

# **THIS GROWING UNITY**

A handbook on ecumenical development in the counties, large cities and new towns of England

SECOND EDITION

Roger Nunn

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Our earnest desire is to become more fully, in His own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission. Such unity is the gift of God.... We affirm our openness to this growing unity....'

(from *The Swanwick Declaration*, 1987)

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## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Roger Nunn's book has proved very popular and useful: so much so that the first edition is now out of print.

The ecumenical movement is developing, not least in the intermediate bodies which take on extra and wider responsibilities, and adjust to the new scene of an emerging regionalism.

Churches Together in England recognises that a new version of *This Growing Unity* will be needed in the next couple of years, after a proper period of consultation and as the regional issues become more clear.

However, such is the demand for *This Growing Unity* that it is re-issued, with some minor up-dating, but without the extensive information-gathering which would provide more recent examples of activities at the intermediate level.

The Appendices of the first edition have been omitted. Much of the information goes out of date. Churches Together in England's Field Officers are a major resource of English ecumenical life. They are pleased to respond to enquiries and to help in any way they can, with both information and advice. They are:

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## INTRODUCTION

Churches Together in England came into being in September 1990, to carry forward the Inter-Church Process and to serve the growing local and county-wide ecumenical activity in England. Two of its Aims and Functions, pp28-29 *Churches Together in Pilgrimage*, BCC/CTS, 1989 were defined as follows:

To promote, coordinate, support and service intermediate bodies in England, assisting them in their care for local ecumenical activity and representing their concerns at the national level.'

'To promote the appointment and support of full or part-time ecumenical officers or their equivalents at the intermediate level throughout England.'

It has been a major part of the work of Churches Together in England, and in particular of the two Field Officers, Jenny Carpenter and myself, since 1990 to follow through these two aims. In pursuit of this, a consultation was gathered at Swanwick in March 1993 of representatives of these 'Intermediate Bodies'; over one hundred people met for forty-eight hours of concentrated discussion.

Out of this consultation came the call for some kind of 'primer' or 'handbook' in which the experiences of these relatively new bodies could be gathered together, and some guidance given as to how they might work more effectively, granted the many constraints under which they operate.

A comment is needed on the word 'intermediate'. It is not an exciting word, and many might have expected the word 'county'. A large number of these bodies are indeed based on English counties, but not all. Some are based on large cities – Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool; others deal with part of large county, as in Yorkshire; two – Milton Keynes and Telford – relate to large new towns. In fact Manchester and Liverpool were set up as county bodies, based on the metropolitan counties, but the latter no longer exist. The only common factor is that all stand somewhere between the 'local' and the 'national', and, for the time being 'intermediate' seem the best word to cover them all.

This handbook arises from the combined efforts of many people. There has been extensive consultation, but the book is not a document that has been formally agreed by all the member churches of CTE. It is a gathering of guidance and experience from many parts of England, in a changing situation.

The final product is now offered to the churches in the hope that it will help in the development of the life of these Intermediate Bodies. For some it can be used as a kind of 'health-check' on their life and performance. For others it can be a source of fresh ideas and inspiration. I hope it will help the churches generally to realise what rich potential for ecumenical cooperation exists at this level, provided the resources can be found to continue the work to be done.

My thanks are due to my indefatigable secretary, Denise Jones, who has typed draft and re-draft without complaint, as usual

*Roger Nunn*

## 1. ORIGINS

There have been two key ecumenical developments in England in the last fifteen years. The first has been the new commitment of a very wide group of churches (including Roman Catholics) to one another as 'pilgrims together' on the way to closer unity. The second has been the creation and development of what are inelegantly called 'intermediate ecumenical bodies'. These two developments are inter-related.

For over forty years following the founding of the British Council of Churches in 1942 ecumenism in England existed primarily at two levels – local and national.

There were 126 **local** Councils of Churches in 1945. The founding of the British Council of Churches led to an increasing number of city, suburban, town and village churches grouping themselves together into local Councils of Churches. By 1970 there were some six hundred of these. At about that time two other developments took place. Following the Second Vatican Council, local Roman Catholic churches, which had not previously been deeply involved in institutional ecumenism, began to join local Councils of Churches in some numbers. Following a Faith and Order Conference in Nottingham in 1964 and the Sharing of Churches Act in 1969, many localities, especially those with new housing developments, were designated 'Areas of Ecumenical Experiment' later called 'Local Ecumenical Projects'. By 1993 there were some 1,200 local Councils of Churches (OR LOCAL 'Churches Together') and some 750 Local Ecumenical Projects. These latter usually included combinations of Baptist, Church of England, Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reformed churches.

**Nationally** the Church of England, the Free Churches and some other churches with smaller numbers in this county had worked increasingly closely together in the British Council of Churches. In 1970, when some of its local churches were joining local Councils of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church began to discuss the possibility of becoming a member of the British Council of Churches. Eventually it decided not to become a member for a number of reasons which were not clearly formulated at the time. One reason, which was both theological and practical, has emerged since. The Roman Catholic Church has not accorded the same theological or institutional importance to its existence at a national level as the Church of England or the larger Free Churches have. For the Roman Catholic Church important decisions are taken either internationally in Rome, or in the diocese.

Significantly, until the 1980s, at **diocesan** level, there was very little formal ecumenical commitment among the churches, except in a few larger conurbations. During this decade, many Roman Catholic bishops got to know and trust their counterparts in other churches; and it was largely the experience of growing cooperation in parishes and diocese which gave the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales the confidence to decide to join the new ecumenical instruments which came into being in 1990. The development of this intermediate pattern of ecumenism has also enabled the Church of England to become more active, because it also takes many important decisions in the diocese, rather than nationally.

Thus bodies were coming into being at the level at which the largest churches take most of their decisions and concentrate their resources.

## **Intermediate Ecumenical Bodies**

There are now over fifty ecumenical intermediate bodies. They are very diverse. To understand them, one needs to be aware of how they came into being. Fundamentally they have four different origins:

- I. City and County Councils of Churches
- II. Church Leaders' Meetings
- III. County/Diocesan Sponsoring Bodies
- IV. New Town Developments

### **i City and County Councils of Churches**

Before the Second World War some cities and large towns began Councils of Churches. Manchester and Bolton both inaugurated a Council of Churches at the end of the First World War. Bristol followed in 1924. In the 1940s many more of these Councils were formed and developed busy agendas, as churches cooperated in a whole range of activities, many of which involved a joint approach to local government or other secular authorities. Their agenda grew sufficiently to encourage them to appoint part-time or full-time officers. Such appointments were made during the 1960s first in Sheffield, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Coventry. Wider geographical areas followed suit. As early as 1955 Bishop Bell established what later became the Sussex Council of Churches. A Greater London Churches Council was formed and a full-time officer appointed. Lincolnshire Council of Churches appointed a part-time Secretary, as did other counties such as Surrey and Sussex, and a Council of Churches for the whole of Cornwall came into being.

