



Ecumenical Facilitator's Report

4 May 2017

Overview

It seems to me that we have begun to achieve a creative continuity in our work at CTHerts, but there is still much to be done. My activity over the last year has focused upon the four areas that have emerged as useful to serve the growth of a **relational ecumenism** (that is, local ecumenism, regional ecumenism, the connection of these with national and international levels, and the promotion of ecumenical vision).

Local ecumenism

I have carried on visiting local Churches Together groups, attending meetings and talking to individuals, and giving support when needed.

Quite a bit of my time has been involved with facilitating to development of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and of local co-operative working, most notably, Panshanger Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and URC Church; North Watford Methodist-URC church; St Hugh and St John's Anglican-Methodist Church, Chells, Stevenage; and the Anglican-Methodist De Havilland Project. These last two are examples of ecumenical activity in accord with the 2003 Anglican Methodist Covenant and the latter, in particular, suggests ways in which Anglicans and Methodists can co-operate in fresh expressions of church (see <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk>).

I have also worked upon emergency planning within the county, linking up various parties with each other and putting in place the possibility of more co-operation between the denominations locally and local government agencies. The key principle for emergency planning and the churches in Hertfordshire is that the Church of England functions as the lead church. Requests for assistance go to the diocese and are then, as the terminology goes, cascaded down to the relevant deaneries and from there all the denominations are contacted.

Regional ecumenism

The Church Leaders of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire meet several times a year. Those that gather regularly are from the Anglican, Baptist, Coptic Orthodox, Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reformed Churches. Others are also invited. I have served this meeting, in consultation with my colleague in Bedfordshire, in an organizational capacity and have brought before the Church Leaders issues that need their attention. We now have clear interest from the Redeemed Christian Church of

God, and it certainly seems as if the Church Leaders' group will expand to encompass a black majority Pentecostal Church. This will be a real enrichment.

In January of this year, together with a pastor from the Redeemed Christian Church of God, I organized the next of our *Treasuring the Riches* events, held during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This brought together in prayer for unity regional Church Leaders in Hertfordshire and, in a spirit of learning from one another, focused specifically upon getting to know the Redeemed Christian Church of God. There were about 60 people at it.

A remarkable development that I have also worked upon has been an initiative that began last year in the Church of England, with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and that has been taken up by many other churches. It is called *Thy Kingdom Come* and is nine days of prayer, in any way that groups or individuals like, between the feast of the Ascension and Pentecost (25 May to 4 June), asking that people in the nation should come to know Jesus. In our region it will conclude with a big, multi-church event hosted in St Albans Cathedral at 6:30 pm, 4 June 2017. One of the notable aspects promoted locally is '5@5', which means praying for five people at five o'clock each day. This is not meant to be prescriptive and could be '3@3' or even '8@8'! The website nationally is: <https://www.thykingdomcome.global> but see also, for more regional information: <http://www.ctherts.org.uk>.

Connection between local, national and international levels

I have worked with Churches Together in England in several ways. Last summer I was a keynote speaker at the national consultation of County Ecumenical and Development Officers. My topic was the five ecumenical imperatives, a few months later to become commitments, that have been outlined for future relations between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. These are a fascinating and profound set of ideas and form a realistic basis for all work between Christians of different denominations. Very briefly they are: to see each other as already members of one Body; to be transformed by our relationships with each other; to recommit ourselves to full visible unity; to rediscover the power of the Gospel; and to go out in mercy to the our fellow human beings (see <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf> and http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html). These should govern our relationships at every level, local, regional, national and international.

Via the Enabling Group of CTE, and other routes, I have also contributed to the process of understanding outlined in the New Framework for Local Ecumenism produced by the National Ecumenical Officers of the churches in conjunction with CTE. It presents an important shift in our thinking about local ecumenism, seeing Christian unity in a much more flexible way (the full, final document can be found at http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx). One of the New Framework's key proposals is that we should see three kinds of co-operative working as the core of local ecumenism: 1) a working agreement (short-term and not taking massive resources); 2) a partnership agreement (long-term, requiring a greater commitment of resources); 3) a constitutional agreement (where relations need a constitution to express and protect a long-term, stable and wide-ranging communion, such as in Local Ecumenical Partnerships).

These different kinds of partnership are more suited to the different kinds of churches now in England. The New Framework also calls for denominational authorities to recover their pastoral responsibilities for the various kinds of ecumenical partnership, not leaving this to the Sponsoring Bodies, that is intermediate bodies such as CTHerts. This means that ecumenical work is the activity of churches or denominations coming together to grow in unity, and not a matter of enthusiasts who bit by bit become dissociated from their parent bodies. This requires, nonetheless, some thought as to where ecumenical expertise is to be found to aid the churches in their endeavours. Here, it would seem, is clearly one area where intermediate ecumenism can play a key role (see appendix). I have brought this important document to the attention of various ecumenical forums locally, so what was fed into the national debate also feeds the local.

Promoting ecumenical vision

In a sense much of my work promotes an ecumenical vision. For instance, this vision is at the heart of the *Treasuring the Riches* events during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Specifically, however, the publication of my Grove Book *Enriched by the Other: A Spiritual Guide to Receptive Ecumenism* sets out a vision that begins from the beauty of God's eternal self. The struggle to develop the website (for which I am still seeking a webmaster, and at the moment I do it all myself) is also a means of contributing to the vision.

Looking to the future

There a number of things, over and above the normal round of facilitating local ecumenism, that remain to be done:

- 1) We aim to have a big event the autumn of 2018, focusing upon spirituality. I have already begun the process trying to find people who can start forming some creative ideas;
- 2) I hope that CTE will complete its work on the videos in the course *Embracing the Other* which dovetails with my book (though both are stand-alone) and aims to provide a way for effective receptive ecumenism to be done locally. This will be promoted and run in various places;
- 3) I aim to contact as many of the various forms of mission in unity that abound in the county, in order to a) understand and map what is happening, b) see what they can teach us about ecumenical practice and c) find out how they can be served by intermediate level ecumenism, that is, by CTHerts;
- 4) There is piece of work that needs to be done that shows the need and usefulness of intermediate ecumenism. This will both co-operate with work on the New Framework for Local Ecumenism and will explain bodies such as CTHerts to local ecumenists in the towns and villages of the county.

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