

An extract from CTE's 2017 report to the Charity Commission. Full text: www.cte.org.uk/annualreports

Strategic priorities

Two anniversaries coincided in 2017. On 31 October 1517 Martin Luther promulgated his 'Ninety-five Theses'. On 4 September 1987 the Swanwick Declaration was signed.

The publication of Luther's Theses led eventually to the upheavals of the Protestant reformations which tore apart the unity of Western European Christendom between the 1520s and the 1560s.

The Swanwick Declaration was the embodiment of the 'common mind' of '...the broadest assembly of British and Irish Churches ever to meet in these isles'. In God's time, they committed themselves to 'become more fully ...the one Church of Christ, united in faith. Communion, pastoral care and mission.' As a result new instruments were created to enable the churches to do that, including, in England, 'Churches Together in England'.



It is a sign of the times that the former anniversary spawned books, programmes and conferences in abundance, but the latter went unnoticed. Division and disagreement is so much more exciting than reconciliation and common endeavour. Thanks to the ecumenical pilgrimage of the past century, of which Swanwick was no small part, working together in mission is commonplace in England's cities, towns and villages and is regarded as normal.

The next phase of the ecumenical journey

It was therefore appropriate that CTE's Board funded research by the Theos think tank into the next phase of the ecumenical journey. Their report, *That they may all be one: insights into Churches Together in England and contemporary ecumenism*, surveyed the

understandings of unity amongst our members. It stands as a salutary cairn on the journey, a reminder of the changing, diversifying face of English Christianity. In 1987 there were sixteen member churches, now there are forty-five, witness to the growth of migrant churches, the burgeoning of Pentecostalism and the changing dynamics of the charismatic movement.

It is small surprise that the 500th anniversary of 1517 loomed large in CTE's life in 2017, but the Theos research reminded us that we were exploring its implications in a very different Christian landscape to that which prevailed in 1987. That in its turn is an impetus to re-fashion our ecumenical engagement as we seek together to share in God's mission. The Board have begun to work with the report and to re-fashion the strategic aims of the organisation.

Relationships

Our Enabling Group is extraordinary, a microcosm of England's Christian diversity, united in recognition of each other as disciples of Jesus Christ, but wonderfully diverse in their styles of worship, theology and spirituality. One colleague from a 'historic' church was delighted to be 'encountering churches I'd never heard of before', and that was complemented by a representative of one of the newer members who said, 'What a pleasure to be around the same table as all these other Christians'. That is an expression of the relational heart of ecumenism, and it is why relationships remained at the heart of our work in 2017.

The Enabling Group doesn't just 'happen' it is carefully engineered by the staff and the Board to get maximum value from our diversity. At most meetings a member church gives a presentation about itself and leads night prayer according to its practice.

A commitment to diversity flows into every other aspect of our work. We sustain a deliberately diverse range of networks, meetings, conferences, consultations and encounters – from Digi-Comms Officers to those who work in

new housing, from encounters between Pentecostal pastors and Orthodox clergy to gatherings of County Ecumenical Officers, from meetings of Bodies in Association who reach into almost every facet of charitable life to briefing sessions for international visitors (in 2017 for a group from America).

Our website

We also devote a good deal of staff time, energy and creativity to our website. 2017 saw much editing, rewriting and archiving of material, not least in pages about the history of ecumenism since 1987. Our average page visits per day was significantly up on 2016, with an average of 9,970 visits. Our Twitter feed had 1,248 regular followers who receive an average of 35 news items daily from the churches and agencies of CTE. 1,390 subscribers to CTe-News received about 15 news items a month. Our news bulletin for evangelists and missionaries, *EvangelismUK* circulated regular news to about 200 specialist subscribers. We continued to maintain The Black and Multi-cultural Churches Directory, a significant online resource.

Our Presidents

Relationships are vital at every level of ecumenism. We are profoundly grateful for the level of ecumenical understanding and mutual support amongst our six Presidents. In 2017 our first Pentecostal and Orthodox Presidents concluded their terms of office. HE Archbishop Gregorios was succeeded by HG Bishop Angaelos, and Bishop Eric Brown by Pastor Agu Irukwu. We were honoured that Archbishop Gregorios and Bishop Brown served us and are grateful for their support and encouragement. We also noted with pleasure Bishop Angaelos' enthronement later in the year as Coptic Archbishop of the Diocese of London.

