



January 2011

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Enjoy yourselves and enjoy Christ in each other

There is a story told about St Francis and St Clare deciding to meet one day on opposite sides of a stream. But the stream was too broad for them to hear each other, and so they decided to follow the stream back to its source, and as the channel narrowed, they were able to enjoy conversation and each other's company.

Those who think of church unity as a kind of merger management, the frail solidarity of declining congregations, misunderstand. It is not about that. It is about travelling back to the one who is the source of all truth, the fountain of all grace, and the origin of all hope. As we draw closer to Christ, we draw closer to all those who call him Lord. The mystery and wonder of the Christian life is that in a way that is beyond our understanding, we are made one with Christ. And that, as Paul reminded the Ephesians, was not simply a matter of personal salvation, but a process of social reconciliation, of Jews and Gentiles being made one – '...he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups one...one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace.' (Eph 2:14-15 NRSV).

As we come closer to Christ, the magnitude of the divisions between us will shrink as we recognise more of Christ in each other. Unity is God's gift. It can't be forced like early season rhubarb. Cover it with dark sheets of aims, objectives, key performance indicators and business plans and it will wither and die. The Spirit is peculiarly resistant to being packaged neatly, preferring the freedom of the wind and the open canvas of faithful discipleship. Rather unity has to grow from the rich soil of prayer and shared delight in the Christian life – enjoying each other in Christ, and Christ in each other. Unity isn't about bureaucracy and endless committees, dull forms and mind numbing boredom. It's about life and laughter and joy, celebration and service.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to be in Westminster Abbey for evening prayer during the Papal visit witnessed something extraordinary. What might have been a Christian version of celebrity culture turned into something completely, profoundly different. Here were Christian communities delighting in their common discipleship, seeing in each other a faithfulness to Jesus which made the divisions between us fade into insignificance, at least for a few precious minutes.

Unity isn't a drag, it's party-time, a celebration of God's outrageous generosity in reconciling not just Jew and Gentile, but in laying waste all our neatly constructed human differences of race and gender and nation and class and culture by the radical love of Christ. Pray, then, during this Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, but more, enjoy yourselves and enjoy Christ in each other. [Back to top](#)

Calls for unity after Alexandria church bombing

President Hosni Mubarak urged Egypt's Muslims and Christians to stand united against terrorism after a bombing outside the Church of Saints Mark and Peter (al-Qiddissin) in Alexandria. At least 21 people were killed and 70 hurt in the suspected suicide attack, which happened during a New Year's Eve service at the Church. In a rare televised address, Mr Mubarak said it bore the hallmark of "foreign hands" seeking to destabilise Egypt.

The Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom issued a statement signed by Bishop Angaelos saying 'We are deeply saddened and disturbed that once again, days of joy and celebration have been turned into a time of mourning and weeping. Our immediate thoughts and prayers are with all those who were affected by the bombing at the Church of Saints Mark and Peter in Alexandria: those who have lost their lives, their families, those who were injured, members of that parish, Christian communities in general, and Christians throughout the land of Egypt.'

Visitors from the Geneva offices of the World Council of Churches (WCC) were honoured to be received in Cairo, Egypt on Saturday 8 January 2011 by Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC, led the group to Cairo in order to offer personal condolences in the aftermath of the lethal bomb attack at the New Year on a church in Alexandria. Tveit expressed the sympathy and support of the WCC member churches to Pope Shenouda at this difficult time for Egypt. He gave his assurance that the fellowship of churches was united in prayer for the Coptic Orthodox Church and for all the people of Egypt. The WCC general secretary spoke of the cross as a symbol of solidarity shared by Christians around the world. "The cross serves as a reminder of the suffering borne in human life, and of Christ's death on the cross, yet as a Christian emblem it also points toward resurrection, reconciliation and peace," Tveit said.

In his message for Christmas, which the Coptic Orthodox celebrated on 7 January, Pope Shenouda focused on the love and peace of God towards everyone. "It is encouraging to see how his message inspired both Christians and Muslims to stand together against violence and attempts at dividing the people" Tveit said. "Pope Shenouda demonstrates that when spiritual leadership is done well, it can have tremendous influence in making peace." Pope Shenouda stressed the importance of prayer to God, and the need for solidarity among all people. [Back to top](#)

Women offer theological perspectives on "Kairos Palestine"

Thirty women gathered in Bethlehem on 13-18 December to celebrate the first anniversary of the "Kairos Palestine" document on the quest for peace and human rights in Palestine and Israel. The gathering also reflected theologically on the content of the text. Participants came from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, North and Latin America and Australia.

