

Strategic priorities

During 2016 we continued to implement our strategic aims: relationships, action for mission, and theological reflection. The ecumenical landscape is continually re-figuring, reflecting the increase of partner churches, particularly locally, but also nationally. Our strategic aims allow us to respond freely and creatively to those changes. Our goal remains the pursuit of the journey towards the unity for which Christ prayed on the evening before his death.

Relationships

2016 began on a note of sorrow with the funeral of our former colleague John Bradley. John had devoted a great part of his ministerial life to working for Christian unity, first as a County Officer in Devon, and for many years as our Field Officer for the South of England. The gathering of present and past friends and colleagues from a wide spectrum of places and churches was deeply moving and profoundly encouraging. It spoke profoundly, about the respect in which John was held, and also about the deep bonds in Christ which bind us in spite of theological difference and ecclesial nuance. It reminded us of our responsibility to nurture those deep bonds and provide the space and soil in which they can grow.



At the heart of our work

And so relationships remain at the heart of our work. We sustain diverse networks, meetings, conferences, consultations and encounters which allow people to meet and we attend carefully to infrastructure, most notably to our website with nearly 3,000 pages of news, information and resources. We also maintain *The Black and Multi-cultural Churches Directory*, which has over 2,000 entries and

remains the most significant on-line resource about that sector of English Christianity.

The heartbeat of English ecumenism

Local relationships are the heartbeat of English ecumenism. They are changing – because there are more partners (CTE has grown from 16 to 44 members since 1990), because the focus of local church engagement is community-focused mission, and because shrinking resources mean that some long-cherished institutions are no longer viable. The emergence of new patterns of ecumenical engagement in mission and joint working is encouraging.

A key piece of work, with member churches and their National Ecumenical Officers (NEOs), was the creation of *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission*, a new, more flexible and permissive framework for local ecumenical work. In 2016 drafts were sent out for consultation and we hope that it will be launched in 2017.

We continue to monitor what is happening, to reflect it in our thinking and to engage creatively with new developments. For example, we welcomed Roger Sutton of the *Gather* movement to our September Enabling Group, and are planning with them *Movement Day*, a major conference in October 2017 aiming to bring together 600 participants from 'unity for mission' organisations across the country.

At the same time we rejoice in developments like the 'ecumenical county' plans in Cumbria, where on Advent Sunday 2016 The Salvation Army joined the Church of England, Methodists and United Reformed Churches in signing the *Declaration of Covenant Partnership*. Alongside partners who signed a *Letter of Companionship*, they seek together to bring the good news of God's love to all the people of the county.

That 'rejoicing' translates into tangible support in our work with ecumenical officers (County and Denominational) and Intermediate Bodies. All staff share in this, but Jenny Bond (the Officer

for Training, Resourcing and Events) acts as the first port of call for enquiries and support.

We continue to provide support during County Ecumenical Officer (CEO) vacancies, help with recruitment and professional appointment procedures and offer new CEOs a personalised induction session at CTE's London offices. The training course for new Ecumenical Officers continues to be refined and improved in collaboration with our NEO colleagues.



Supporting County Ecumenical Officers

We worked with the South-West CEOs to produce a well-attended annual consultation for CEOs and NEOs: *Five Ecumenical Imperatives and the Reformation*. It drew on the international report *From Conflict to Communion* and on the advice of CTE's Presidents on commemorating the Reformation. The intent was to equip CEOs to produce and manage commemorations of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

Bringing Member Churches together

Our Governance also relies on relationships, expressed primarily in the twice-yearly 24-hour Enabling Group. Attendance is impressive. One member described the experience as 'multi-lateral, multi-vocal, multi-level conversation and theological reflection and listening together'.

Enabling Group members encounter the diversity of English Christianity and its underlying unity in a shared discipleship in Jesus Christ. In 2016 the Unification Council of the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches (European Chapter), which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2016, and the United Reformed Church and Congregational Federation, who share a common history, made presentations about their ethos, worship and life.

The Enabling Group also received presentations on ecumenical developments, considered how

to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the 1517 Lutheran Reformation, worked on *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission* and celebrated the Presidents' ecumenical launch of the 2017 *Thy Kingdom Come* prayer initiative.

The balance of learning, reflection and business makes the Enabling Group a key tool for co-ordination between churches at a national level. That encounter is sometimes reflected in wider national encounters. For example, 2016 saw the first English Orthodox-Pentecostal meeting to discuss bi-lateral relations and co-operation in mission. We hope that will be built on in 2017.

More routine but crucial networking...

Relationships also form a thread which runs through more 'routine' work, for example in the Co-ordinating Groups of church professionals – those responsible for ministerial training, for HR management, evangelism and mission, new housing and theology and unity. Such networks facilitate sharing resources and co-operation which are essential to ecumenism.

More noticeable is the profile of our Bodies in Association, whose meetings we host alongside our colleagues in CTBI, and our servicing of the National Ecumenical Officers meetings – but once again, relationships are key.

National Pentecostal Forum

A highly significant ecumenical development during 2016 has been the consolidation of the National Pentecostal Forum – a bi-annual meeting which brings together representatives of twenty national Pentecostal and charismatic CTE members – which acts both as a forum for developing policy and to deepen relationships and understanding within that sector of church life.

Young people

We have sought to follow through the innovative work of the 2015 Forum which listened to the voices of young leaders, gathered together through a partnership with *Chemin Neuf*. With the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity, we provided 12 bursaries to send young leaders to *Chemin Neuf's* follow-up celebration to *Paradise in the City* at Lodz in Poland. Following a day's de-briefing, these young leaders made a presentation to the Presidents and church leaders at Lambeth Palace in October. We will continue that focus at our 2018 Forum for which planning is already under way.

