



Reflection: Mission Opportunities served up on a Plate



Revd Chris Briggs is a Methodist Minister based on Portland in Dorset.

I have been deeply privileged to serve Christ's Church through engaging with two major sporting events over the last few years. In 2012 The Church in Weymouth and Portland welcomed the Sailing Events of the London 2012 Olympic Games to our local area. Under the banner of "Refresh 2012" as the Church we sought to be refreshing and uplifting seeking to make local people and visitors alike aware of an oasis of God's presence in the midst of all that was going on. It was a terrific time with many local churches and individual Christians sharing in serving others and making good news known in word and action. I estimate we had something like 500 volunteers involved over the period of the Olympics and we were planning for 5-6 years.

This year I was privileged to be on Sabbatical during the period leading up to Glasgow 2014, the Commonwealth Games. As part of my Sabbatical I was looking at how the Church responded to big event opportunities presented to it by wider society (like the Olympics and Commonwealth Games). It was a joy to share with More than Gold 2014 (the organisation set up to resource the Church in its response to these major events) and it meant that I had several trips to Scotland to observe and participate in the Church's preparations for this major event. With some involvement with the Church's response to these two major sporting events I have been reflecting on the response of the Church and churches to the opportunities presented by having these kinds of opportunities.

In a nutshell it was much as one would imagine. Even with major events served up on a plate such as the Olympics or the Commonwealth Games, it appears to be very hard work indeed to motivate churches to seize the mission opportunities. To me this underlines the fact that there is not really a mission mind-set in most churches. With the backdrop of society as it is at present we need to place mission at the centre of our training, resourcing and focus in a way that maybe it has not been in more recent decades. We live in a society that is very open to the spiritual but disillusioned with institutions such as the Church. We need to acknowledge this and invest more in training missionaries to our own context rather than pastors who keep the Church ticking over.

These big events provide ideal opportunities to engage with people with the opportunity to make mission central to much of our thinking. That of course is a principle that is not confined to major sporting events but which is applicable to local life in any church or fellowship. What is going on around us? Where are our communities gathering? We can respond to the opportunities presented by local festivals, sporting events, the draw of major shopping centres, and so forth by being present and ready to connect with people.

Finally, another little lesson I have tried to learn. When these opportunities come it can be easy to treat them as ends in themselves. In reality we should always be looking for how the Holy Spirit is breathing shape into our structures and organisation so we are better equipped to reach out to others. That is one way we develop legacy from these events. With London 2012 and Glasgow 2014 if the witness and work of the Church only revolved around these events and stopped there then we have missed a further opportunity. If our local events are just one off self-contained outreach occasions then we may be missing where the Spirit is leading us. In Weymouth and Portland we have now set up "Refresh" as a charity, because it seemed that we were being led to give shape to something that would enable the Church in this area to continue joining in the mission of God together. Maybe God is saying something similar in your area.

[Here is a blog I kept while on Sabbatical which covers this area and many others.](#)

Equality and Human Rights Survey



Before October 14th, all people of faith have been invited to share their experience of Religion and Belief' in the Equality and Human Rights Survey. This is from their website:

'Has your religion or belief, or that of other people, affected your experiences in the workplace or the services you receive as part of your daily life? Or perhaps they impact on you as an employer or manager? If so, we want to hear from you, whether your experiences are good or bad.

We want to gather as much information as we can from @ employees, service users, employers, service providers, trade unions, legal advisors and religion or belief groups so that we can assess how a person's religion or belief, or lack of it, is taken into account at work and when using services.

This major call for evidence is part of our three year programme to strengthen understanding of religion or belief in public life, to improve knowledge of what happens in practice and to make sure that the laws which are in place to protect everyone's right to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect are effective'.

[Link to the Equality and Human Rights web Survey](#)

Interfaith Declaration on Climate Change



As hundreds of thousands of people flooded through the streets of New York City on 21 September in a march for action on climate change, 30 faith leaders representing nine religions signed their names to a statement calling for concrete actions to curb carbon emissions.

The [document](#) was the centrepiece of an interfaith conference jointly hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC), a body that includes 345 churches representing about 560 million Christians worldwide, and [Religions for Peace](#), an interfaith coalition with members in more than 70 countries. Signatories hailed from 21 countries on six continents.