The group represented different ecclesial traditions and included one member of the Jewish faith. They were lay, ordained, theologians, ecumenical and church leaders, and many are engaged in social action. The Bethlehem gathering was sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) office on Women in Church and Society and by the Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum. The women also experienced the visible reality of the occupation of Palestine during visits to Israeli checkpoints and encounters with the Separation Wall. They united around a common hope for the end of the occupation and a call for just peace.

The women embraced "listening as a mark of solidarity": a form of participation during the meeting and a point of origin for the just peacemaking work to be done following the meeting. Faith, hope and love expressed through just peace were themes within "Kairos Palestine" that these women found particularly inspiring. They noted the inclusion of three Palestinian women in the writing process that produced the text and listened to a few Palestinian women explain that, although they found the document a testament to equality and welcoming for women, "there is much work to be done both in the churches and wider Palestinian society" to include and engage women fully. They affirmed that "there is an ongoing need for the global ecumenical community of women to listen to, strengthen and support the work of Palestinian women".

During a larger one-year celebration of Kairos Palestine, Dame Dr Mary Tanner, European president of the WCC, offered greetings on behalf of the group of women gathered to reflect on the document. "We pledge ourselves to pray for you, knowing that in Christ no wall, however high, however obscene, can separate us in the communion of God's own life of love. What happens to you happens to us, your pain is our pain, and your struggle becomes our struggle," she said. "We will accompany you in that movement which the Kairos Palestine document has begun and bring it, in whatever ways we can, into our ministries, into our churches and societies. Your story will be our story and we will ask the fellowship of churches in the WCC that has gathered us to take your witness and your challenges into its work and into the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May 2011," she continued. "We shall not be silent."

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CTBI launches Churches Together Connect

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) launches on January 17 a new social networking site called CT Connect. Launched to coincide with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it will offer a free website to local Churches Together groups with direct links to CTBI's online resources.

CTBI General Secretary Bob Fyffe said "this is about resourcing and developing a new space to work on our agenda for unity. It's about building an on-line community. Significantly, it will allow Christians at a local level to engage directly with each other and with the many organisations in the ecumenical family. It will also be an interactive space that will resource and strengthen the work of local Churches Together groups. It's a good example of our being 'More Together, Less Apart'"

CT Connect will also offer a quality space for Christians to seek and share information and best practice. It will facilitate groups sharing resources for worship and spirituality, publicising events, and most importantly to engaging, interacting and discussing current issues locally, nationally and internationally.

CT Connect web facility (www.churchestogetherconnect.org) is an online space to share and receive - thoughts, reflections and insights from other people who share similar interests and commitments.

A place to:

- learn from each other and to explore what it means to be a Church united in Christ
- Generate ideas
- Share resources for worship, liturgy and spirituality.
- Engage and discuss current issues with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Publicise community and Churches Together events and get ideas from others about how to organise particular events and use the best resources

Building an on-line community is central to what Churches Together Connect is all about! Make your contribution to the ecumenical movement, challenge and be challenged, affirm others in our faith and be affirmed yourself.

Why should I join and what's in it for me?

Churches Together Connect aims to

- Help members use social networks
- Share what is happening in local communities with other Christians
- Make contact with new friends across the churches, the wider community, and around the four nations.
- Join other Christians from around the globe who will use CT Connect as their means of sharing in the movement towards greater Christian unity.
- Help members use our resources and provide feedback on all that we do.
- Develop a new on-line community where we can explore the nature of what might be distinctive about an online Christian community.
- Allow members to become better informed about issues affecting Christians and to interact with subject experts at national and local level.

