



March 2012

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## Unity with a purpose

The strange phenomenon of seeking what you already have is probably more common than we think: they say the grass is always greener on the other side. Coming as I do from an early childhood in the Caribbean, I naturally have an inclination to recall sayings that remind me of important lessons. Like, 'cow never know the use of him tail till it cut off'!

What I am talking about may be described as 'realized ecumenism'. Could it be that the unity we seek we already have? Could it be that our failure to recognize where we are is hampering our abilities to fulfill our God-given purpose? Might we even be playing games with each other, wittingly or unwittingly, knowing that so long as I don't recognize you as my brother, I don't have to treat you like a brother? Could it be that if we maintain the notion of a divided church we don't owe much love and respect to each other, but we will keep trying to become one church, and when we become that one church then we will love, respect and cooperate? Could it be that we are looking to structures where only relationships will do?

### Unity

Since the mid-1990s I have engaged in what I call 'intercultural ecumenism'. For me, this is an attempt to encourage unity between peoples and churches, of not only different denominations, but of different ethnicities and cultures. I soon realized that my concept of greater mutual recognition and cooperation across cultures, ethnicities and denominations did not meet everybody's expectation of Christian Unity. For some, nothing short of full visible union will do, and no efforts should be spared, indeed nothing worthwhile can be done, until we achieve it.

I guess we can all agree that schism, division, fragmentation is not reflective of a healthy body of Christ. Indeed, the Greek *oikoumene*, from which we get the word *ecumenical*, implies more than cooperation: it implies wholeness. And what I think I have discovered since my initiation into the ecumenical world in the mid 1990s as Director of the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership, is that we are divided about what we mean by unity. As I've indicated, I lean towards growing cooperation, and I do so out of a conviction that the Church of Jesus Christ is already one. I work on the basis that oneness is a given, it's in the DNA of the Church; and it is so not least because Jesus prayed for it: That all of them may be one as we are one (John 17.21). Now, if we believe we don't have this unity and nothing can happen till we do, we may benefit from an examination of Jesus' words. Jesus' idea of unity is a compound one. 'Father, make **them** one as **we** are one'.

For those of us who embrace the understanding of God as Trinitarian, we bask in the incomprehensible notion that God is three and yet one, one yet three. We see here a unity in diversity and diversity in unity. Whatever we may wish for, we do well not to take our diversity as an automatic signifier of disunity. I have ten siblings; we were given birth by one mother and we have one father. Today we are all very different, live in different places and some of us don't even look alike. But we know we are of one stock and live with the challenge to demonstrate our shared heritage so that our parents' name is not dishonoured in the eyes of those who knew them. We are one, just not the same. Father, Son, Holy Spirit are one, just not the same. The Church, I beg to suggest, is one, just not the same.

Here is a remarkable thing: God in Christ has already made one church, one called out people of different ethnicities, cultures, nations. John, in a bit of realized eschatology, saw us in Revelation 7.9; 'After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.' Believe me, God has already done it, and we should affirm our oneness in Christ, not as something to aspire to but as something done and sealed in the redemptive blood of Christ.

We who are called to be light and salt will be ever more effective when we recognize the other light and salt, not as competition but as an extension of what we are trying to do. Whether you are black or white or somewhere between, we are one in Christ; now let us intentionally live as though we were. Our diversity is a strength, not a weakness, as we show Jesus to a diverse world that they may believe in the salvation he has brought. God has a purpose for our unity. It is that the world may believe. [Back to top](#)

## Archbishop of Canterbury delivers a lecture on human rights and faith

Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke on faith, human rights and human dignity, during a keynote presentation entitled 'Human Rights and Religious Faith' on Tuesday, 28 February at the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva. A renowned theologian, he has been involved in several theological, ecumenical and educational commissions and has authored a number of books.

On the morning of his second day he addressed a round table discussion on the unity of the Christian church. "Unity is neither a means nor an end," he told assembled staff, visitors and governing body members of the WCC and other organizations in the Ecumenical Centre. "Unity is what God has given us in the church." The responsibility of Christians who receive the gift of unity, he continued, lies in "seeking a life in which no one is without the other." This life, "constantly moving us forward into a further truth", compels all who live within the love of God to ask the

question: "Who is not yet here?" In addition to other panellists from the Anglican Communion, of which Archbishop Williams is senior prelate, participants in the round table included representatives of the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed confessions of faith. The discussion was moderated by the Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC.