The General Secretary attended an ecumenical service of Vespers to mark the death of one of our former Presidents, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor. He was a great friend and champion of ecumenism, and he would have been gladdened to see so many of our member churches represented at the service.

Ecumenical Officers and Intermediate Bodies

The fine working relationship and nexus of friendships which binds the National Ecumenical Officers together is a vital component of the English ecumenical engine.

We continued to service their meetings in 2017, and note with pleasure the widening of that group as more Churches appoint people as NEOs. We said sad farewells to long serving full-time officers on their retirement (particularly to Roger Paul of the Church of England and David Tatem of the United Reformed Church), but welcomed their replacements and rejoiced at a new blend of gifts for fresh challenges.



Philip Brooks (l) took over from David Tatem (r)

We continued to work hard during 2017 in supporting the work of Intermediate Bodies and their officers (County Ecumenical Officers and equivalents). At the sharp end of this is Jenny Bond, our officer for Training, Resources and Events, keeping information flowing, dealing with queries and arranging the annual Consultation. During CEO vacancies we continued to provide support with recruitment and appointment procedures, offering newly-appointed Officers 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 National Ecumenical Officer colleagues.

The 2017 consultation for County Officers unusually was a reflective retreat, led by Jenny Bond and David Cornick, on prayer and meditation on John's gospel. It was well received. During 2017 planning began with the East Midlands for the 2018 consultation.

Other relationships and networks

2017 saw a change in our Bodies in Association meetings. This is work we share with colleagues in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. We both wish to note our thanks to the long-standing Convenor of that meeting, Fr Mark Woodruff, who concluded twelve years of service in 2017. Mark has been a doughty champion of the 'ecumenical voluntary sector' and a good friend of the Instruments. We were delighted to welcome his successor, Doral Hayes of the Association of Interchurch Families.

The Pentecostal Forum brings together leaders and representatives from 21 national Churches and church agencies to discuss matters of Christian unity and mission. Amongst other work, they have begun to address the complex questions around the arguments for reparative justice in relation to the legacy of slavery and its history, and will be engaging Member Churches in those discussions in due season.

Ecumenism is sustained and developed by this complex, fragile and yet remarkably tensile web of relationships and networks, and we are grateful to all who have worked with us in 2017.

Action for Mission

Our work here falls into two discrete categories. We have expertise in Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations (PMR). Our staff member in this area, Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, is also key to many initiatives within the wider black community. That expertise is reflected in the wide range of partners with whom we worked during 2017: the Church of England's Anglican/Pentecostal Steering Group, the Inter-Faith Network, the National Church Leaders Forum and Housing Justice. That collaboration is an indication of the respect in which our expertise is held and our engagement with public affairs and government is focused here. We took particular pleasure in Dr Aldred's appointment as one of the Co-Presidents of Housing Justice.

June saw the launch in the House of Lords, hosted by Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, of our report *Behind Closed Doors – voices against gendered violence, human trafficking and modern day slavery*. This unique and significant piece of work focused particularly on churches with a large West African constituency, raising awareness of trafficking issues and how they can respond. It provides a template for all our Member Churches whose congregations are drawn from across the globe and many cultures because trafficking is a global crime, and a universal sin against the image of God. We are pleased to report ongoing conversations about training as a consequence of this research.

Our 18 month long Heritage Lottery funded project, *They Also Served - the contribution of Black African and Caribbean servicemen and servicewomen to WW1*, concluded during 2017, culminating in a moving service at Handsworth New Testament Church of God on 2 July, at which the preacher was the Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of

Commons. This project was focused on the West Midlands and its impact has been profound; the take-up of the exhibition materials and the interest of schools exceeded expectation. It is an important contribution to black history and a notable contribution to the discovery of a common history in the horrors of war, enabling new understandings of the complex multi-cultural history of twentieth century Britain and its churches. If mission is about discovering who you truly are in the presence of God, then this was mission.



