with different churches and different people worshiping together.

There were sessions which enabled the Forum to encounter the Orthodox tradition and the Pentecostal tradition, to understand their richness and to reflect on what they bring to the ecumenical journey.

There was a very inspiring session led by some young people who had visited an ecumenical event in France together. They were from different traditions and many of them hadn't much experience of traditions other than their own. They shared what they experienced and how it had deepened their understanding of one another. They learnt from, and were moved by their experiences of worship, and they spoke with enthusiasm, joy, and hope for the future of the church, and with the confidence that comes from a deepening faith in Jesus. But they also asked whether the church is still relevant and what we are doing about difficult issues in society like homelessness. For me this was the most engaging and inspiring session of the whole Forum.

These are a few quotes and comments that I picked up during the Forum.

"Unity is absolutely crucial for the life and work of the Church."

"Division is a scandal."

"Unity is not important, it's indispensable."

"Unity is a gift that we will only receive when we are on our knees."

"Unity needs to come from our hearts. We need to be secure in our own identity – that enables us to share and serve with others."

"To have a rich conversation one voice cannot dominate."

"Unite for the persecuted."

"The wise way is respectful of others."

"Harmony in the Church is the Holy Spirit".

"Our image of the Church changes through encounter".

The Forum concluded with David Cornick asking a few questions which included:

"Do we need a vision of a broken Christ who accepts us in all our divisions and diversity?"

He reminded us that we are not all the same and need different things from our faith, but that we need to travel together, and he talked about the importance of Receptive Ecumenism – understanding and experiencing something of other people's faith traditions. We are part of the same Church – Christ's Church. Don't be afraid to do something new – like going to someone else's service or to build a new relationship.

There were lots of questions to think about and many challenges to consider, but it was a great few days that I felt was an important part of my ecumenical journey.

Barrie Cheetham, County Ecumenical Development Officer – CTiBucks.

Denominational Ecumenical Officer vacancies

In Buckinghamshire there are at present vacancies for Baptist, URC and Society of Friends ecumenical officers. If you are in one of these denominations and have some spare time please consider whether you could volunteer to serve your church and the ecumenical movement in this way. Denominational ecumenical officers serve on the Enabling Group of Churches Together in Buckinghamshire and play a vital role in linking the denominations with CTiBucks. They are also important when reviewing Local Ecumenical Partnerships (churches working together with a formal ecumenical agreement – sometimes joined together as one church), and can assist the work of local Churches Together groups. Churches Together in England run frequent training courses for new officers so don't worry if you feel you don't know what to do. If you think this might be for you please approach your local church leaders.

Treasurer for Churches Together in Buckinghamshire

Our current Treasurer, Tony King, has decided to step down from the end of December. We are very grateful to him for looking after the CTiBucks finances so well and for the work he has done in getting subscriptions paid. We need someone to replace him, so if you think you could offer your services please let the Barrie Cheetham, the County Ecumenical Development Officer know.

Ecumenical news from around the county

We extend a warm welcome to Rev'd. Remco van den Heuvel who was inducted to Wendover Free Church on Saturday 12th September. Wendover is a partnership of Baptists and URC who share the buildings with the Roman Catholics. Remco is a Baptist minister and we wish him well in his future ministry.

Vision Day 2016

The date of the next Vision Day is 16th April 2016. Further details on venue and speakers will be sent over the next few months.

The Changing Face of the Village

Rural Mission and ministry in a changing rural context

The Diocese of Oxford Rural Team are running a conference at Windmill Farm Conference Centre, Clanfield, Bampton OX18 2SN, on Saturday 21st November, 9.45 am – 3.30 pm. Cost is £10 per person. Speakers include Jerry Marshall, Director of the Arthur Rank Centre. To book a place contact Rev'd. Cannon Glyn Evans, Diocesan Rural Officer: glynevans@gmail.com or phone 07581 491713.

Sharing precious gifts this Christmas

As we count down to Christmas we are inviting churches to be part of our life saving work. Every 60 seconds, a child dies of malaria. In Nigeria alone, around 250,000 children die of the disease every year. But malaria is entirely preventable. Can your church help to provide mosquito nets and train community health volunteers? Visit our Christmas resource pages on our website (www.christianaid.org.uk) to read stories of hope and find out how you can be involved.

We are delighted to once again have the UK Aid match which means that every pound raised through the appeal will be matched by the UK Government resulting in twice the impact in tackling poverty.

We have some amazing resources to help churches prepare for Christmas and get involved in sharing hope with those living in poverty. All our resources can be found at www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/christmas/ including Advent liturgy, church magazine article, prayers, Nativity script, children's activities and films to share with your church.

Jess Hall

About the Lutheran Churches

From the opening session of CTE Forum 2015

The Lutherans in this country have a particular history, founded in a desire for theological purity and social change but not to establish a new Church: Martin Luther, when he posted his 95 Theses in Wittenberg, Germany on 31 October 1517, desired to reform the Catholic Church where he was a monk. (By the way, keep that date in mind: you will hear more about it in the next two years as we prepare for the 500th Anniversary and remember 500 years of reformation and renewal which continues today – as Karl Barth said, *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* – “the Church is always being and needs to be reformed”). So in many countries we find ourselves close to the Catholics in relations and in look and feel. In this country Lutherans are also close to the Anglicans, and almost all of our Council's member churches are in full communion with the Church of England.