Revd Dr John Gibaut, director of the WCC joint commission on Faith and Order, observed that disunity is often more evident than church unity. Different traditions describe the church in differing terms. "If we cannot agree on what we mean by the church," said Gibaut, "we cannot begin to say much about the unity of the church." The commission continues to work on a proposed consensus document on "The Church".

Another important submission to the WCC 10th Assembly in 2013 will be a statement on mission and evangelism. Dr Annemarie Mayer, a Roman Catholic theologian working as a member of the WCC staff, stressed that unity of the church implies obligation to manifest unity in Christian witness and service.

Dr Mary Tanner, the current WCC president for Europe, described the early stages of drafting a unity statement to be presented at the 10th Assembly of the WCC, to be held at Busan, Korea in 2013. A first full draft of the document is to be completed by June 2012.

Dr Tamara Grdzeldze, an Orthodox theologian on the staff of Faith and Order, recalled the role of Orthodoxy as a driving force behind the modern ecumenical movement while always taking very seriously ancient teachings on the church.

Revd Dr Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, reminded the gathering that Christians are called together for a purpose. Quoting the Belhar Confession of the anti-apartheid era, he depicted the unity of the church as both "a gift and an obligation for the people of God." Christians are not called simply to "be" one, but to act together against injustice and violence, and to establish peace.

Two bishops of the Church of England, Rt Revd Dr John Hind of Chichester and Rt Revd Dr Peter Forster of Chester, commented on their service, respectively, on the WCC Faith and Order Commission and the WCC Central Committee. Hind argued that church unity must be seen by Christians not merely in terms of institutionalism, sociology and ethics, but as having a sacramental significance. Forster recalled the Central Committee discussion in seeking a theme for the 10th Assembly. They finally adopted a prayer, "God of life, lead us to justice and peace."

"Unity is the air we breathe," Forster concluded, "not one more issue to be examined."

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### **Reformed Churches and Council for World Mission seek closer ties**

The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM) have issued a statement following a three-day meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa between leaders of the two organizations. Talks sought to chart new ways of working together. Participants at the talks included WCRC's president, CWM's moderator and the general secretaries of the two organizations.

WCRC is a global network of Protestant churches focused on theology, church unity and social and environmental justice concerns. CWM is a worldwide partnership of churches sharing resources including people and ideas to enrich and enhance God's mission in the world. Twenty-seven of 31 CWM churches are also WCRC member churches. The full statement may be found [here](#).

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### **Ecumenical organizations celebrate International Women's Day**

On International Women's Day, 8 March, staff based in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva organized special prayers and programmes to acknowledge achievements of the ecumenical organizations in the area of gender justice and to celebrate their struggles together as a community of women and men. The World Council of Churches hosted a prayer service in the morning with the theme "What is your hunger? On crumbs and tulips" meditating on ways of overcoming fear, despair, exclusion, violence and oppression.

Dr Fulata Lusungu Moyo, WCC programme executive for Women in Church and Society along with the Revd Dr Elaine Neuenfeldt, secretary for Women in Church and Society at the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), lead the activities for the day. "We want to celebrate some achievements in empowering women. We want to celebrate in communion, get together and praise these actions as fragments of our struggle for justice," Moyo said at the gathering.

Presentations covered the LWF achieving equal salary certification, and the ACT Alliance's publication Clapped with Both Hands promoting gender equality. The World Communion of Reformed Churches issued a call for nominations for the Sylvia Michel prize, which acknowledges the contribution of women in church leadership. The World Young Women's Christian Association and the World Christian Student Federation also participated.

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## Bossey inaugurates its new guest house and conference hall

The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey inaugurated its recently renovated guest house and a new conference hall on 14 February, expanding its facilities for the use of churches, ecumenical bodies, local and international organizations and individual visitors. The institute, which is part of the World Council of Churches (WCC), has provided ecumenical formation and support to the churches, ecumenical bodies and theological institutions through education and dialogue since 1946. The institute is located in a unique setting, overlooking Lake Geneva and the French and Swiss Alps.