"When in January I listened to the general secretary of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, calling the world's heads of state for a summit on climate change, I thought we also have to get together as leaders of faith communities to offer our contributions," said Rev. Dr Olav Fkyse Tveit, the WCC general secretary. Large changes require "deep and strong conviction" which, he said, can be found in the "beliefs, rituals, symbols, sacred texts and prayers of faith [that] give meaning and direction for a large portion of the world's population."

The statement, titled Climate, Faith and Hope: Faith Traditions Together for a Common Future will be presented to the deputy-secretary general of the UN, Jan Eliasson, in advance of the UN climate summit that is set to begin on 23 September.

It calls on "all States to work constructively towards a far-reaching global climate agreement in Paris in 2015" which will be "ambitious enough to keep temperature from rising well below 2° Celsius; fair enough to distribute the burden in an equitable way; and legally binding enough to guarantee that effective national climate policies to curb emissions are well funded and fully implemented."

As faith leaders who together represent a huge swathe of the world's religious adherents, "if we

change, everything changes. So we have to commit ourselves," said Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, founder of the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values in The Hague, the Netherlands. "The march is visible. What we are doing here is visible. The march and the signed documents together make an impression," he said.

"Although there is always the emphasis on the beyond, on the eternal life, we are extremely eager for earthly life for people," said Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. "Climate is a central issue for human life. So we have to try as a church to ensure the best possible conditions."

For some of the signatories, climate change is threatening the very countries they call home. The nation of Tuvalu sits on a small collection of reef islands and atolls in the Pacific Ocean. Salt water has entered the underground water table on which the people rely, and scientists suggest the islands will eventually be subsumed as sea levels continue to rise.

"For my church, this means life, because our very existence is challenged. And anything that challenges the livelihood and the life and life continuity of a people is a mission from God to us as believers to fight against it," said Rev. Tafue Lusama, general secretary of the Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu (EKT).

Yet, he said, he didn't want Tuvalu to become "a symbol of defeat" for other low-lying countries that may eventually face the same fate. "If we can stand our ground and tell the world they should do something and act on it now, even if Tuvalu goes down, we can save the others," Lusama said.

In the face of the crisis affecting the world, it is imperative for people of faith to speak out in hope, becoming a moral voice that speaks "to our deepest convictions and commitments as human beings," said the WCC general secretary. "I say it is immoral not to speak of hope in this time."

"I see a lot of hope, even just these three days," said Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, who spoke to the gathering during a morning session. "There's the public mobilization that we're seeing today, corporate mobilization that we're going to see, and the political mobilization. It is a very encouraging sign that people are standing up to be counted. Yet it is not enough. We have to build on that to get to the final solution."

"We cannot despair, said Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah, president of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies in Abu Dhabi and co-moderator of Religions for Peace. "This hope is our address. This is where we live."

WCC news release written by Connie Wardle, senior writer and online editor at the Presbyterian Record, Canada.

[Statement from the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change 2014](#)

[To save the earth, all must change their ways, says Ecumenical Patriarch](#) (WCC news release of 19 September 2014)

[Website of the Interfaith Summit on Climate Change](#)

[WCC's work on climate justice and care for creation](#)

Love Your Neighbour - JPIT Conference 2015



Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby will give the keynote address at Love your neighbour: Think, Pray, Vote. This is the third JPIT conference and will be a day of reflection, discussion and Bible study focussed on how churches and individual Christians can take the opportunity of May's General Election to help create a society that better reflects God's kingdom of justice and peace.

We are delighted that Justin Welby has agreed to give the keynote address. His commitment to

social justice is well known in the UK where he has led moves to improve the regulation of banks and payday lenders, as well as calling for peace and reconciliation internationally. We greatly look forward to hearing his insights, setting the scene for the day. This will be followed by a series of workshops; some covering key themes while others seek to equip delegates to engage effectively on social issues in the run up to the General Election.

Love your neighbour: Think, Pray, Vote will take place at Coventry Central Hall on Saturday 21 February 2015 with opening worship starting at 10.30am.

[Click here for further information and to register your attendance.](#)

Cornwall 'Declaration of Intent': One Year On



Plans are now all in place for the first follow up gathering one year on from the signing of "The Declaration of Intent." This will take the form of a "follow up and reporting back" session plus workshops and Ecumenical Service all being held one year on from the November 2013 Ecumenical Declaration of Intent.

We invite all those Christians throughout Cornwall to come, participate and attend and to hear from their church leaders the progress that has been made.