But Lutheran churches are not native to England, and we are all immigrant or expatriate – whether with German merchants and Scandinavian sailors in the 17th and 18th centuries, or fleeing communism in central Europe after World War II – and we find things in common in our Lutheran churches around the doctrine and also the practices that help us to belong. We are confessionally united, but linguistically and ethnically diverse. We are a wide communion and find a close community in this diversity. Our members come because they are welcomed and feel that they belong in this community, whoever they are. A value that I have always appreciated is that Lutherans seek to find, and believe it is each of our life's mission to find the unique identity and value that lies in ourselves and in others, that God has created each of us as individuals, uniquely known and loved and with a unique purpose.

There are some visual and practical elements that help us to recognise Lutheran community and worship, such as standing to pray and sitting to sing. Music in particular plays a large part in Lutheran services and tradition: Luther believed strongly in the power of songs, psalms and hymns to teach as well as to worship, sometimes using folk and dance tunes that would have been known to the people and so to bring the word of God to the people, in a language that we can each understand. There is a great musical tradition in Lutheranism, including hymns and also sung services which are not a high mass but sung prayers as well as hymns.

Finally and fundamentally, Luther was known for his focus on the Word, going back to the source and making it available to the people. He translated the Bible and championed education, to put the Bible in the hands of the people rather than the institutional hierarchy of the established Church. This Biblical basis of Lutheran churches has been codified in three *solas* (to which two were later added: *sola Christus* and *sola Deo gloria*). These three are *sola scriptura* – only through the Word of God, the scriptures, can we know Him; *sola gratia* – only by grace does God justify, not by our instigation; and *sola fide* – only by faith are we justified, not by works or anything else. And so we come to one of the fundamental tenets of Luther and Lutheran Churches that we can surely all agree with: of justification by faith through grace, to the glory of God. Amen.

James Laing, General Secretary, Council of Lutheran Churches

ONE FRIDAY

ONE FRIDAY is a project funded by The Jerusalem Trust and managed by St John's College, Durham, a university college and ministerial training institution with a long Christian tradition. The idea for the project emerged from The Great North Passion, a BBC TV programme broadcast live on Good Friday 2014, in which community groups in South Shields responded to Stations of the Cross through art, drama and music.

The plan is that on Good Friday, 25th March 2016, the story of The Passion will be told in hundreds of new and challenging ways in the streets and communities of the UK. Churches will be resourced to stage public events and exhibitions that will engage their local communities in retelling and responding to the events of the final day of Jesus' life.

Worth a look for any CT groups who fancy trying something a bit different next year! Further information can be found at www.onefriday.info

The following has been taken from the website:

The Concept

The last few years have seen a dramatic decline in knowledge of the Bible. Good Friday remains a Bank Holiday, though increasingly shops are open and many people wonder why they've been given a day off work. To keep the story of Jesus alive we need to find new ways of telling it in public places.

Throughout the ages Christians have responded to the Good Friday story by commissioning public art or music, or by performing Passion plays. Churches of many denominations still meet together ecumenically through Lent, or mark Good Friday with a combined service, or

a Walk of Witness.

ONE FRIDAY is encouraging local inter-church and community groups to do something different in 2016; something unique and public that is specific to their location; something that will engage their community in retelling and reflecting on the story of the Passion of Jesus.

ONE FRIDAY will take many different forms. It might be an event in the open-air on Good Friday, or an exhibition in a community venue, or a procession that retells the story in a series of locations. We will be providing a host of downloadable ideas and resources that can be adapted to any setting. The common thread will be the Scriptural Stations of the Cross. At the beginning of Lent each "station" will be assigned to an individual or community group, who will be asked to respond to it through art, music or other forms of creativity. These contributions will be woven together into a unique offering from and for the community.

Every community expression will be different, but they will be linked by the title ONE FRIDAY in.... Common branding will enable us to generate national and local media interest. We are seeking endorsement from national church leaders and organisations to make this a truly national and ecumenical event.

Why Stations of the Cross?

The Stations of the Cross represent the events that happened to Jesus as he made the journey – just about half a mile – from his trial to his execution. For many hundreds of years Christians of every tradition have re-enacted this journey along the Via Doloroso, the Road of Sorrow, as they remembered the last hours of Jesus' life. Those who couldn't make pilgrimage to Jerusalem have recreated the route in their own locations, using art or sculpture to express the aspects of the story.

Through the years the precise number and description of the stations has changed. Roman Catholic tradition settled on fourteen stations, but some of these recorded events that aren't in the Bible account. In 1991 Pope John Paul II inaugurated a revised set of stations based only on the Bible text. These Scriptural Stations of the Cross are the ones ONE FRIDAY is based on – though some groups may choose to bypass some of the stations to fit their context.

For each station we have allocated a theme and provided notes to help groups relate to and respond to the story. So the journey through ONE FRIDAY touches on betrayal, mercy, forgiveness, family, death and finally hope.

Following the stations is simply a way of retelling the story of Jesus road to death. But it is more than a journey of the head. The progress helps us to explore the very human emotions that Jesus felt as he made his way to the cross. As we feel our way through the journey we feel that we are travelling with him – entering into his suffering, as he enters into ours.

To contact me with requests for support with ecumenical work in Buckinghamshire email barrie@bernwodefrest.org.uk or ring 01295 277738 - Rev'd. Barrie Cheetham.