Each of these Councils developed its own agenda, which varied from place to place. Many developed joint work in relation to local radio or industrial mission. Many helped the churches to work closely to encourage better race relations. Some developed a joint approach to the local education authority. Most regarded it as their task to encourage the development of neighbourhood Councils of Churches within their area. Some established Faith and Order group to help the churches in their area to work towards closer visible unity. London later discontinued its initial wide-ranging attempt, and replaced it with the London Churches Group, focusing on social issues in the London boroughs, and supporting a network of Ecumenical Borough Deans.

### **ii Church Leaders' Meetings**

As the ecumenical movement in England gained momentum, and secular originations became less and less willing to deal with the established church on its own, so church leaders at diocesan/district level began to meet with their colleagues who exercised similar responsibilities in other churches. Usually these meetings began (and often continue) in an informal manner for mutual support, information and consultation on matters of common concern. Sometimes church leaders will invite their denominational ecumenical officers (where they have them) to join them for part of the meeting. But sometimes it is felt that the confidential and informal nature of the business would be inhibited by such a widening of the meeting.

After meeting in this way for a number of years, church leaders in many areas have entered a personal covenant with one another to work together as closely as they can.

### **iii County/Diocesan Sponsoring Bodies**

The first sponsoring body was probably that established for the first Area of Ecumenical Experiment in Desborough in Northamptonshire in 1965. The concept of a sponsoring body was outlined in the report *Planning the Ecumenical Parish* produced in Corby (also in Northamptonshire) in 1967. At first it was normal for each Area of Ecumenical Experiment to have its own sponsoring body.

When a large number of Areas of Ecumenical Experiment were established in Bristol and Swindon in the 1970s – mainly arising from the initiative of the Anglican Bishop and the Methodist District Chairman – a Bristol Sponsoring Body was established to watch over their development, and to save the need for a large number of separate sponsoring bodies.

As more and more Areas of Ecumenical Experiment were established and turned into Local Ecumenical Projects, and as the national Consultative Committee for Local Ecumenical Projects in England was established, so more and more places in the 1970s and 1980s began to follow Bristol's example by appointing one sponsoring body with the exclusive responsibility of overseeing the development of all Local Ecumenical Projects in their area. Perhaps because Local Ecumenical Projects posed particular problems to the Church of England, perhaps because the Anglican diocese seemed a convenient size, or perhaps simply because of the Establishment, most of these sponsoring bodies at first were coterminous with an Anglican diocese. Their membership was made up of the leaders of the five main churches (Anglican bishops, Baptist superintendents, Methodist district chairmen, Roman Catholic bishops, and United Reformed provincial moderators).

In some areas they were established alongside city or county Councils of Churches, and often at first there was very little relationship between the two bodies. In Lincolnshire, for example, the old County Council of Churches eyed the new sponsoring body with considerable suspicion until their respective roles were clarified.

Where there was no other ecumenical agency covering the whole area, sponsoring bodies were often expected to take on other ecumenical responsibilities, as the 1980s progressed. Generally they resisted this, maintaining that they were created for a specific purpose only.

In many areas it soon became apparent that as far as many of the other churches were concerned, an Anglican diocese was not an ideal unit for a sponsoring body. There are few areas where the perfect geographical unit has been found, but most areas have settled on the county or metropolitan area as the least unsatisfactory unit.

The crucial step was taken at the British Council of Churches Assembly in November 1984, when a report brought by the Division of Ecumenical Affairs and prepared by the Consultative Committee for Local Ecumenical Projects in England, noted the development of two independent but related streams: 'County Sponsoring Bodies' and 'Church Leaders' Meetings'; and recommended that in future there should be established **County Sponsoring Bodies for Local Ecumenism**. These bodies

should include local church leaders as well as their ecumenical officers and other selected representatives; also an executive secretary with sufficient time and money to deal with the sponsoring body's affairs.

This decision was re-affirmed for the time being at the consultation on intermediate bodies held at Swanwick in March 1993.

#### **iv New Town Developments**

A fourth type of intermediate body has grown up as churches of different traditions have worked together to establish strategy for new towns. Examples of this have been Crawley, Corby, Telford, Swindon, and Milton Keynes. Bishop Bell's initiative in Crawley and the early plans in Corby did not bear much ecumenical fruit; but a series of Local Ecumenical Projects were established in each new area as the other three towns developed.

**Telford** appointed an Ecumenical Development Officer whose task as to relate to the development corporation and to enable the various churches to work together in establishing joint neighbourhood churches and also joint specialist ministries. From a variety of sources the churches in Telford have managed to raise considerable sums of money to establish and maintain their ecumenical mission.

At the end of the 1970s the churches in **Swindon** asked the sponsoring churches to appoint an ecumenical bishop to exercise pastoral oversight over all the ecumenical work in the area. This proposal proved too difficult for some of the sponsoring churches to accept, in particular for the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

**Milton Keynes** appointed an ecumenical secretary and formed the leaders of each of the sponsoring churches into a joint presidency. As they had developed mutual trust, they agreed that the actual presidency would be devolved for one year at a time to each of their number in turn. This task proved to be very demanding on the time of the presidents, who each had their own church responsibilities to fulfil throughout the rest of their areas. Milton Keynes Christian Council then proposed that the churches should jointly appoint an Ecumenical Moderator to take whatever pastoral oversight for the town's churches the sponsoring churches were prepared to entrust. The Revd Hugh Cross, a Baptist minister, was appointed to this office in 1990.

This fourth kind of intermediate body is usually distinct from the other three. However, apart from new towns, most other intermediate bodies can trace their origin to one, or two, or even all three of the other earlier bodies. The present structure and agenda of the intermediate body is likely still to be moulded by its history. One that began as a city or county Council of Churches may still be widely representative of the local churches in the area, and its agenda may include issues of public as well as of ecclesiastical concern. One which began as a sponsoring body may comprise mostly church administrators and be particularly concerned with the oversight of Local Ecumenical Partnerships. One which began as a Church Leaders' Meeting may remain largely informal in style and with a tightly drawn membership, its agenda being set by the church leaders themselves.

An intermediate body which had its origin in two or even all three of the former organisations (city/county Council of Churches, diocesan/county sponsoring body, and Church Leaders' Meeting) will already have met the tensions inherent in trying to fulfil different expectations, with a different membership and different agenda. Some, such as the Merseyside and Region Churches Ecumenical Assembly (MARCEA), have worked their way through these tensions, have had a review of their ways of working and are at least on the way to becoming agencies through which their member churches learn to do together all those things that deep differences of conviction do not compel them to do separately (*Lund Faith and Order Conference, 1952*). Other intermediate bodies will have much to learn from MARCEA and other areas with wide-ranging ecumenical experience.