It is to be held at St John's Methodist Church, Bodmin Road, St Austell PL25 5AE on Sunday 16th November 2014 starting at 3pm although an exhibition of Churches Together work will be on display from 2.30pm.

At 6pm (after tea together) a closing act of ecumenical worship with the URC Moderator Rev Ruth Whitehead giving the "thought for the day."

All are invited to join us from workshops onwards. If you wish to come along [please book your place here](#) or contact [David Smith](#) on 01736 719432 or 07979 856 456

Islamic State cannot be defeated by military action alone, say major Church leaders

24 September 2014

Leaders of two of Britain's major Churches say that the UK Government must not give into the rhetoric that Islamic State can simply be bombed out of existence.

In a statement released today, leaders of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Methodist Church in Britain say that the case for military intervention can only be supported as one part of a broader political and economic strategy to tackle the ideology of IS.

The Churches have issued a briefing on the issues and are urging their members to pray and to write to their MPs asking the Government to offer greater support to refugees from Syria and Iraq as part of such a strategy.

The full statement follows:

The UK Government must treat with caution suggestions that Islamic State could be defeated primarily through military action. An ideology - even one as dangerous and perverse as that of IS - cannot be defeated by the use of weapons. Military action could help to protect persecuted minorities and prevent IS from expanding its control in Iraq. But countering extremist violence in Iraq requires that Iraqis effectively address the underlying grievances that provided support for

the rise of IS. The situation in Syria is more chaotic and the effectiveness of external military intervention less certain. Both nations face difficult challenges for which there are no easy solutions.

Military intervention carries huge risks. Any intervention must be legally justified and can only be supported as one part of a broad political and economic strategy which must have the support of countries in the region. It is not certain that the most crucial elements of such a strategy are in place. We recognise the Government's attempts to involve Iran, but would like to see this on a much broader front, and there are a number of unanswered questions that must urgently be addressed. For example, what is the level of commitment among countries in the region to take steps to prevent the funding of violent extremism - not only in Iraq and Syria but more broadly?

The international community also has a key role to play in documenting human rights abuses and challenging the culture of impunity that allows such atrocities to occur.

We are grateful that the Government has agreed to provide resettlement for some Syrian refugees, but to date only a handful have been resettled in the UK. This does not even begin to scratch the surface of the level of need and further support must be extended to displaced people from both nations, in the UK and elsewhere. Meanwhile we welcome the contribution of the UK Government to the support of millions of displaced persons and refugees who remain in the region.

As Christians we stand with those who are abused, persecuted and marginalised, whatever their faith or ethnicity. We pray that leaders in government who grapple with seemingly impossible situations will be guided by God's wisdom and peace. We will continue to pray for peace, to work towards greater understanding between peoples of all faiths and none, and to advocate for the needs of those most marginalised.

The Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain
The Revd Ken Howcroft, President of the Methodist Conference
Ms Gill Dascombe, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

Free Churches Group Elects new Moderator



The Free Churches Group is pleased to announce that Revd Dr Hugh Osgood has been elected as Moderator for the next term of office.

Dr Osgood was elected by members of the Free Churches Group at their meeting in London on Wednesday 17th September 2014 following the resignation of Revd Michael Heaney. He expressed his thanks to member churches for the confidence they have invested in him by electing him to this important Office in the following words:

"I am honoured to have been elected as Moderator of the Free Churches Group and will seek to represent this significant constituency in a way that reflects the rich spiritual heritage and diversity of the member churches. I look forward to meeting with the leaders and officers of our member churches to build and strengthen our bonds of fellowship and to publicise the work of the FCG Secretariat in seeking to promote faithful Christian witness in the public square."

Dr Hugh Osgood is the President of Churches in Communities International, a network of some 4,000 churches worldwide. He is well-known in inter-church circles, having served in various capacities over the years, mainly within the evangelical constituency. He is also well-known in parts of Africa and Asia for his Bible teaching ministry and his work in gathering and inspiring those growing into leadership. He has recently been involved in some significant conciliation projects and has a commitment to effective unity.