It was deeply moving to see how these young people responded to Christian difference with openness and generosity, yet with a rootedness in their own church life and to feel their 'holy impatience' with disunity. For some it was the first time they had met Christians of different denominations and spiritualities – a salutary reminder of the iterative nature of ecumenism. It also raises the critical strategic question of how best the churches can nurture that age-group and encourage their ecumenical participation.

Action for Mission

Our work here falls into discrete categories. We have expertise in Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations (PMR) and our engagement with public affairs and government is focused here. Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, our staff member, is key to many initiatives within the wider black community. In 2016 Elizabeth Joy volunteered to work with him.

Other organisations have drawn on the expertise of our PMR work – Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's *Churches Forum for Interfaith Relations*, the Evangelical Alliance's *One People Commission*, the *Inter-Faith Network* and the *National Church Leaders Forum* – as it seeks to represent the 'voice' of black Christianity in Britain. That range of collaboration indicates the respect in which our expertise is held.

Combatting slavery and human trafficking

We continue to promote the anti-slavery/human trafficking agenda particularly within the black Pentecostal sector. Our *Churches Combatting Modern Slavery-Human Trafficking (CCMS-HT)* initiative continues to raise awareness of the issue amongst Pentecostal Churches. The online information hub is now well established.

In 2016 we commissioned a new project 'Trafficking recognition and the impact on women for Pentecostal churches in the UK' from the Cambridge Centre for Applied Research in Human Trafficking (CCARHT). The report of this conversation particularly with black churches to explore the nature of human trafficking and violence against women will be published in 2017.

Recognising their contribution

We have also been running and managing a Heritage Lottery funded project – *They Also Served – The Contribution of Black African and Caribbean servicemen and servicewomen to WW1*. This eighteen month project ran through

2016, directed by Dr Angelina Osborne, and will conclude with a commemorative event in Birmingham in July 2017. It is hoped that it will raise awareness during the centenary of the First World War of this regrettably often-neglected narrative and deepen our appreciation of our shared and multicultural history.



Evangelism and mission

We focus on evangelism and mission through the work of Capt. Jim Currin CA. The Churches Group for New Housing Areas was pleased to collaborate in research which led to the publication of *Pioneer Ministry in New Housing Areas* (www.grovebooks.co.uk) and the launch of the publication in June. It was accompanied by an article from a Catholic perspective by Fr James Cassidy in *One in Christ* (Dec 2016).

The celebration of the Queen's 90th birthday saw many local Churches Together groups run local events – street parties, festivals, all age events – and we were pleased to act as a resource for information and co-ordination. It was a joy that our Presidents and the General Secretary took part in the service of thanksgiving at St Paul's.

Thy Kingdom Come

The most hopeful development of 2016 was the way the Archbishop of Canterbury's prayer initiative for evangelism between Easter and Pentecost 2017 became ecumenical. National church leaders and denominations responded and by CTE's Presidents agreed to adopt it as an ecumenical venture from the beginning.

Jim Currin has been a key player for us, co-ordinating the ecumenical dimension of this in the planning process. We hope and pray that it will continue to bear fruit across the country.



Theological reflection

Theological reflection is fundamental and woven into all we do. All our courses and events include Bible Study or theological reflection and all that we do grows out of theological reflection.

For many years the Theology and Unity Group has done sterling work. In 2016 we thanked and said farewell to TUG's indefatigable Secretary, David Carter, and are now re-thinking how the churches can engage together in theological reflection. David's valuable paper, *A history of TUG 1996-2016*, is available on our website.

National Pentecostal Symposium

We were delighted to host the first ever national Pentecostal symposium in November 2016. Over 200 representatives of Pentecostal and charismatic churches gathered to worship and reflect together in an occasion of celebration, recognition, and academic reflection. Our hope is that the various papers given will result in publication and that the symposium will be the first of many to allow a popular engagement with Pentecostal theology and spirituality.



Theological resourcing

The General Secretary is part of a small group preparing a resource on 'Receptive Ecumenism' which CTE hopes to publish online in 2017. He continues to be a valuable theological resource within CTE and beyond.

All staff resource Churches Together groups at local and intermediate levels and in 2016 three staff sabbaticals included theological reflection.

Governance issues and general remarks

CTE's Board regretted the decision of the Church of England Archbishops' Council to reduce their funding of CTE by £80K from 2017, not least because there had been no prior conversation with ecumenical partners. In response, they initiated a review from the *Theos Think Tank* on the nature of English ecumenism

and what the churches seek from CTE in the next five years. That research began in the autumn and will be concluded by the middle of 2017. The churches will then consider how they wish funding to be handled. In the meantime careful financial control will be exercised as we will be in a period of deficit financing – sustainable in the short but not in the long term.

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for an umbrella body include the number and influence of those who wish to join. In 2016 we welcomed *Ixthus Church Council* as a member and *The Friends of the Holy Land* as a Body in Association.

Another KPI is those willing to lend support or work in partnership with us. Our Presidents are the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, HE Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain, Bishop Eric Brown, the Revd Dr Hugh Osgood and the Revd Canon Billy Kennedy. A wide range of church leaders of all denominations participate in our work in many other ways.

Working together with others

We continue to work in partnership with many different organisations as well as with the other National Ecumenical Instruments and *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland* (CTBI).

Plans for the future

CTE's future plans will be intimately connected with what the *Theos* review reveals about the ecumenical needs and aspirations of member churches. Our major vulnerability, finance and funding, will be critical. CTE's staffing will be reviewed in the light of the General Secretary's impending retirement after the 2018 Forum.

We hope those actions will allow us to keep delivering our strategic priorities of building relationships across denominational and confessional boundaries, resourcing churches for active participation in their communities in service and mission, and reflecting theologically on ecumenical activity.



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