However, each intermediate body has its own history, its own distinctive geography, and will have to work out its own development, structure and agenda at its own pace.

Note: The term 'Local Ecumenical Partnership' is used in this book in accordance with the resolution of the national consultation on LEPs in 1994. 'Project' is used when historical accuracy requires it.

## 2 A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

During the 1920s and 1930s theologians gathered internationally to try to reach agreement among the churches on questions of Faith and Order. During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s a whole series of Union Schemes and Covenant Proposals were under discussion between Anglican and Free Churches in England. As we have already seen, since the First World War, and more rapidly since the Second World War, there has been a growth of practical co-operation between local churches of different traditions.

In all this ecumenical work there has until recently been a serious gap at intermediate (diocesan/district) level. The result has been a tendency for local ecumenism to be largely pragmatic and unconnected with national and international ecumenism. The degree of ecumenical commitment has also varied considerably from locality to locality. One of the dangers of the rapid growth in Local Ecumenical Partnerships in certain parts of the country is that these places have tended to attract those people (and especially those ordained ministers) who were already committed to ecumenism; leaving wide areas of the country where there are few Local Ecumenical Partnerships and active Councils of Churches or 'Churches Together'.

The creation of intermediate ecumenical bodies has provided a potential means for overcoming these gaps. One of the roles of leadership in the church, whether that leadership is seen as personal or corporate, is to maintain unity between local congregations. Another related role is to maintain the faith and hand it on to each new generation in ways appropriate to it. The role of leadership at intermediate level therefore includes theological and pastoral oversight and the maintenance of unity. The intermediate ecumenism body, bringing together, as it does, representative leadership figures from all its participating churches, has the potential of enabling all the churches in the area.

- i. to take account of theological developments between the churches and denominations nationally and internationally;
- ii. to keep abreast of ecumenical developments, and to achieve at least a modicum of ecumenical commitment in every place in the area;
- iii. to adopt a common missionary strategy at least in those fields in which deep differences of conviction do not compel the churches to act separately.

There is also the parallel and equally important task of keeping the churches and denominations at national and international level informed as to what it has discovered about the mission and unity of the church in the area.

So what is the vision for the future? It is of an intermediate ecumenical body which is representative of all the churches and denominations which have committed themselves to one another in the area. This body will have representative structures related to the structures in its member churches. The member churches, working through the intermediate body, will increasingly share their resources of people, money and buildings for common work.

Many churches have resources and structures at intermediate level, as do a number of para-church organisations such as Christian mission, education and development agencies.

Churches have different theologies and self-understanding; so the resources cannot yet be fully shared, even when they have committed themselves to work together in the new ecumenical bodies. One obvious example is that there is not yet a complete reconciliation of ordained ministries. This means, for example, that an ordained Free Church minister may not preside at Holy Communion in an Anglican parish church, unless this is within a Local Ecumenical Partnership.

However, there are a vast number of resources which can be shared. **One vision for the immediate future is of intermediate ecumenical bodies through whose auspices all these resources are shared, and deployed under the oversight of the appropriate authorities of all the participating churches, working jointly and according to an agreed mission strategy.**

How can this vision be fulfilled? The detailed answering of this question will be sketched in the subsequent chapters, and will be filled out only as intermediate ecumenical bodies become more deeply rooted in the life of this country. But there are at least two major problems in the way of implementing this vision which should be pointed out now.

#### **a. Which Boundaries**

How should an intermediate area be defined? In the first place, the boundaries established by different churches and denominations for their dioceses, districts, circuits and provinces do not coincide with one another. In the second, the sizes of these units are not comparable, mostly owing to the lower membership or the smaller number of church buildings of other churches, compared with the Church of England – there are forty-three and only eleven United Reformed provinces in England, for example. In the third place, different churches make decisions on the same matters (e.g. the deployment of ministers, the allocation of finance) at different levels. Even more importantly, these distinctions are bound up with different understandings of what the Church is. This is why ecumenism cannot be simply pragmatic. It must take reasonable account of major theological differences and be prepared to live with some untidiness.

A number of intermediate areas have already proved that these differences are not in themselves an insuperable hindrance to the effective working an intermediate ecumenical body. For a few areas there is an obvious and perfect boundary. Cornwall is perhaps the least contentious. MARCEA resolutely refuses to draw itself a boundary on a map – though it has an understanding with Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire as to who sponsors Local Ecumenical Partnership s in border territory!

Churches Together in South Yorkshire follows the boundaries of the already defunct South Yorkshire County Council comprising the Metropolitan District Councils of Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham. This area has a certain coherence, though it coincides only with the United Reformed Church's South Yorkshire District.

West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council covers an area comprising most of three Church of England dioceses, the greater part of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Leeds and two Methodist districts. It also involves regional leadership of smaller denominations. It is thus able to work strategically. Detailed oversight of local ecumenism is exercised largely through six area sub-groups for Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Halifax, Huddersfield and Harrogate.

Lancashire has developed a new pattern for consultation and decision-making in six reasonably well-defined areas: Lancaster, Fylde, Preston, Blackburn, Accrington and Burnley, which are represented on the council of Churches Together in Lancashire.

The 'Plus' in Staffordshire Plus Ecumenical Council stands for the Black Country District Councils, formerly part of historic Staffordshire. The Worcestershire body, which includes Dudley, is similarly searching for an appropriate name. The City of Peterborough, divided between the diocese of Peterborough and Ely, is moving towards intermediate body status.

Most areas have settled for a secular boundary – that of a county or metropolitan area. However, the pragmatic agreement on an outer boundary is not the only problem. There is also the impossibility of a Free Church leader, a United Reformed provincial moderator for example, attending the meetings of up to eight intermediate bodies in his or her area. An agreement has to be reached on who represents whom, when and where.

The review of Churches Together in England (1994) said:

'Attention should be given to the burden which overlapping boundaries places on those church leaders and their officers who serve areas covered by more than one Intermediate Body.'

Then there is the question of how to involve at intermediate level the independent churches which wish to participate but which nobody to represent them beyond the local congregational and whose theology places the emphasis on the local. Intermediate ecumenical bodies are still struggling with this problem.

## **b. More Bureaucracy?**

Some people see the establishment of intermediate ecumenical bodies as the creation of yet another unnecessary layer of ecumenical bureaucracy. Bureaucracy literally means control by someone working at a desk, and carries the pejorative undertone of remoteness from real life. Bringing over twenty disparate churches to work more closely together and to become interdependent is a complex task and requires someone to keep track of what is happening and to keep all the participants informed. Such persons cannot be effective if remote from what is really happening. While control should remain in the hands of the decision-making bodies of the participating churches, there is a specific co-ordinating and enabling task of keeping them informed about one another and helping them to make decisions together.