The newly renovated guest house, which was previously a traditional Swiss barn, now contains 21 rooms with modern facilities. Similarly, the new conference hall has the capacity of accommodating around 200 people, with the special equipment and assistance required for organizing meetings and events. "In these times of financial crisis, it was only because of our faith and confidence in this visionary project and the constant support from our colleagues that we have been able to complete this work successfully," said Prof. Ioan Sauca, director of the Ecumenical Institute, at the inauguration ceremony. He talked about the financial and logistical constraints that had hindered completion of the conference hall, which he said were overcome with support from the WCC Executive Committee, the WCC general secretariat and constant efforts by the Bossey faculty and administrative staff. The Executive Committee began their February meetings in the new conference hall shortly after the dedication. The committee meets every six months and is a governing body of the WCC.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by around one hundred guests including the WCC Executive Committee members, Jean-Marc Gambazzi representing the mayor of Bogis-Bossey, Revd Dr Walter Altmann, moderator of the WCC Central Committee, and Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the WCC. Among other guests were staff members of the WCC and its sister organizations, representatives of Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist communities in Geneva, the Friends of Bossey and the local press.

At the ceremony Tveit was presented with a symbolic key on behalf of the architect of the renovated facilities. In his speech, Tveit commended the role of the institute in bringing together people from diverse churches, cultures and regional backgrounds for ecumenical learning, academic study and personal exchange. He said that the "new facilities will strengthen the role of Bossey as a place for international ecumenical formation as it will offer more space to welcome guests, visitors, researchers and students." Tveit called Bossey an "ecumenical guest house", where he said individuals and groups can come and spend time on work, retreats and celebrations. [Back to top](#)

## Ecumenical Prayer for Syria and the Middle East

The Sabeel Theological Center organized an Ecumenical Prayer for Syria in the St. Stephen Church, Jerusalem, echoing the words of Pope Benedict XVI at the Angelus on Sunday, February 12th.

The Pope renewed with emotion his proximity to the people of the Middle East: "I am following with deep apprehension the dramatic and escalating episodes of violence in Syria. In the past few days they have taken a heavy toll of victims. I remember in prayer the victims, among whom are several children, the injured and all those who are suffering the consequences of an ever more worrying conflict." He then addressed an appeal "to put an end to violence and bloodshed" inviting everyone "to give priority to the way of dialogue, of reconciliation and of the commitment to peace."

The members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Executive Committee have sent a pastoral message to the churches in Syria extending solidarity as they face enormous challenges due to the ongoing violence in the country. The message comes at a time when the situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. The situation was discussed in a meeting at the WCC headquarters in Geneva in late December 2011, in which some twenty Syrian church leaders from various Christian traditions in Syria participated.

The message was crafted by the Executive Committee during their meetings last week from 14 to 18 February in Bossey, Switzerland. In the message they expressed hope for an end to violence and a national dialogue to emerge from the conflict, based on peace with justice, recognition of human rights and human dignity and the need to live together in mutual respect. The message also strongly supported a joint letter from the three heads of churches in Syria sent out to congregations in the country in December. In the letter they condemned "the use of any type of violence" while encouraging their members "not to fear and not to lose hope". It also called on WCC member churches to "engage in concrete actions of solidarity" during this time of difficulties. Quoting the WCC constitution the message read "as a fellowship of churches we are to express the common concern of the churches in the service of human need, the breaking down of barriers between people and the promotion of one human family in justice and peace".

"Ecumenism is a quality of life that needs to be articulated in all aspects of a Christian's life", and "conciliarity is an essential nature of the church," said Catholicos Aram I, head of the Holy See of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church. He was speaking to the audience at the World Council of Churches (WCC) consultation in Beirut, Lebanon.

The consultation, which was hosted by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), focused on the theme “conciliar ecumenism”, referring to the Christian councils and associations that pursue church unity at the national, regional or world level. The meeting was attended by thirty-three leaders from national councils of churches (NCCs) and regional ecumenical organisations (REOs), building on the tradition of the WCC, REOs and NCCs working together to give expression to churches’ desire for unity in Christ.