We are offering the following

- A refreshed website at www.ctbi.org.uk with lots of resources and information, including a growing number of e-books.
- A new initiative at www.churchestogetherconnect.org connecting Christians through a dedicated social networking site that allows groups to set up dedicated space along with video conferencing.
- A free Churches Together website for any local CT group, available through the CTBI website. This will include direct and embedded links to news and new resources.
- Engagement on Facebook and Twitter (see the links on the home page at www.ctbi.org.uk) [Back to top](#)

Good reception for BBC's 'The Nativity'

Broadcast at prime time on the evenings before Christmas, BBC1's new dramatic telling of the Christmas story was well received by viewers. 200 comments on the BBC website were overwhelmingly positive, many asking that the programme be issued on a DVD, and a [Facebook Page](#) called 'The Nativity - Thank You BBC and Tony Jordan' attracted over 800 friends. Some commentators, however, objected to the dramatic insertion that the people of Nazareth accused Mary of adultery and the portrayal of Joseph's reluctance to believe Mary's account of the Annunciation. It was also unfortunate that the drama included features familiar to nativity plays and carols but absent from the Gospels such as that the Magi were three men on camels named Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar and that they arrived immediately after the shepherds. The clear inference of Matthew is that they arrived about two years later (2.14) when Jesus is described as a 'child' (to paidion 2.11) rather than a 'baby' (to brephos Luke 2.16). However, the heart of the story was well told and communicated to a modern audience.

When asked what he thought viewers would get out of it, writer and producer Tony Jordan replied, 'I hope that if they ever had any questions about the Nativity and what happened and why it happened in the way that I did before I started working on it, then those questions will be answered. I think if they have got faith then it will reaffirm it and I think if they haven't got faith then I would like to think it might make them think twice. More importantly I think it is really nice for an audience to just be reminded of what Christmas is and what it is all about and it is the kind of project that shows just why we need a BBC.'

Charis Gibson, head of media at the Evangelical Alliance, said: "It's a tribute to Tony Jordan's storytelling that when I went to see a preview of the Nativity with a group of communicators, none of us could speak as the end credits rolled. This is an utterly moving piece of television, telling a much-loved story simply and respectfully. By contrasting the humanity of the characters with the cosmic revolving of the universe, it left me with a renewed sense of awe that the creator God cares so intimately for us that he sent his son to be born for shepherds and wise men alike." A Church of England spokesman said: "Tony Jordan's adaptation presents a gritty interpretation of the events of the first Christmas. We hope it will bring home the story of Jesus being born in a humble stable to many new viewers."

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Bishop Michael Evans

The Catholic Bishop of East Anglia has written to his diocese about his declining health. He wrote, 'Over the last five and more years, since my diagnosis with advanced prostate cancer, I have managed to cope with my developing illness, its ongoing treatment, the general decline in my health, and generally – I think – continued my ministry as best I can. In the last few weeks, the cancer has rather quickly taken control. My oncology and palliative care consultants informed me openly and honestly just before Christmas that I now probably have only weeks to live, and I am as prepared for that as I can be, accepting it with faith as a gift of God's grace. Rather than resign, I would like

to continue among you as your bishop and the father of our diocesan family until this stage of my life ends. I do not know how long that will be. As I live now under the shadow of death, my prayer is very much that of St Paul that I may know something of the power of Christ's resurrection and a share in his sufferings, trusting that the Lord is with me. I pray that even now I can joyfully witness something of the good news we are all called to proclaim.'

Bishop Michael is the Chair of the Catholic Committee for Christian Unity and the Joint Chair of the British Methodist - Roman Catholic Committee and a leader of the Intermediate Ecumenical Instruments in East Anglia. Please remember him in your prayers. [Back to top](#)

New Year Honours and CEO changes

New Year Honours

Rt Revd Martin Wharton, Bishop of Newcastle, was awarded the CBE. He is the Anglican Co-Chairman of the Porvoo Contact Group which links Anglican and Lutheran Churches. Among those awarded the OBE in the New Year Honours were Mgr John Devine, Churches Regional Officer for the North West, Canon Andrew Wingate, former Director of the St Philips Centre, Leicester, Ven Dr Michael Ipgrave, Archdeacon of Southwark and former Inter Faith Relations Adviser to the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, and Mr John Keast, former National Government Advisor on Religious Education. Roger Hosking of Happy Hens Care Farm, Derbyshire, has been awarded the CBE. Care Farms provide a range of health, social rehabilitation or education benefits to thousands of people.

CEO Changes

The New Year sees several changes in the corps of County Ecumenical Development Officers. Louise Cole has begun as CEO for Churches Together in Berkshire in succession to Honor Alleyne. Erica Dunmow has been appointed as Ecumenical Mission and Development Officer for Churches Together in South Yorkshire. Teresa Brown has left the post of CEO for Shire & Soke, Churches Together in Northants and Peterborough and a successor is being sought. Other appointments anticipated are CEOs for Bucks and Cheshire following the retirements of David Scott and Mark Thompson and a new appointment of a County Ecumenical Missioner for Cornwall. Ecumenical [vacancies](#) are posted on the CTE website as they occur. [Back to top](#)

Money Outreach Ministries through churches

Liz Mann of Credit Action writes about how churches can support people struggling with debt.