When the churches were in process of establishing the new ecumenical bodies at national level, Archbishop Runcie pleaded for an ecumenism which released rather

than absorbed energy. Some intermediate ecumenical bodies have begun to break through to such a stage. The problem is that before such mutual trust is reached, when resources can be shared, there is always a preliminary stage of fostering trust and establishing a way of working. This stage inevitably absorbs time and energy, and causes a certain amount of frustration. But the intermediate bodies which have begun to break through to the energy-releasing stage tend to be the ones that, in faith, set aside money and time and at least one person to serve as administrator and guide to lead them through the energy-absorbing stage.

The Revd Michael Hubbard, giving the keynote address to the first national consultation on intermediate ecumenical bodies at Swanwick in March 1993 said that each intermediate body needed a full-time ecumenical officer, working with a team of denomination ecumenical officers belonging to each of the major churches or denominations in the area. With the pressure on church budgets at every level in the 1990s, this vision looks very difficult to realise. But it will become apparent that if many of the patterns of working together suggested in this document were to be implemented, it would be difficult to manage with less. We already see a widening gap between what could be achieved ecumenically at the intermediate level, and what is possible with only part-time officers and secretaries.

### 3 THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS

There is no special theology for working together at intermediate level. There is only one ecumenical movement undergirded by the same Gospel imperative and built upon the same theological insights, whether working at international, national, intermediate or local level.

The establishment of intermediate ecumenical bodies is an attempt to give structural expression to the present state of ecumenical relations between the churches at intermediate level in England, without forcing any of them to go beyond what their consciences allow, in order to worship God more harmoniously, and to engage in mission and service in the world more faithfully and effectively.

Its purpose is to enable the member churches to share as far as possible one another's spiritual and material resources, as well as personnel, in the service of God's Kingdom, without forcing them to adopt any beliefs, structures or practices which contradict their own conscientious position.

This can be seen as a practical response to the challenge of the 'Lund Principle'. At the third World Conference on Faith and Order at Lund, Sweden, in 1952 a text was agreed of which one sentence asked, 'Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches, and **whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep difference of conviction compel them to act separately?**' This latter section became known as the 'Lund Principle'. In an article in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Morris West says, 'Probably this is the most quoted (and sometimes misquoted!) sentence from any Faith and Order document. It has often been misunderstood by being taken as an exhortation, rather than, in its original context, a question to be answered. The original intention was to talk together so that they could come to act together.' The intermediate level is one example of where the churches are learning that they can 'act together'.

An inherent difficulty is that for some churches the intermediate level is a key one in their organisations, while for others it is not; some regard their structures at this level as fundamental to their understanding of the church, and some do not. This problem has to be tackled with sensitivity. It can be overcome only if the intermediate ecumenical body is seen to have a co-ordinating role, and all authority and decision-making is seen to rest ultimately with the member churches themselves.

Common decisions can be made through the intermediate body, but this cannot be forced. It is essentially a developing situation and requires an evolving structure. As trust is built up, so more weight can be placed on the ecumenical structure, and the churches can agree to share resources and exercise authority through it, but only so long as all churches are sensitive to the problems that may be caused to other partners. It should be recognised that some churches are able to work more closely together and share more resources than others. There should be scope to allow this to happen, care being taken that those churches which cannot share so much are not marginalised.

There should be a continual interchange of pragmatic action and theological reflection, to enable all participating churches to learn from one another and to engage freely in the process of growing together in mission and service.

The challenge remains – how can the churches move out of their inertia and ‘structural fundamentalism’ (‘We do it this way because we’ve always done it this way’)? A report from MARCEA comments that ‘safety first’ cannot be the churches’ policy. *Taking Holy Risks?* Was the title and it suggested three possible models. One is the ‘**co-ordinating**’ model, where work done by each denomination is co-ordinating so that each church knows what the others are doing in a particular field, and opportunities are taken to eliminate duplication wherever possible. A second is the ‘**partnership**’ model where new pieces of work are taken up together, possibly through an Ecumenical Agency set up for the purpose, so that the churches are visibly seen to be working together. A third is the ‘**representative**’ model, where one church takes the lead in carrying out work on behalf of all the difficult to ‘own’ work in which they have not evidently had a significant part. The extent to which intermediate bodies can work in this way is a kind of ‘litmus’ test’ as to their ecumenical progress.

Just as the third Faith and Order Conference at Lund in 1952 gave a challenge to the churches which has been worked on since, so the fifth such conference at Santiago de Compostela in Spain in 1993 has given a theme which is now providing fruitful. The word ‘*koinonia*’, with the emphasis on ‘a real but incomplete communion’, is proving a good stimulus for life at the intermediate level. The *koinonia* – the ‘fellowship’ of working together – has been recognised as real; but *koinonia* – understood at communion’, ‘common life’, ‘solidarity’ – is still far from complete.

#### 4. INTERMEDIATE BODIES AND LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS

Many intermediate ecumenical bodies, came into existence in order to provide oversight for Local Ecumenical Projects (see *chapter 1*). From the initial concept of 'Areas of Ecumenical Experiment' proposed at the Nottingham 1964 Conference, the idea spread rapidly so that by 1993 there were 750 LEPs in England. Rather than have a separate sponsoring body for each separate LEP, it soon became clear that a more efficient way of working would be to have a sponsoring body covering an area containing many such projects. The church leaders who needed to give oversight were substantially the same people for any given area, and the problems and possibilities were also similar. Thus the development of intermediate ecumenical bodies for counties and large cities was much influenced by the spread of LEPs. Their oversight, including both their inauguration and their development, is now a major responsibility of these intermediate bodies.

The particular way in which this has been exercised has varied. In Bristol, where a large number of LEPs were formed in the 1960s and 1970s, a separate department of the Greater Bristol Ecumenical Council was established so that its detailed work should not hinder other on-going work of the council. However, in recent restructuring, the work of oversight of LEPs has been brought back closer to the general life of the council.

In Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, which have 37 LEPs, nearly all have been given a small local advisory group, appointed by the intermediate body and answerable to it, ensuring frequent and consistent contact with each local situation. The sustaining of this pattern is now a major commitment of the Ecumenical Officer for Herts and Beds.

Several intermediate bodies – eg Churches Together in South Yorkshire, Newcastle Church Relations Group and MARCEA – have committees which handle detailed LEP concerns, but the overall responsibility remains with the intermediate body as such. Local advisory groups or contact persons to keep in regular touch with particular LEPs and report to the sponsoring body are providing a useful development in many places; these may also be referred to as 'local sponsoring bodies' or 'support groups'.