Catholicos Aram I also identified three distinctive trends that require further consideration in conciliar ecumenism, namely the growing shift from church-centred to people-centred ecumenism, a shift from multi-confessional to confessional ecumenism, and a shift from global to regional and local ecumenism. Other realities, such as the multiplicity of ecumenical actors, churches not yet identifying with the ecumenical movement, and questions of financial sustainability of councils, were identified by the Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the WCC general secretary, during his presentation.

Tveit encouraged the participants to ask “if we are really the fellowships of churches that we are called to be, communities of churches that move forward towards the goal of visible unity? And are we a common witness in the spirit and ethos of koinonia and guided by its values, such as solidarity, mutual accountability and the commitment to consensus and common witness?” Koinonia is the New Testament vision of unity within the communion of the Holy Spirit. In their responses participants focused on the theological and biblical basis of conciliar ecumenism, reflecting on its different expressions and implications for the role of national and regional councils.

In light of the radical changes that the Middle East region is currently passing through; changes that directly impact the present and future destiny of its Christian inhabitants — instilling in them a genuine fear of what lies ahead — the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (Lutheran – Anglican – Reformed) held its first international conference on “Evangelical and Christian Presence in the Middle East” from Monday 13 to Wednesday 15 February, 2012 in Beirut, Lebanon. The Conference was attended by most of the ordained and lay leaders and heads of the member Churches of the Fellowship, as well as delegates from sister Evangelical churches and church institutions in Lebanon, the ME region, Europe, the USA, Canada and New Zealand.

The opening session was held at the Evangelical Church in downtown Beirut. In addition to the participants, it was attended by present and former Lebanese ministers and members of parliament, representatives of local and international evangelical churches and institutions, as well as representatives of sister Eastern Churches and local Islamic leaders.

Mrs. Rosangela Jarjour, the General Secretary of FMEEC, welcomed the attendants and invited Revd Dr. Salim Sahiouny, president of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon, to open the conference with a word of welcome followed by a prayer. A series of keynote speakers delivered their speeches starting with Revd Andrea Zaki, president of FMEEC and vice-president of the Council of Evangelical Churches in Egypt. He was followed by Bishop Munib Younan, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Lands and president of the Lutheran World Federation, Fr. Dr. Paul Rouhana, General Secretary of Middle East Council of Churches and Revd Dr. Thomas Wipf, president of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. Additionally, ex minister Dr. Tarek Mitri and present MP, Dr. Farid El Khazen, offered two major interventions. The session concluded with a summary of the program of the conference presented by Revd Dr. Habib Badr, vice-president of FMEEC.

The Conference also received words of greetings from the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the First International Meeting of the Protestant Synods in Europe.

In the afternoon the participants reconvened at the Commodore Hotel where two major interventions were delivered by the Very Revd Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo and Revd Dr. Mitri Raheb. Each gave an insightful general overview from his perspective of the present moment in the Middle East in light of the drastic changes brought about by the so-called “Arab Spring.” It was noted that the rising paradigms of governance in the Arab world today seem to be based on a moderate or radical political Islam that have replaced the mostly military regimes of the past few decades. A realistic view was offered as to how Christians should practically respond to this new situation.

With detail and precision, other local experts delineated the main challenges and disturbing effects that the recent events in the Middle East region have had on Middle Eastern Christians. Suggestions were made as to how Evangelical Christians may face the challenges in their various contexts and circumstances. Special attention was given the role that the Evangelical tradition played in the life of the Middle East and how Evangelicals met similar challenges in the past, and how may they continue to do so in the present and the future.

After the opening worship service the next day, a series of testimonies from different contexts in the region were given. These included Jerusalem and Palestine (Bishop Munib Younan), from Egypt (Revd Dr. Safwat El Bayadi, president of the Evangelical Community), from Iraq (Revd Haitham Jazrawi, president of the Evangelical Community) and North Africa (Algiers). Each speaker described the present situation in his home country and the impact it has had on the local Christians in light of recent developments during the last year. [Back to top](#)

## Praying, reflecting and acting for a just economy of water

During the seven weeks of Lent the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) focuses on the theme "economy of water" in its Seven Weeks for Water campaign, inspiring churches to pray, reflect and act together for local and global water justice. The Seven Weeks for Water began on 20 February and will be approaching World Water Day and Maundy Thursday with special resources produced for this event.