The Moderator of the Free Churches Group also acts as one of the Presidents of Churches Together in England representing the broad Free Churches constituency.

http://www.freechurches.org.uk/Articles/415740/Free_Churches/News/Free_Churches_Group.aspx

Billy Kennedy appointed as a President of CTE



Due to the resignation of the Rt Revd Jana Jeruma-Grinberga, there was a vacancy for a President to represent the New Churches, the Society of Friends and the Lutheran and German-speaking group of Churches. A meeting of representatives of these Churches met on 30 April 2014 and agreed that this President should be appointed for three years in turn by:

- The New Churches
- The Society of Friends
- The Lutheran and German-speaking Churches.

The New Churches have appointed Billy Kennedy from Pioneer as the new President.

Speaking of his appointment, Billy says:

I am thrilled to be the first leader of a new church network to take on the role of a President of Churches Together in England to represent a number of new church streams, the Lutheran and German speaking churches and the Society of Friends. Over the past few decades thousands of new churches have formed creating new expressions of church life in villages, towns and cities across England. I am pleased to be able to draw some of these new churches to the ecumenical table to learn from our brothers and sisters in Christ and make our contribution to the unfolding unity of the church in England.

About Billy Kennedy

Billy Kennedy is the leader of the Pioneer network of churches. Pioneer was formally organised in 1985 as a network of new churches that had developed over the previous two decades. Billy, with his wife Caroline, was appointed to lead the network in February 2009. Pioneer became a member of Churches Together in England in 2011.

Billy is also the Senior Leader of New Community Church in Southampton. He was recently instrumental in the formation of Love Southampton, a cross church group seeking to serve the city in practical ways. He was also chair of the Southampton Christian Network up to September 2013.

[Press Release: Billy Kennedy appointed a President of Churches Together in England](#)

"Building a Good Society: Embracing Difference?"



Corrymeela & St Ethelburga's Conference November 2014 in London

Building relationships and celebrating diversity in a divided culture are about doing difficult things. The Northern Ireland experience of trying to end cycles of discrimination, let alone establish peace and justice, surely essential elements of a good society, takes generations.

How can it be done and where do we start?

We have three guests to guide us and share their varied experience with us.

- The Reverend Richard Carter – Associate Vicar for Mission at St Martin in the Fields.
- Mr David Lammy – (Who hopes to join us) MP for Tottenham.
- Councillor Sue Anderson – Councillor for the London Borough of Harrow.

Brief biographies of all three are listed on the booking form.

When - Saturday 29th November 2014

Where - [St Ethelburga's Centre, 78 Bishopsgate, London, EC2N 4AG](#)

Time - from 10.00am (for 10.30am) until 4.30pm

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/416044/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Corrymeela_Conference.aspx

Meeting of Middle East Church Leaders and the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace



In an unprecedented ecumenical gathering at Lambeth Palace hosted by The Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, and initiated by His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom, a joint statement was agreed by leaders and representatives of the Churches of the Middle East and the wider Christian Church in Britain.

The meeting began with a round table discussion regarding the plight of Christians and minority communities in Iraq, Syria and the wider Middle East. A joint statement was then agreed, expressing solidarity with, and advocating for, all those who continue to suffer gross violations of the fundamental right and freedom to practice their chosen faith.

The round table discussion was followed by a service of prayer to give thanks for Christians in the Middle East and to remember all those who have lost their lives or continue to suffer persecution. A short press briefing followed.

After the meeting, Bishop Angaelos said:

It is incomprehensible and unacceptable in the 21st Century that our sisters and brothers in the Middle East face intimidation and death for exercising their freedom of religion or belief, or merely being of a certain ethnic background.

We have gathered today as leaders and representatives of Churches in the Middle East within the wider Church in Britain to stand in solidarity with those who are persecuted for their Christian faith, as well as all who fall victim to injustice.

We have spoken in one voice, calling for the continued support of Christians and minority groups across the Middle East, and pray protection upon them while they remain steadfast in the face of unimaginable challenges.

With regards to media coverage of the plight of Christians in the Middle East, Archbishop Justin said:

When you are looking at the murder and the slaughter of vast numbers of people there is never enough in terms of coverage, and it is easy to forget that is part of a global process of immense suffering. I think in looking at the Middle East we hope that the media will not move on quickly but will continue to remember those who are suffering so greatly.

Full account and Statement:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/416041/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Meeting_of_Middle.aspx

News from Churches Together in Devon / 50th Anniversary Vatican II



We have a new Catholic Bishop who arrived in Devon in January this year. He is quite refreshing and has already put out details for the service celebrating 50 years of Roman Catholic Ecumenism.