Other intermediate bodies have a watching brief over the LEPs in their area by keeping this item on the agenda of the regular meetings of the Council. Sometimes this can be squeezed out by other demanding business. Some kind of regular reporting to the intermediate body does seem to be necessary. The personal involvement of the Ecumenical Officer or alternate is crucial. Clearly it should be part of his or her brief to ensure regular contact with all the LEPs in the area, so that emerging problems can be dealt with before they develop into major setbacks.

A particular area of concern in this 'second generation' period in the life of many LEPs is the effect of change in the ministerial team. This is a 'make or break' factor. The right appointment can take the LEP forward into new levels of commitment and relationships; the wrong one can be a major setback. The intermediate body, through its officer, can place a crucial role in trying to ensure that there is a proper degree of ecumenical consultation and that all involved in the process take the ecumenical aspect with the utmost seriousness. Each intermediate body should establish

procedures for this - in most cases these are written into each LEP constitution. Some bodies have standing committees on appointments, which ensure that appropriate consultation takes place.

The Consultation on the Future of LEPs at Swanwick in March 1994 made particular reference to this point and recommended (Group3, paragraph 5.2.1) *'From the models available each Intermediate Body should produce its own guidelines for ministerial appointments and their duration. It should then seek commitment from its member churches to these guidelines'*. (For more information on LEPs see: *'Travelling Together: a handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships'* by Elisabeth Welch and Flora Winfield, CTE 1995)

### **The review of Local Ecumenical Partnerships**

The point at which the intermediate body often has the most direct influence in an LEP is when the time comes for a formal review. This should be part of the constitution of all LEPs, as a recognition that these essentially pioneering initiatives require a pattern of regular review that may not be possible or appropriate elsewhere. The Church of England requires a review at least every seven years of all LEPs in which it is involved (Interestingly, the URC is now committee to a five year review of all its churches, and the Methodist Church is piloting a system of church appraisal. 'Mission audit' is increasingly common in the Church of England.

A recommended pattern for such reviews has been set out in the publication *Guidelines for the Review of Local Ecumenical Projects*, published by the Group for Local Unity of Churches together in England in 1991 and revised and republished in 1993. The intermediate body will normally appoint a small group representing the major church traditions, mostly people with some wider experience of LEPs but not deeply involved in the one to be reviewed, and including ordained and lay, male and females. Denominational Ecumenical Officers often get involved.

After a pattern of local meetings and visits the group will come to its own judgements and recommendations in the form of a report to the intermediate body. It must be emphasised how important it is that this is done with care and sensitivity. The potential for creative forward movement arising from a good review is considerable; but the potential for misunderstanding in the process is also great. Sometimes relationships between the review group and the project have broken down because the situation has not been carefully interpreted or its findings have not been received; it is important that the report emphasises both the positive and negative aspects of the LEP. For all the pitfalls, the need for such reviews has never been greater than now, particularly when some LEPs which have been running for over twenty years need attention. Some may need a new challenge, others may need to be restructured; some indeed may need to be quietly wound up in their present form if the vision or commitment of the past no longer apply to the present.

When the review group has done its work and presented its report to the intermediate body, the responsibility for implementing its recommendations pass to the latter; and if the report suggests significant changes or raises important issues in the LEP, this is a crucial stage. Clearly the changes need to be implemented after full consultation with those in leadership locally, and there may be tension between the views of the review

group and some local people. If a kind of stalemate is to be avoided, the involvement of the County Ecumenical Officer (or possibly a Denominational Ecumenical Officer) is particularly crucial here, working with the church leaders. Here as elsewhere in the life of the intermediate bodies the question 'by whose authority' is not always clearly understood. But the ultimate authority for the review, and for implementing agreed recommendation, rests with the denominations that are participating in the LEP. The intermediate body needs to check that the recommendations of the review are being properly dealt with.

As more reviews are carried out, more experienced people are needed to take part, and there is an encouraging pattern of intermediate bodies coming together to provide training courses regionally for such reviewers or potential reviewers. MARCEA has set up a panel of about 30 people who are willing to undertake reviews – provided they are not asked to do more than one every two years.

The work carried out by intermediate bodies in reviewing Local Ecumenical Partnerships has made them aware that the intermediate bodies themselves could be in need of an occasional review; West Yorkshire, MARCEA, Dorset, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire are amongst those that have been reviewed.

### **A job description for sponsoring bodies**

The task of intermediate bodies, in their role as sponsoring bodies for LEPs, can be summarised as:

1. Enabling the establishment of LEPs
2. Supporting their life
3. Overseeing a regular process of review or evaluation

The following could act as a more specific check-list of the detailed tasks.

### **Establishing LEPs**

1a Look out for local situations where the sense of partnership and co-operation has grown to the point where the future establishment of an LEP might be appropriate (the idea can be introduced but should not be pushed). Encourage and explain the possibilities for ways forward in a partnership.

b. When a local partnership of churches is considering the possibility of becoming an LEP, provide the necessary booklet, documentation and, above all, accurate advice about what is possible. Examples of similar groupings can fire people's imaginations. Someone – very often the County Ecumenical Officer or a Denominational Ecumenical Officer needs to visit and meet the key leaders locally. The church leaders and sponsoring body need to be kept informed of developments.

c. If appropriate, follow through the correct procedures for formal designation of an LEP. These categories of Local Ecumenical Partnership have been in use since 1996.

Single Congregation Partnerships

Congregations in Covenanted Partnerships

Shared Buildings Partnerships

Chaplaincy Partnerships (Higher & Further Education, Health, Prisons)

Mission Partnerships (Industry, Commerce, Broadcasting)

## Education Partnerships (Lay Training, Ministerial Training, Schools)

Several leaflets are available (eg from West Yorkshire or Birmingham) giving the step-by-step process that needs to be followed. The local people need to understand the particular and unique role of the sponsoring body, which is the accepted way for the denominations to exercise joint authority for the project and to 'own' it. The County Ecumenical Officer may be asked to sit in on the local discussions to guide them through, so that what is proposed to the denominations and sponsoring body is likely to be accepted.

d. Before the project can be inaugurated, the sponsoring body and participating denominations will have checked and accepted the key components which apply, eg forms of joint worship; mutual recognition of minister; ministerial appointments procedures; joint preparation of member for baptism and confirmation, and entry to multiple membership; arrangements for sharing of premises through the *Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969*; the procedure when a person previously baptised in one tradition seeks 're-baptism'; the remarriage of divorced persons. It is important to sort out financial arrangements, not only for support of the stipendiary ministry received, but also for the wider mission and ministry of the participating denominations.