Mission and evangelism

Our second main missional focus is through the work of Capt Jim Currin CA, our Mission and Evangelism officer. We were partners in the initiative of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in *Thy Kingdom Come*, the call to prayer for mission between Ascensiontide and Pentecost. All our Presidents eagerly endorsed this and we worked hard, from the initial stages of planning onwards to realise its ecumenical potential. We helped facilitate the ecumenical Champions launch event at Lambeth, and encouraged their appointments, and gathered stories and information about Churches Together Beacon events. The impetus was considerable, and the ecumenical possibilities promise to be even greater during 2018.

We were also partners with the *Gather* network of 'new unity movements for mission' in Movement Day, a major conference at Methodist Central Hall for about a thousand people on 6/7th October. We were responsible for a seminar on 'Churches Together and Mission as Transformation' and it was a real delight to see five of our six Presidents (the Archbishop of Canterbury was abroad) leading prayers for the nation in Parliament Square at the conclusion to the first day. Unity is not a brand we 'own', rather we are its heralds and celebrants, so we will continue to build bridges to all who share the gospel imperative of bringing God's people to unity that the world may believe. Solid relationships have been built which will bear fruit in 2018 and beyond as *Gather* increases its international momentum.

We have continued to provide space and secretarial servicing for meetings of Evangelism Officers and the Churches Group for New Housing. We organised a day for Digi-Comms officers. Members of the New Housing Group made site visits to Kent and to Derby, exploring the creative ways in which the churches are responding to new housing areas: church planting, pioneer ministry, Café Church and retail chaplaincy, all in pursuit of mission, the creation of community, and human flourishing.

Mission and unity are integral parts of being the church, so the finalising of *A new framework for Local Mission in Unity* in March and the work on *A guide to understanding 'A new framework'* with National Ecumenical Officers colleagues provides a resource for wider and more collaborative ecumenical mission activity. It should enable a much looser, nimbler enabling of ecumenical mission objectives.

Theological reflection

This weaves through all that we do. Enabling Group meetings in 2017 included Bible study and theological reflection. The Board spent a day in July reflecting on the Theos report, which has theological resonance into the future. Its significance lies in the clear perception of members that mission and unity are inseparable, for our missionary God is in Christ reconciling all peoples, all creation, to himself. Part of our ongoing work will explore the ecumenical implications of that. The Deputy Convenor, the Revd Ruth Bottoms, plans to work with CTE staff at their residential meeting in January 2018 to start work on new strategic objectives which will re-align CTE with the mission focus suggested by Theos' research.

The 500th anniversary of the Reformation opened up particular possibilities. We were responsible for a major conference in October, 'Responding to the Reformation'. Speakers included Professors Mark Chapman and Andrew Louth, Fr Nicholas King SJ, and the Rt Revd Jan Macfarlane, the Bishop of Repton. The focus was on handling the legacy of the reformation and the papers were published in *One in Christ*. (vol 51, no 2, 2017)

David Cornick gave 15 lectures/papers during the anniversary. The level of interest evoked by the anniversary speaks both of people's hunger for knowledge of their Christian history, but also (more importantly) about how that heritage can be understood and used ecumenically.

Theology does not exist in isolation from the reflective people of God. Mission stimulates both theological thought and ecclesiological innovation. Of nowhere is that more true than Cumbria. The attempt in Cumbria to create an ecumenical county has a resonance and significance beyond its borders and so we have been standing alongside them, trying to help them explore the boundaries of ecumenical co-operation. That work is theological and its conclusion will stretch into 2018.

Governance issues and general remarks

The Board, through its Finance Committee, continue to exercise careful financial control as they enter a planned period of deficit financing. That is sustainable in the short term, but clearly not in the long term, and they will be engaging with Member Churches about that during 2018.

It is a pleasure to report that we are dealing with a number of applications from churches who wish to join CTE, and that during 2017 we welcomed the Calvary Church of God in Christ as members and Action for Children and Sports Chaplaincy as Bodies in Association.

Plans for the future

CTE is committed to developing working arrangements with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the National Instruments in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and the Free Churches Group who generously allow their Education Officer's expertise to be available to us.

Our future plans will be connected with the reception of the Theos report and re-aligning our strategic aims towards a mission focus. We do that with a new General Secretary, the Revd Dr Paul Goodliff, who takes up his post in July.



Financial stability remains an overriding concern which will be shared with member churches during 2018.

We will continue to seek all avenues for using our expertise in mission, education, theology and multicultural issues to the benefit of our members.

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