In a time of economic and environmental crisis, the theme of the campaign stresses the urgency for Christians to engage in reflection and action on the "economy of water". EWN coordinator Maike Gorsboth says, "Water is the lifeblood of the planet as well as the economy. It is crucial for sustainable development in regard to health, food security, energy and poverty – issues that affect and engage churches around the world in different ways."

For the seven weeks, beginning in mid-February this year, the EWN publishes weekly meditations on its website to raise awareness of water and justice. The reflections are accompanied by campaigning links and ideas for activities encouraging individuals and congregations to work towards water justice in their communities. Reflections every week offer biblical responses to several issues including the economy of water, wasteful consumption and production, agro-ecological production and climate change adaptation.

Revd Dr Konrad Raiser, former WCC general secretary, offers a biblical reflection on the concept of thirst for life and thirst for water, integral to human survival, as well as the greed driving manipulation of this precious resource in our world today. "To be thirsty for water is part of the human condition. It is the bodily expression of the longing for the fullness of life, but it can also turn into a greedy effort to maximize satisfaction," says Raiser. The campaign is also paying special attention to the emerging and controversial "Green Economy" concept. The Green Economy aims at reconciling economic development with environmental and social well-being. It is one of the key topics for debate in the run-up to the United Nations' "Rio+20" Conference on Sustainable Development.

EWN is an international network coordinated by the World Council of Churches, which strives to promote the preservation, responsible management and equitable distribution of water for all, based on the understanding that water is a gift of God and a fundamental human right. [Back to top](#)

## Corrymeela Weekend

The Exeter Corrymeela Support Group offers '2012: Ready for Reconciliation?' a Corrymeela weekend of activities celebrating and exploring the work of the Corrymeela Community with its focus on embracing difference, healing division, and enabling reconciliation. Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, and Mrs Susan McEwen, newly appointed Development Director of the Corrymeela Community, will address this conference for all those interested in Corrymeela and reconciliation in their own environment.

The meeting is at the Old Deanery, Cathedral Close, Exeter EX1 1HS on Saturday March 17<sup>th</sup> (10.00 for 10.30-4.30pm). The cost is £10, to include a light lunch of Soup and with drinks provided. Disabled access is available; please advise of your need.

Also on Saturday March 17<sup>th</sup> from 7.30pm till 10.00pm there will be a Ceilidh (and supper) at St Thomas's Church Centre, Cowick Street, Exeter EX2 9AX with music provided by Rough Music. The cost is £5.00; please bring your own alcoholic beverages, soft drinks available to buy.

On Sunday March 18<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am, join together for a Corrymeela service at Southernhay URC, Dix's Field, Exeter EX1 1QA when the preacher will be the Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal. At 5.30 pm he will also be preaching at the service in the Exeter Central Methodist Church (The Mint), Fore Street, Exeter, EX4 3AT.

For further details and to book, contact Revd Georgina Vye, The Vicarage, Newton St Cyres, Devon. EX5 5BN 01392851886 or [g.vye@btinternet.com](mailto:g.vye@btinternet.com) [Back to top](#)

## Prayers at council meetings

On 10 February the High Court ruled on the case of the National Secular Society and Mr Clive Bone v Bideford Town Council on the matter of whether Bideford council had the authority to include prayers as a formal part of full council meetings. The National Secular Society and Mr Clive Bone argued that the practice was discriminatory under the Equalities Act 2010, contravened Mr Bone's rights under Sections 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and contravened Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr Justice Ouseley ruled that the practice of including prayers on the formal agenda was not discriminatory towards Mr Bone under the Equalities Act 2010 nor did it contravene Articles 9 and 14 of the ECHR. He ruled that, under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council did not have the authority to summon any councillors to a meeting at which prayers were part of the formal agenda. He also made it clear that the saying of prayers in a local

authority chamber before a meeting of such a body was lawful, provided councillors were not formally summoned to attend. The full ruling is available for download [here](#).