It is the sponsoring body's responsibility (working through the Denominational Ecumenical Officers) to ensure that formal approval to the setting up of the LEP has been given by the denominations involved.

In the case of an LEP in the form of a Single Congregation Partnership, these points should normally be covered in the declaration of intent or the constitution. In the case of Congregations in Covenanted Partnerships, many of these points will be covered in the covenant statement.

e. If all is agreed, the sponsoring body, in consultation with the LEP, fixes a date for the formal inauguration of the LEP in a specific act of worship and celebration attended by the appropriate church leaders and other representatives of the sponsoring body, together with as large a gathering as possible of local people.

### **Supporting the LEP**

2. Once the LEP is established, the sponsoring body is responsible for supporting its life through:

a. **Encouraging regular contact between the LEP and the sponsoring body.** An annual report and possibly regular minutes should be sent to the Ecumenical Officer; the Ecumenical Officer should be advised about any point of development or setback; the Ecumenical Officer (or his or her nominee) can pay an occasional visit to the worship or decision-making life of the project, and gain the confidence of the local people.

b. **Appointing a local support or advisory group for each separate LEP, or covering a group of several.** If so, this should report regularly to the main meeting of the sponsoring body, and the members of the group need to be clear about their duties and, if necessary, 'refreshed' by new members from time to time. Some sponsoring

bodies appoint individual advisers or visitors, who can become more intimately involved with the LEP, yet remain external to it.

c. **Establishing a clear consultation procedure**, ideally agreed in writing by the church leaders and the sponsoring body, to deal with procedure where there is a change in ministry in the LEP.

Here, more than at any other point, LEPs can suffer a setback if and inappropriate appointment is made without consultation.

d. **Organising an annual consultation** on some topic of mutual interest to which all the LEPs can send representatives. This offers support on the chosen topic, mutual support and the cross fertilisation of idea.

### **Review and Terminations**

3a The sponsoring body is responsible for initiating and carrying out a regular review of each LEP in its area (*see above*)

b. If it becomes clear to a sponsoring body that an LEP needs to be brought to an end, then this needs to be done as decently and sensitively as possible, and it is the sponsoring body's responsibility to see that the appropriate document is drawn up and agreed, ending the special relationship and commitments of the LEP.

In practice the denominational Ecumenical Officers often act together to carry through many of the above functions on behalf of the intermediate body and the church leaders. In many intermediate bodies there 'DEOs' meet together regularly with the 'ecumenically appointed' ecumenical officers, forming a team with considerable expertise

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## 5. INTERMEDIATE BODIES AND LOCAL 'CHURCHES TOGETHER' AND COUNCILS OF CHURCHES

Prior to 1990 the care and oversight of local Councils of Churches in England was mainly the responsibility of the Ecumenical Officer for England, a post created by the British Council of Churches in the 1970s out of the recognition of the need for the BCC to give more encouragement and support to the several hundred Councils of Churches which by then existed. The past holders of this post would be the first to agree that the task of relating to such a large number of local councils was beyond them. Hence in 1990 when Churches Together in England was formed, it was recognised that it was CTE's responsibility to encourage and service the intermediate bodies, but that these in turn should accept primary responsibility for relating to local Councils of Churches in their area. Thus a new pattern of servicing the local though the intermediate emerged.

In a letter to intermediate bodies in autumn 1989, Hugh Cross, then Ecumenical Officer for England, said,

'This responsibility of care for local councils of churches is not handed on lightly, but with the pleas that as far as possible your council will nurture and encourage these expressions of Christian unity'.

This task of supporting local Councils of Churches was a new one for many of these intermediate bodies, especially those which had come into being primarily as sponsoring bodies for Local Ecumenical Projects. From 1990 onwards they have been expected to service the whole range of local ecumenical endeavour. This task has been taken on board by the intermediate bodies with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success. Some local 'Churches Together' and Councils of Churches have been reluctant to accept the support of the intermediate body, and have tried to maintain a direct link with the national structures, not realising that the pattern has changed.

In the 1990s, many local Councils of Churches have sought to 'move up a gear' in their effectiveness by changing into 'Churches Together in...'. Some admittedly have done little more than change their name, but many have shown areal determination to move *from co-operation to commitment* following the theme of the *Swanwick Declaration*, as well as the title of the national body in England and many of the intermediate bodies. A move from a 'Council of Churches' style to a 'Churches Together' in style should mark a move from ecumenism and as an optional and occasional extra for local churches, often supported by a limited number of enthusiasts, to a more committed coming together of churches to share concern and action about their central purposes; thus the key decision-makers and leaders, ordained and lay, need to be involved as much as possible, with a willingness to act together on a far wider and more demanding scale. It is out of this kind of new commitment that a great variety of shared initiatives have grown, both in social action and evangelism.

Meanwhile, other inter-church structures have arisen locally, often based on a shared concern or theological outlook, and intermediate bodies need to be aware of them and relate to them as appropriate. Many local Councils of Churches seem to have remained in an earlier era, repeating the well-tried formula of a united worship service in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a committee for Christian Aid Week, and participation in whatever Lent study programme is organised nationally. These

activities can remain optional extras shared in only by ecumenical enthusiasts. The life of each local congregation continues virtually untouched, and a new generation arises, often without deep denominational affiliations, but also without much direct ecumenical experience.

In this situation much can be done by the intermediate body to bring opportunities for a fresh start and revival of local enthusiasm. For example, many intermediate bodies organise an annual assembly or forum which provides an ideal opportunity for sharing ideas and good practice for the local level. But the value of a local visit by someone representing the intermediate body is still enormous. The problem is – who is to do all this work? Most of the secretaries and officers of the intermediate body are at best part-time, and much of their time can be swallowed up in servicing the life of the council and keeping in touch with LEPs in the area. The extra task of caring for local Councils of Churches and emerging 'Churches Together' has been firmly on the agenda of many of these secretaries, but some feel that they have not been able to give it the time it deserves. Consequently some local Councils of Churches have felt unsupported and unclear about the implications of the 1990 changes. On the other hand some local Councils have deliberately kept the County Ecumenical Officer out of their affairs, ignoring offers to visit them.

However, much can be done with an organised approach. An example of this has been provided by Terry Garley, Ecumenical Officer for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, who systematically visited twenty-four towns and villages in her area between 1990 and 1994. In each case, by mutual agreement she asked the same questions –

1. Where are we now in this locality on the 'co-operation to commitment scale'?
2. Where do we want to move to next?
3. How are we to get there?

The results of these and subsequent local discussions have been brought together in an encouraging pack, *Growing Together in Commitment* (available from Terry Garley) which demonstrates a possible 'proactive' model, for the involvement of an officer of an ecumenical body in the local sense.