Money is a worry for many at the moment, 1,732 people are made redundant every day, VAT has increased and levels of personal debt remain high (£8,495 per household excluding mortgages). No community, inside or outside the church, is immune and the effects of financial problems can cause fear and shame, stress, ill-health and relationship breakdown.

Regardless of whether we ourselves have money problems, for Christians this is an opportunity both to review and recommit our own finances to God and to also demonstrate the compassionate, all-accepting heart of Jesus to those who find themselves in financial difficulty. Church groups have much to offer. They can bring hope to those trapped in financial despair and can play a powerful role in preventing others from getting into difficulties in the first place by teaching wise stewardship both within the church and in the wider, secular community around them. Responding to money issues doesn't have to be complicated, even simple interventions can make a big difference.

Help people to get help

Over 200,000 unsolicited calls are made every day to consumers by fee charging debt management and loan companies. However, there are many excellent charities providing free, independent advice. Community Money Advice, Christians Against Poverty and Citizens Advice Bureaux provide face to face advice at centres across the country and the Consumer Credit Counselling Service (CCCS) and National Debtline both operate national telephone helplines. Your church could display **posters** for free services or make **booklets**, such as Credit Action's 'moneymanuals', available to people.

Set up a money outreach ministry

Churches are well placed to provide one-to-one support to individuals with money issues. By doing so, we have the opportunity to follow Jesus' example in proclaiming "good news to the poor" and "freedom for the prisoners" (Luke 4 18). A number of churches have set up **debt advice centres**. This is a big commitment but there are two Christian charities, Community Money Advice (CMA) and Christians Against Poverty (CAP), who can help. With Christians Against Poverty, churches partner with CAP and support a CAP Debt Coach who works within the community. Community Money Advice supports churches in setting up their own, independent debt advice centres. The impact of a debt advice ministry can be life-changing for individuals who have been struggling under the burden of debt.

Another option is to set up a **budget coaching service**. Because budget coaches do not give debt advice, which is heavily regulated, this can be a lighter undertaking. Budget coaches are volunteers who help individuals to prepare an accurate, realistic budget. Creating a budget enables people to regain control, shine a light on their finances, highlight areas of waste and lift fear of the unknown. After completing their budget, some individuals may still need specialist debt advice, which the budget coach might support them through, but the first, and therefore, hardest steps have been taken. Credit Action can provide Personal Budget Coach Training.

Develop wise and Godly attitudes to managing money

As well as responding to those in difficulty, we need to focus on prevention and to develop a Godly attitude towards money. Money is a significant factor in our daily lives – we cannot avoid it, so we must learn to use it wisely, to be generous and to prevent it from becoming our master (Matthew 6 24). This is both spiritual, remembering that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6 19), and practical, ensuring that we are good stewards of everything God has put in our care.

There are many great resources available for **sermons and small groups** available on the subject of managing money and giving (see some of the websites below). It is important that we learn how to manage money effectively. Only 26% of people have a budget that they follow regularly, yet this is the most effective way of keeping control of our finances. You can find budget planners to help you on line.

You might consider running **budgeting workshops** for your congregations or local community. These can be particularly effective if incorporated into other ministries and courses such as marriage preparation or parenting groups. There are resources and courses that you can use to do this, or book someone to come and run a workshop for you.

If you would like to find out more, please contact lizman@creditaction.org.uk.

Useful links and resources:

Credit Action: www.creditaction.org.uk

Community Money Advice: www.communitymoneyadvice.com

Christians Against Poverty: www.capuk.org

Stewardship: www.stewardship.org.uk/money

Crown Financial Ministries: www.crownuk.org

The Money Revolution: www.themoneyrevolution.net

Consumer Credit Counselling Service: www.cccs.co.uk 0800 138 1111

National Debtline: www.nationaldebtline.co.uk 0800 808 4000

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Christian Unity Exhibition at Lichfield Cathedral

To coincide with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Cathedral Head Steward and City Councillor Tony Thompson will hold his first exhibition at Lichfield Cathedral this month. The exhibition of black and white sketches reproduced onto Christmas cards, will be on display in the Cathedral's South Transept, from Saturday 15th January until Tuesday 25th January and depict 16 churches that the artist has visited from all over the world. Entrance to the exhibition is free of charge – donations to the Cathedral are always welcome.