Responding to this ruling, Mr Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government announced on 18 February that he had 'fast tracked' a commencement order for the Localism Act 2011 to give local councils a 'power of general competence' that would allow them to hold prayers as part of the formal agenda of meetings. In his statement the Secretary of State said that the high court ruling reflected the fact that "for too long, faith has been marginalised in public life." The new powers were made available to local councils from 18 February. The Secretary of State's statement is available [here](#) [Back to top](#)

### **Rough sleeping highest in areas where housing is most unaffordable**

Newly published Government statistics show that rough sleeping has risen in England by 23% in the last year. The Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Statistical Release records 2,181 people as sleeping rough on any one night, up from a total of 1,768 in last year's count. Amongst the information contained in the release is the fact that the largest number of rough sleepers per head of population is in the South of England, especially the South West. This corresponds with the areas of the country where housing is most scarce and unaffordable.

All local authorities in England have submitted figures based either on street counts or estimates done in partnership with homelessness agencies such as outreach services. Street counts were carried out by 53 local authorities between October and November 2011 and estimates were done by 273 local authorities.

Housing Justice director Alison Gelder said: "This increase is sadly part of a familiar picture of chronic and growing housing need in society. Churches in the Housing Justice network report that more and more people are asking for help with housing, including families at risk of losing their homes because of the new limits on Local Housing Allowance. Churches providing practical assistance to homeless and precariously housed people are struggling to meet the rising demand. New church shelter schemes that opened up this winter, such as those in Milton Keynes and Birmingham, have quickly filled to capacity. As predicted, cuts to local authority funded services and independent advice agencies are starting to bite. And on top of all this the rising cost of food and other essentials is forcing many families into debt just to survive. The Coalition Government should think again about its policies which are impacting most directly on the poorest in society. They could start by scrapping the benefit caps in the Welfare Reform Bill."

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### **London Centre for Spirituality appoints new Director**

The Trustees of The London Centre for Spirituality ('The Centre') are delighted to announce the appointment of the Revd Mark Godson as the new permanent Director of the Centre with effect from 1 June 2012.

Mark has a broad and extensive experience including twenty five years as an Anglican priest, ten years of which were as an NHS Chaplain. Mark is also an Integrative psychotherapist and presently holds the office of Area Dean of Christchurch in the Diocese of Winchester, whilst also being Rector of the Avon Valley Partnership covering six parishes.

Chairman of the Centre's trustees, Robin Hepburn commented; "This is great news for all who work in and use The Centre. Mark's vision and knowledge of Spirituality will be a huge asset to the Centre and the trustees are confident that the future work and development of the Centre will grow and be enhanced under his leadership. We wish Mark heartfelt congratulations on his appointment"

Mark Godson said: "Spirituality is essential to human flourishing and the Centre has a key role to play in challenging and encouraging us to become fully human. I am thrilled to have this opportunity to lead the staff and work of the Centre as we engage with a rapidly changing and globally interdependent world, and seek to support individuals and communities in bringing their lives into the life of Christ so that they may be transformed."

For further information about the London Centre for Spirituality ☎ 020 7621 1391, e-mail [info@spiritualitycentre.org](mailto:info@spiritualitycentre.org) or 🌐 [www.spiritualitycentre.org](http://www.spiritualitycentre.org) [Back to top](#)

### **Partners pave the way for new housing in Gloucester**

Much needed affordable housing is on its way in Gloucester thanks to an innovative partnering arrangement between Evesham-based housing association, Rooftop Housing Group, Faith in Affordable Housing, and the Anglican Diocese of Gloucester.

The agreement will see the Diocese provide land at Frampton Road for 13 new housing units designed for local people. The scheme comprises eight 1-bed flats and four 3-bed houses for general affordable rent and three 2-bed houses for shared ownership, along with associated parking and landscaping. As part of the proposals, Rooftop will also be constructing a new vicarage on the site, better suited to modern ministry.

David Hannon, Development Director at Rooftop Housing Group said: "This is a very exciting project which will help to regenerate the local area, provide high-quality, affordable new homes and a new vicarage. In these difficult economic times we all need to work together more than ever and look for innovative solutions to the challenges we face. As such, we were delighted when Faith in Affordable Housing and the Diocese approached us with their ideas for the site and we very much look forward to progressing the scheme as quickly as possible."

Ben Preece-Smith, Director of Finance for the Diocese of Gloucester said: "We have waited a long time to ensure we get the right development for Linden on this site but we are delighted with the scheme we have now agreed with Rooftop. This is a real example of partnership working between the Church and the charitable sector to deliver a real community need. We both hope this will not be the last time we are able to work together for the people of Gloucester."