Different approaches suit different counties and cities: some have run day or evening conferences for the officers of local Councils of Churches Together where problems can be faced, new visions shared and a sense of the national, regional and local network strengthened.

This work of keeping contact with local Councils of Churches and groups of Churches Together by visits, letters, phone calls, conferences and bulletins, is being recognised as important by most intermediate bodies. The denominational Ecumenical Officers can help in this exercise, working as a team with a part-time Ecumenical Officer. For three years West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council had an Assistant County Ecumenical Officer on a voluntary, expenses only, basis. In his first year he visited fifty local Councils of Churches out of over one hundred in WYEC, thus providing a valuable link, and finding out the variety of ecumenical activity in each locality. A similar appointment in Bedfordshire meant that local Churches Together there were visited more often. In the mid-90s Lincolnshire and South Humberside had a separate half-time officer

specifically committed to the support of local ecumenism, including LEPs and local Churches Together; and another half-time officer handled county-wide ecumenical co-operation.

If most officers or secretaries of intermediate bodies are only part-time or even spare-time, much is going to remain undone, and there will continue to be many with a feeling of 'the ecumenical winter' in localities around England. In the Greater Bristol area an experiment was tried in which six 'syndicates' of local Councils of Churches were asked to send a representative to the council. The idea of creating a department of local ecumenism to cater for LEPs and local Churches Together is being floated.

### **The Financial Dimension**

The 'marigold book', *Churches Together in Pilgrimage*, which provided the blueprint for ecumenical structures in the 1990s, recommended (p30) that the subscription which local Councils of Churches had paid to the British Council of Churches before 1990 (£3.00) per member congregation per annum) should be paid to the Ecumenical Council or sponsoring body for their area, and this would go some way towards enabling regular contact to be kept with them. This principle has been followed through in most areas, but the response and effectiveness has at best been patchy. Some intermediate bodies felt uneasy about asking for such subscriptions when they were not in a position, partly for financial reasons, to provide much support for such local councils – a typical 'chicken and egg' situation. Others felt that the agreed figure was so small as to be hardly worth the trouble to collect. One intermediate body has already raised the total £10.00 per local congregation per annum, producing £1,500 income in 1993. The question was raised- was this to be seen as a donation or a subscription? One intermediate body found that some local councils of Churches resisted paying this unless they were in some sense directly represented on the intermediate body – an understandable reaction.

Churches Together in England has not sought to impose a standard pattern in this matter; much depends upon the enthusiasm with which the treasurer of the intermediate body pursues it. It could be argued that this is too cumbersome a procedure, and either needs to be clarified and up-graded or allowed to die. One can sympathise with the treasurer of a local Council of Churches or local congregation who might ask – what do we get for our money? However, where the relationship has been fully understood, a helpful bulletin provided and the Ecumenical Officer is available to be consulted, there may be a greater sense of 'getting our money's worth'.

A positive way forward would be for each intermediate body to set itself the target of making and keeping contact, in one way or another, with every congregation in every local Churches Together or Council of Churches in its area; and then to fix such financial support from these congregations as will make this realistic. Local churches vary enormously in size and income. There is no doubt, however, that considerable financial resources lie in the budgets of local churches, and not at the 'intermediate level'; and therefore a larger parish or congregation with an annual budget in many tens of thousands of pounds should not find it difficult to give £10.00 or £20.00 a year for this purpose, providing the relationship is explained and established.

Another possible source of income for hard-pressed intermediate bodies is the offering during local *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* services. It might be suggested to local Councils of Churches and Churches Together that at least some of the offering might be used in this way. Information about what the intermediate body is doing could be disseminated at the service or, better still, in advance.

## 6. INTERMEDIATE BODIES AND CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND

Intermediate bodies are autonomous, with their own structures and constitutions; not 'county branches' of Churches Together in England. Nevertheless, they draw their impetus from the Swanwick Declaration of 1987 (*Churches Together in Pilgrimage*, BCC, 1989, pp 7-8) and from the proposals set out under 'England – Intermediate' (pp 31-33).

The two Field Officers of Churches Together in England have, as the first item on their job description, "Liaison with Intermediate Bodies...". They see their task as part of a strategy through which the national instrument, Churches Together in England, services the intermediate bodies; and the latter service the local. Therefore, the Field Officers work closely with the intermediate bodies and their officers, and hence this publication as an attempt to strengthen the intermediate bodies.

The intermediate bodies, in turn, are represented on the Churches Together in England Forum, which meets over two years. They elect about 120 of its 200 representatives – see the schedule given on pp 35-37 of *Churches Together in Pilgrimage*, subsequently slightly revised. So it is the intermediate body's task to choose members of the Forum, and to do this well in advance; at least in the autumn prior to the forum of the following summer. As most counties have two representatives, it is suggested in *Churches Together in Pilgrimage* (p 37) that 'one person should be concerned with church strategy in the area, and one represent local Councils of Churches'. It is useful for these (if not already serving it) to be appointed to the appropriate intermediate Ecumenical Council or Forum and to have an opportunity to report back after the Forum has met.

The Enabling Group of Churches Together in England also has ten representatives of intermediate bodies, elected in regional groupings at the Forum. The review of Churches Together in England in 1994 recommended that the Group for Local Unity should also have direct input from intermediate experience; this has now been implemented, with co-opted places for two Intermediate Ecumenical Officers, one being nominated by the Southern Region and one by the North and Midlands.

The strongest regular communication between Churches Together in England the intermediate bodies is the bi-monthly bulletin, *Pilgrim Post*, edited at the Didcot office and produced with the intermediate level of ecumenism very much in mind. Many intermediate bodies draw on the material of *Pilgrim Post* for their own county or city-wide publications.

## 7. WORKING TOGETHER ON SHARED CONCERNS

### a. Evangelism

Local Councils of Churches in England have in the past usually found it easier to cooperate on projects of social evangelism. Working together on the practical challenges of Christian Aid Week tends to raise fewer theological controversies than attempting a united evangelistic mission to the area. Agreement on aims, style, content and speakers has not always been easy between congregations of different outlooks and traditions.

However, the launching of the Decade of Evangelism (or Evangelisation) in the 1990s, initiated by the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches world-wide, and now increasingly regarded as an ecumenical enterprise, has prompted many more intermediate ecumenical bodies to ask whether evangelism should be on their agenda. The report: *Finding Faith Today* (Bible Society and Churches Together in England, 1992) focussed attention on how adults come to faith; a series of regional conference was then organised through the Group for Evangelisation of Church Together in England to stimulate discussion and action. In some places the Ecumenical Officer has called together the denominational officers with responsibility for evangelism; one says 'we have found in practice that this is a very valuable method of working'.