Special Sung Vespers for Christian Unity led by Bishop Mark O'Toole to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Decree on Ecumenism will take place on Friday 21st November at 4.00pm in Plymouth Cathedral. Come and celebrate this historic initiative with prayer for the unity Christ willed: 'that all may be one so that the world will believe'. Refreshments available. All are welcome.

The Anglican Bishop of Truro, Cornwall has been invited to speak and other Church leaders are invited as are the Enabling Group and CT Groups.

[For a copy of the invitation please click here](#)

For further news from Churches Together in Devon visit:
<http://together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/devon/>

New CEO for Staffordshire, the Potteries and the Black Country



At a service at Broadway United Reformed Church in Walsall on Monday 22nd September 2014, Graham Sim was welcomed by regional and local church leaders and representatives of Churches Together as their new Ecumenical Mission Officer for Staffordshire and the Potteries.

Graham's career has been with British Telecom and, with his wife Sandra, this has meant living in various places and attending a variety of churches. This, together with chairing a growing a local ecumenical partnership and a keen interest in mission, were the key reasons why Graham was appointed, said the regional church leaders who appointed him.

Graham succeeds the Revd Philip Webb, who has been in post for 4 years and now retired. Philip offered his reflections on his time in office and was thanked by Bishop David McGough, an Auxiliary Bishop in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham who said, 'We appointed Philip to do more than maintenance. We wanted a person with vision to proclaim the good news'. Philip was warmly thanked for 'clothing that vision' and Graham has been appointed to continue that emphasis as the 'Ecumenical Mission Officer'.

In addition to Bishop McGough, Regional Church leaders included Bishop Clive Gregory for the Church of England and Revd John Howard for the Methodist Church, as well as Rev Bev Boden who had been on the interview panel and Prebendary David Lindwood who chairs the regional ecumenical body called CLASP. Representatives from various groups of Churches Together and friends from Redditch supported in prayer and worship at the commissioning of Graham Sim to serve them in Staffordshire and the Potteries.

Read more about Graham succeeding Philip on the website of CLASP:
<http://staffordshirechurches.org/who-we-are/your-new-emo/>

"Invitation to Faith" talking about mission, dawah and shared witness

Churches Together in England, the Christian Muslim Forum, Leeds Church Institute and the Makkah Mosque, Leeds, collaborated to arrange a very enjoyable and informative event. Emma Booth (intern at the Christian Muslim Forum) has written an excellent [report of the evening](#).



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2015

This is the International version of the worship and background material prepared for the Week of prayer for Christian Unity 2015. The material from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is to follow.

Jointly prepared and published by the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2015 is rooted in the experience of the churches in Brazil.

Jesus said to her: "Give me to drink" (John 4:7)

[Annual brochure \(pdf\) jointly prepared and published by the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.](#)

The two bodies that co-sponsor the Week of Prayer invited the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC) to prepare the resources for the week of prayer 2015. CONIC appointed a working group formed by representatives from its member churches and affiliated ecumenical organizations to produce the material. The working group met in February and in April 2012, and completed its work in July. The International Committee appointed by the two co-sponsor bodies met 22-27 September in São Paulo, Brazil, to finalize the preparation of the material.

The biblical gesture of offering water to whomever arrives, as a way of welcoming and sharing, is something that is repeated in all regions of Brazil. The proposed study and meditation on the story of Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at the well is to help people and communities to realize the dialogical dimension of the project of Jesus, which we call the Kingdom of God.

Please note: This is the international version of the text. The resources for Britain and Ireland will soon become available as free downloads from [Churches Together in Britain and Ireland](#).

CTE Christmas card picture competition - an invitation to all

Each year the staff at Churches Together in England have a Christmas card printed with a copyright free picture on the front. Several hundred cards are sent to a wide variety of people in the national, county and local networks of Churches Together.

This is an invitation for any artist to submit their work for consideration in the competition. The prize is to have a picture printed on the CTE Christmas card, with the work referenced on the card with thanks, acknowledgement, and a link to the artist's blog or web site if there is one. The picture will also be used on the CTE website for Christmas too, so be seen by all our web visitors.



This invitation would be an opportunity to profile the work of a new or amateur artist who has not had a picture in print before - or it may be an opportunity for a professional to add to their portfolio. We would like to consider work from people of all ages, backgrounds, and theological persuasions.

All details: www.cte.org.uk/christmaspicture

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