Alastair Murray, Deputy Director of the Christian charity Housing Justice which manages the Faith in Affordable Housing project said, "Many churches have closed buildings or more space than they can make full use of. This is exactly the kind of excellent example that we would like to see replicated across the country. We want to encourage communities to look imaginatively at how church buildings and land could be used for the future."

There is already planning permission on the site for a similar scheme; however Rooftop will be submitting revised plans in the spring. Initial discussion with Gloucester City Council suggests that they are supportive in principle to the new project. The £1.4 million development is being part-funded by the Homes and Communities Agency and if all goes well it is hoped that work could start in the autumn with the first homes opening in 2013. Local residents will be consulted as part of the planning application. [Back to top](#)

## A Year of Service

All faith communities have within their ethical teachings the values of compassion, care and social justice. One of the ways that their members put these values into everyday practice is through volunteering. In 2012 a special project called 'A Year of Service' will be taking place. In each month, for A Year of Service, faith communities will be hosting a day or days of volunteering and inviting people of other faiths and non-religious beliefs to join in. There will also be workplace volunteering opportunities. The Year provides an opportunity for marking in a practical way the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen of whose reign service has been a key theme.

Monday 28 February saw the formal launch of the project in London at the first faith community volunteering day of A Year of Service, led by the Baha'i community. Further information about the project and how to get involved can be found at [www.ayearofservice.org.uk](http://www.ayearofservice.org.uk) [Back to top](#)

## All Party Parliamentary Group on RE

The Religious Education Council for England and Wales (REC) announced on 17 February that a new All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) is being set up which will 'focus on safeguarding the provision of RE in our schools and explore how the subject can continue to deliver a valuable dimension to the education of all children and young people.' The REC will be providing the secretariat of the APPG. The APPG, which will be chaired by Mr Stephen Lloyd, MP for Eastbourne and Willingdon, will draw on earlier cross-party support for the inclusion of RE in the English Baccalaureate. Further information can be found on the [website of the REC](#) [Back to top](#)

## Giles Fraser lectures on the Morality of New War

Giles Fraser, former canon chancellor of St Paul's Cathedral, will be leading a series of lectures exploring war, conflict and Christianity. The Sarum Theological Lectures will be taking place at Salisbury Cathedral on four consecutive nights from Monday 30 April to Thursday 3 May at 7 pm.

With the rise of asymmetric warfare, does the traditional understanding of Just War theory work in the 21st century? Does human rights legislation have a place on the battlefield? And has secularisation undermined the moral substructure of the British army? See [here](#) for details. [Back to top](#)

## Route around the World

The Diocese of London Environmental Challenge 2012 event **Route around the World - Climate action for resilience, renewal and hope** – will be on Saturday 17th March 2012 at St George's Church Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury Way, London WC1

Church doors open 13:30; Refreshments: Upper Vestry Hall  
WELCOME 14:00; KEYNOTE 14:05 - The Rt Rev Peter Wheatley, Bishop of Edmonton  
14:25 HELP WHERE IT HURTS - Stephanie Hubbard, Christian Aid

15:00 Refreshments

15:30 WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE? Tales from Peru: Daniel Hale, Progressio

16:05 RIO EARTH SUMMITS Legacy from 1992, Prospectus for 2012

Rabbi Jeffrey Newman, Earth Charter UK

16:30 Conclusion and networking; Depart 17:00

RSVP to Brian Cuthbertson ([brian.cuthbertson@london.anglican.org](mailto:brian.cuthbertson@london.anglican.org)) ☎ (020) 7932 1229

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## Churches Together groups invited to help Close the Gap

Church Action on Poverty has been campaigning ecumenically since 1982 to Close the Gap between rich and poor in the UK. Individuals and churches across the UK work with them to make a difference, tackling poverty in their own communities and supporting our national campaigns against injustice. One of the most effective ways of making a difference in your own community is to form a local group to share resources and ideas. There are thriving local groups in many large cities - and many of these groups were set up by, or supported by, Churches Together bodies.