Amateur artist and retired Chemistry lecturer Tony felt inspired to create the distinctive pen and ink sketches during his travels over 5 continents. The images include Anglican, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches. The beautiful sketches feature Lichfield Cathedral (taken from Prince Rupert's Mount), St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. In 2010, Tony went on a trip to Oberammergau to see the Passion Play and whilst he was there with the Friends of Lichfield Cathedral, he also took the opportunity to sketch Seefeld Church in the Tyrol. To complete the images Tony made preliminary sketches and took photographs in situ and then was able to create the final drawings back in Lichfield.

Mr Thompson said: “We enjoy travelling to new places and while there we enjoy local church architecture and local church services. As a Christian I try to look outward from Lichfield, and it is my hope that Christian Churches will work together looking outward to help address the world's problems and not inwards to their internal divisions. So I am delighted to have this exhibition in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity”.

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Vigil for Christian Unity at Liverpool Hope

The ecumenical Chaplaincy Team at Liverpool Hope invites fellow Christians from across the university and city to join in a 24 hour vigil of prayer and praise for Christian Unity beginning at 8am on Friday 21st January in Hope Chapel. Inspired by the early Christians they will hold a day-long sequence of worship from different traditions, times of fellowship and reflection, and an all-night vigil in Hope Chapel, for which a sleeping bag and pillow may be needed.

The programme for the day will include Morning Prayer, Worship led by a local church, Mass at Noon, Taizé Prayer for Peace in the Holy Land, a Midnight Feast a celebration of the Eucharist (Anglican) and Keeping Watch through the night. [Back to top](#)

Bishop Nick Baines moving from Croydon to Bradford

A 'Blogging bishop' who is a University of Bradford graduate will be the next Bishop of Bradford. The Rt Revd Nick Baines (53), who is currently Bishop of Croydon, will be the 10th Bishop of Bradford, following the retirement of the Rt Revd David James last July.

Nick Baines is renowned for his media expertise - he is an experienced broadcaster and writer and he blogs and tweets almost daily. He has been Bishop of Croydon, an area bishop in the Diocese of Southwark, since May 2003. He makes use of his experience working with other faith leaders in London following the 9/11 attacks in representing the Archbishop of Canterbury at various international interfaith initiatives. He has been a key leader in Croydon Churches Forum.

A Liverpoolian by birth, Nick Baines gained a degree in French and German from Bradford University in 1980. He says, "Bradford is a place I came to love when I studied Modern Languages at the university thirty years ago. I look forward very much to working with and serving the churches and communities of this culturally diverse diocese in the years ahead." [Back to top](#)

Education Sunday and National RE Celebration

See the links to Education Sunday 2011 (February 20th) resources on the CTE [website](#).

The one million pupils who attend Church of England schools will play their part in this year's celebrations to mark the founding of the Church of England's National Society in 1811 offering education to the poor in every parish – 50 years before the state joined in. More than 15 million people alive today had the benefit of a church school education in England and Wales, including celebrities and leading figures in public life.

The work of the National Society received the royal seal of approval in the Queen's speech to General Synod in November when Her Majesty spoke of its "impact on the life of the Church and the nation". Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, President of the National Society, said: "Universal free education in England began when the Church of England introduced schools in every parish - more than 50 years before the provision of state education. Two hundred years later, church schools continue to serve their communities, providing an inclusive education with a distinctive Christian ethos. I am immensely appreciative of the National Society's history and its continuing role in supporting Church of England schools." Today, more than 1,000 of the Church of England's 4,700 primaries are small schools providing vital educational provision in isolated rural areas and working closely with their parish church to serve the local community.

The Church of England, through its dioceses, is also the largest sponsor or co-sponsor of academies under the first wave - the majority replacing vulnerable or failing schools and already showing a marked increase in academic achievement (latest DoFE figures). At a Church of England Academy Family Conference at Lambeth Palace in November Schools Minister Lord Hill said: "We very much value the contribution that Church of England schools and academies make to our education system." This year's celebrations will be marked by events in schools and dioceses across the country culminating in a special service at Westminster Abbey on October 14 (Full details are on the anniversary website www.natsoc200.org).