In 2012, the year of CAP's 30th anniversary, Churches Together groups everywhere are invited to join in 'Kindling a Flame', building partnerships to tackle the UK's growing poverty and inequality. Please get involved if you can! Find out more about local Church Action on Poverty groups at [www.church-poverty.org.uk/groups](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/groups) Download a [guide](#) to local action or call Liam Purcell on 0161 236 9321.

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## Human rights abuses taken to European Council

The European Council's working party on the Middle East, the Mashreq/Maghreb Working party (MaMa), heard clear evidence about human rights abuses in Israeli occupied Palestinian territories, from the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR). It was the first such meeting at this level. MaMa heard evidence from the West Bank including about the herding communities in the South Hebron Hills, where the absence of the rule of law and the remote location means that when Israeli settlers harass Palestinians, sometimes with the protection of the Israeli Defence Forces, complaints are not investigated.

The EAPPI team were asked for their observations and recommendations. The meeting in Brussels comes just days ahead of a Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union meeting on 27 February 2012. MaMa's function is to draft policy for the European Council's twenty seven Heads of States. The EAPPI was set up by the World Council of Churches in 2002 in response to a call for international help from church leaders in Jerusalem. EAPPI's aim is to end the Israeli occupation and bring a just peace based on international law. Quakers manage the programme on behalf of British and Irish churches and church agencies.

The President of MaMa said the members of MaMa, all ambassadors, political counsellors and first secretaries, were already aware of the work of EAPPI. They heard first hand evidence from Hamed Qawsemeh, field officer of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) for the Southern governorates of the West Bank and from Jane Backhurst, an EAPPI human rights observer who provided a protective presence for Palestinian herding communities for three months in the South Hebron Hills. Both speakers said clearly that the human rights abuses have major humanitarian consequences.

EAPPI human rights observers, called ecumenical accompaniers, monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, support acts of non-violent resistance alongside local Christian and Muslim Palestinians and Israeli peace activists, offer protection through non-violent presence, engage in public policy advocacy and stand in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation. Speaking from that experience, the EAPPI team's recommendations included: establishing the rule of law in the region; an end to demolitions of Palestinian homes and infrastructure including water tanks; an end to expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory which is illegal under international law; and an end to child detention and for the European Union to ensure clear labelling of Israeli settlement products. UNOHCHR were also keen for the Golani Brigade of the IDF to be removed from Hebron City. Teresa Parker, who manages EAPPI for Britain and Ireland and was present at the MaMa meeting said: "This work is about keeping our promises to take the experiences of civilians suffering violence and occupation to those with the power to bring about a just peace."

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## Not Wasted but Wanted

Senior Church Leaders in West Yorkshire listened to, prayed with and spoke out alongside young people. On Ash Wednesday (22 February), the first day of the penitential season of Lent, the Church Leaders asked God's forgiveness, "for the mess we have created for our children and grandchildren to live with". Senior Church Leaders from Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and other traditions met with students at Bradford College, part of the College's Confidence in Diversity Week.

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## Launch of new premises for Croydon Faith Education Resources Library

The Mayor of Croydon, Councillor Graham Bass officially opened the new premises for the 'Croydon Faith Education Resources' library based at the Oasis Academy Shirley Park in January. The resources library is now in a more pleasant, central & accessible location since it has moved from its previous location at Selhurst. The Mayor acknowledged the importance of this multi-faith resources centre and the valuable services it offers the local schools & community. He encouraged and hoped that people would visit the new Centre with its wonderful twenty thousand faith resources including artefacts, posters, DVDs & books and make use of the excellent facilities provided.

Amongst the key guests was Alan Potter, the Director of Education for Croydon, who thanked the CFER Management Committee and Staff for their hard work, enduring the journey which eventually brought them to the new Centre. He stated that he and Croydon Council recognise the benefits of the thousands of resources the Centre holds in providing the opportunity to deliver good quality RE and will continue to support the Centre in its future developments.

The Bishop of Southwark, the Rt Revd Christopher Chessun, kindly sent his apologies for regrettably not being able to attend on this occasion, but requested that the following message be read out on his behalf: "please pass on my very best wishes for the work of CFER, particularly as it seeks to build strong and positive relationships between faith communities. Increased knowledge of each other can only lead to greater understanding and the finding of common ground to work for the well being of the wider society. I hope that CFER will prosper in this work in its new home".

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