Archbishop of York Dr John Sentamu said: "Before the state had even considered offering free schooling, the National Society had the wisdom and the determination to make education for all a reality in this country. Building on this heritage we have an opportunity to celebrate all that is good in our Church Schools today. This year also gives us the opportunity to dream, to imagine possibilities as to what the future of our schools might look like. Working together we can make those dreams a reality as we look forward to the next two hundred years of enabling our young people to flourish." The Bishop of Lincoln the Rt Revd John Saxbee, current Chair of the National Society, added: "Church of England Schools have a special character which has matured over 200 years, and which we now celebrate and seek to consolidate in the years ahead".

Celebrating RE month provides an opportunity for all those involved in religious education to share the impact that RE is having countrywide. The month of March 2011 provides a focus for anyone involved in religious education to share its impact locally, regionally or nationally. Celebrating RE provides opportunities to raise awareness of the prominent role religious education has in promoting community cohesion. The Religious Education Council of England and Wales ([REC](#)) has produced a [paper](#) to support teachers, school managers and others in promoting this work. [Back to top](#)

Holocaust Memorial and Interfaith Relations

27th January is Holocaust Memorial Day whose theme this year is: Untold Stories. There will be many events on and around that day, which is the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 1945. As the HMD website says: "There are millions of stories we will never know. But we can still honour the memory of those affected by genocide by playing a part in these Untold Stories. We can listen and learn from them, we can tell others the stories we hear. Some stories are not easy to hear. They can speak of danger, pain and suffering. We must not shy away from these stories – it is vital to recognise the consequences of exclusion and persecution in order for us to learn the lessons of the past in order to create a safer, better future." Christian engagement in HMD is every more important. For more information see: <http://www.hmd.org.uk>

The theme of this year's World Peace Day, celebrated in the Catholic Church on the 1st January each year, is ***Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace***. Pope Benedict's Message is an excellent read exploring powerful themes of justice, education, the family, moral truth in politics and diplomacy, the public dimension of religion, fundamentalism and hostility to believers, religious freedom in the world. It can be accessed [here](#).

Building a safer and better future also depends upon deepening our faith and understanding how it connects with inter religious dialogue, evangelism and the common good. To this end, out of conversations with friends and colleagues, Celia Blackden wrote a short [booklet](#), published last year by Grove Books (www.grovebooks.co.uk) with the title *Friendship and Exchange with People of Other Faiths: a context for witness and dialogue*. Not least in its content is the importance of Christian unity. Celia hopes it might prove helpful to some Christians, especially those new to this area of work. [Back to top](#)

Who Counts? Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2011 will run from 29 January to 6 February. 30 January is Homelessness Sunday and 6 February is Poverty Action Sunday. The theme is 'Who Counts?' The 2011 census will try to list all of the people who live in the country – but chances are there are many it won't include - such as the 'hidden homeless' and destitute asylum-seekers.

Homelessness Sunday brings together thousands of churches drawing attention to the devastating effects of homelessness. Through prayer and reflection Homelessness Sunday offers an opportunity to listen to what God has to say about homelessness, and to consider what action we are being called to take. Together, with faith, we can repair the hurt of homelessness and build both homes and lives. Homelessness Sunday has the support of all the main denominations and is celebrated in a wide range of congregations. [Back to top](#)

Scottish Churches House

It has been announced that Scottish Churches House, Dunblane, (SCH) will close on 15th July 2011. In 2005 ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland) Executive created the Interim Management Group (IMG) to oversee and develop the work of SCH. It soon became apparent that the condition of the House needed to be addressed. In 2007 ACTS Forum authorised the IMG to launch the Jubilee Appeal in order to refurbish the property and develop the work of SCH. The Jubilee Appeal was substantially successful and major refurbishment accomplished. In 2009, following a proposal from IMG, ACTS Members Meeting decided that the Trustees could invite the IMG to establish an independent company, SCH Ltd, to lease SCH and develop the House use and programme.

Regrettably, since 2008 the global economic crisis has had serious repercussions, including the market for conference/retreat house provision in the UK. This has diminished considerably the financial returns from the House. At their meeting of 11 Nov 2010, ACTS Trustees discussed the current and future situation of Scottish Churches House (SCH). They were joined by the ACTS auditor who provided a full report on the current financial position of SCH, and the forecasts until December 2011. Neither the SCH Ltd IB nor ACTS Trustees can foresee a viable economic future for SCH. Estimates for deficits in annual running costs are: £116,659 (2010), £86,943 (2011). ACTS does not have the reserves to cover these deficits. Therefore, the ACTS Trustees decided that the only option open to them was to close the current business operation of Scottish Churches House.

At an Extraordinary Members' Meeting held on Monday 10th January 2011, the Member Churches of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) affirmed the ACTS trustees' decision that, in light of the current financial situation of Scottish Churches House, which is running at a substantial loss, ACTS trustees will close the business operations at SCH. The staff of SCH have been kept fully informed of these developments and redundancies will be negotiated with all staff. [Back to top](#)

ECCR becomes a registered charity

Church-based research and advocacy group the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility (ECCR) has become a registered charity. ECCR completed registration with the Charity Commission for England and Wales at the end of 2010. It now hopes to secure and extend its work by being able to access a wider range of grants and Gift Aided donations.

An investor coalition and membership organisation founded in 1989, ECCR's mission is to promote economic justice, human rights and environmental sustainability. It works through research-based dialogue with companies, faith-based and responsible investors and others on the impacts of business on society and the natural world. ECCR's Chair, Lee Coates, who has been involved with the organisation for many years, welcomed charity registration: 'After 21 years of advocating higher standards of corporate and investor responsibility, I am heartened that ECCR continues to grow and develop. Charitable status will help us build on our past achievements and take our work forward.'

ECCR's 80-plus corporate members control and advise on more than £17.5 billion of invested assets. Member denominations and church bodies include the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, the Church in Wales, the Industrial Mission Association, the Methodist Church and its Central Finance Board, the Missionary Society of St Columban, Pax Christi, the Society of Friends (Quakers), St Patrick's Missionary Society, the Society of Jesus, the Student Christian Movement, the United Reformed Church, and USPG: Anglicans in World Mission.

Financial services members of ECCR include Cazenove Capital Management, CCLA Investment Management, Co-operative Financial Services, Ethical Investors, Rathbone Greenbank and Triodos Bank. Campaigning organisations such as Christian Aid, FairPensions, Traidcraft and Trócaire (Ireland) are also ECCR members. Current and recent funding partners include CAFOD, Cordaid (Netherlands), the EIRIS Foundation, the Polden Puckham Charitable Foundation, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Souter Charitable Trust.

ECCR, which also has individual members, is currently working on the social and environmental impacts of the oil industry in the Niger Delta, the trade in Israeli settlements goods, mining and human rights, and risks associated with deep-water oil drilling and the Canadian oil sands. It will publish a new report on the banking sector in March 2011. 'New members and supporters are always welcome,' said ECCR's Co-ordinator Miles Litvinoff. 'People can find out more about us, and contact us, by visiting www.eccr.org.uk' [Back to top](#)

Quakers call for army recruitment age to be raised

Quakers in Britain call for the government to raise the age of recruitment into the army. Those under eighteen year olds currently in the army should be able to leave as of right. All those under the age of eighteen should have to make a positive decision on their eighteenth birthday when they legally become adults.

Britain is now the only European country to recruit sixteen year olds into the army. Last year over four thousand under eighteens were recruited into the armed forces. Under eighteens need their parents' consent to join. After an initial cooling off period there is no discharge as of right. They may be held to their commitment, for four years beyond their eighteenth birthday. This is two years longer than those joining at eighteen. Those leaving without the consent of their commanding officer may be subject to prosecution in military courts. Parliament is currently debating the Armed Forces Bill and will have the opportunity to introduce amendments. Quakers are calling for its amendment to ensure that only those who are legally adult can join the army. The Armed Forces Act needs to be passed every five years and is part of the legal framework that allows for the keeping of a standing army in peace time.

"It is time for the UK to adopt a more consistent attitude to the age of adult responsibility," says Michael Bartlet, Parliamentary Liaison Secretary, Quakers in Britain. "Under eighteens are considered too young to vote, yet they are old enough to join the army. They are too young to buy fireworks, yet old enough to train with live ammunition. They are not legally adult, yet then can make a decision, which binds them for four years beyond their eighteenth birthday. Decisions made as a child have irrevocable consequences as an adult and may lead to them serving in Afghanistan."

"Parliament's Joint Human Rights Committee made recommendations for safeguarding the well being of young people in the army in 2009. The Armed Forces Bill represents the best opportunity of putting these into practice," he added. The Committee called, in particular for UK Government action to implement recommendations of the UN Committee on Human Rights regarding the UN Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child. [Back to top](#)