The county is perhaps too large a unit for co-ordinated evangelistic efforts, but one or two in the south of England have attempted events centred on a cathedral city, with a teaching and celebratory emphasis. Here are some examples.

*The Spreading Flame*, at Wells Cathedral, at Pentecost 1992, drew 600 people for a programme of teaching, with four major speakers.

A *Pentecost Celebration* at Truro in 1993 was organised through Churches Together in Cornwall, but did not receive strong enough support throughout the county – perhaps because a Bank Holiday weekend was a difficult time for many local people involved in the holiday trade. However a united service on the Sunday in Truro was very well supported.

A major *Festival of Faith* across Humberside at Pentecost 1995 was sponsored by Humberside Churches Council.

Coventry and Warwickshire have organised several events to 'empower' local evangelism: a day conference attended by more than 750 adults and children, addressed by Archbishop Derek Warlock and Bishop David Sheppard, and with a live link to Cliff Richard; an ecumenical rally addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, with a programme of music and drama; participation in the *On Fire* initiative, especially by organising a 'Burning Questions' revue attended by more than 500 people. an evangelism group continues to meet regularly.

In Wiltshire and Dorset a common 'framework' was provided, with a logo 'This way', which could be used by any churches (individually or working together) in publicising the Decade events.

Milton Keynes had an 'Evangelism Enabler' in the person of Kathy Keay until 1992; a Christian Festival was held in that year. The Revd Simon Weedon was appointed to a similar half-time post in 1994.

Cities in the north of England have initiated large, multifaceted events with a specific evangelistic purpose. Leeds and York demonstrated that churches of many denominations and theological traditions can cooperate on a large programme intended to reach the non-churchgoer. In each case the County Ecumenical Council concerned was involved in publicising and encouraging these events, though the main responsibility for the York programme was more locally based, and a half-time co-ordinator was appointed for eighteen months in Leeds. Wakefield had a similar large-scale ecumenical mission in 1994, *Wakefield Awake*.

A bold and imaginative plan for London was launched in June 1995 with the support of the church leaders. The main focus was *The Great Banquet* on 3 June at the Banqueting House, Whitehall, which brought together 270 people from all walks of life for a shared meal and hospitality, in the style of the parable of Jesus in Luke 14. The decision makers – politicians, business and professional people, church leaders – sat down at round tables with some of London's most vulnerable people, including the homeless, to listen to each other's stories. More than 200 similar 'banquets' were held throughout London, including twenty-four picnics such as the one on Wanstead Flat for the East End. As part of the same ecumenical venture *Project Sinai* was set up to give seven groups of young people aged 16-23 the opportunity to travel to the desert; the Rt Revd Richard Chartres, then Bishop of Stepney, led a multi-cultural group of young people from the East End.

But since it has been **locally** that there has been such a remarkable growth of ecumenical initiatives planned with the explicit purpose of 'sharing the good news', the task of the intermediate body is to encourage; to promote the sharing of stories (both of successes and failures); to remind local Churches Together and Councils of Churches that evangelism is increasingly being tackled ecumenically; and to argue that a diversity of traditions and emphases can be a strength rather than a weakness, granted a sufficient level of trust and mutual acceptance, which however can only arise from a long period of working and worshipping together.

Evangelism has now become an ongoing feature of the life of some local Churches Together groupings – as at Wickersley, in South Yorkshire, where Anglican, Methodists and Roman Catholics have evolved a joint approach in outreach while recognising that individuals have to exercise Christian discipleship primarily within one tradition, so that each church offers its own follow-up nurture programme. The St Helens churches have set up 'SHINE' – St Helens Interchurch Neighbourhood Evangelisation'.

The Revd Roger Whitehead, Secretary of the Churches' Co-ordinating Group for Evangelisation says, "The 1994 initiatives did cause churches to work together in localities – sometimes in ways they had not done before. *On Fire* seems to have provoked the Isle of Wight (to mention one area) to work together, and there are numerous examples of responses. *Minus to Plus* also forced many churches to look at how they would respond to a national initiative; many combined together informally so that one church could register and quietly pass on referrals to the most suitable church. In other areas *JIM Challenge* brought churches together. The feature of most

of these was the involvement of churches not normally associated with CTE. *Have Another Look*, launched by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland for Lent 1994, seems to have had less influence outside churches that are members of Churches Together in England, but it brought local Christian together – often exposing how few contacts they had with their non-Christian neighbours.’

Intermediate bodies can do a great deal to stimulate thinking about evangelisation – for example, by day conference as in MARCEA, which held such an event entitled *Culture Shock* in 1994, on the theme, ‘Sharing the Gospel in a Changing Culture’; and Telford Christian Council produced a valuable publication, *Evangelism Unlocked*, n 1992. Many intermediate bodies have evangelism or mission committees; the one which is part of Leicestershire Churches Together focuses on training and inspiration.

The Christian Enquiry Agency is a little-known ecumenical agency for evangelism, set up during the 1980s, and based at Inter-Church House in London. It places advertisements in newspapers and on posters; and publishes other outreach literature, which elicits significant response from young men, a group seriously under-represented in many congregations. A greater awareness of its existence, and the service it provides, can be encouraged, and support for it fostered among local Churches Together, Councils of Churches and LEPs by intermediate bodies.

## **b. Social and International issues**

Since many intermediate ecumenical bodies have grown out of sponsoring bodies for Local Ecumenical Projects, some of them have tended to focus on the ‘inter-church’ dimension of ecumenism. But beyond the concern for ‘one church’ there is a vision of ‘one world’, the *oikoumene*, understood as ‘one inhabited earth’, with the ongoing search for a community of justice and peace, in which the churches are called to engage together.

The ‘Conference Message’ from the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order at Santiago, 1993, said:

‘There is no turning back, either from the goal of visible unity, or from the single ecumenical movement that unites concern for the unity of the church and concern from engagement in the struggles of the world’.

This raises a huge agenda of possible concerns and actions; yet many intermediate ecumenical bodies have been able to make a response, and to be the means of united action of various kinds. Amongst the models of possible action are:

**i. Bringing together church leaders to make a joint statement on an issue of current concern.** For example, in 1992 the Norfolk church leaders (meeting in the morning before a full meeting of the Ecumenical Council in the afternoon) agreed a statement on Sunday trading, which was given wide publicity. Over the programme of pit closures, the church leaders in both Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire made strong joint statements. In 1993 the church leaders in the area made a joint statement on the closure of the Swan Hunter shipyard in Tyneside. In 1994, the seven leaders of Churches Together in South Yorkshire issued a strong statement expressing their condemnation of the attacks on members of the Asian community in Rotherham.

**ii. Bringing together the Social Responsibility Officers of the various churches to facilitate greater teamwork.** Most Anglican dioceses have a Social Responsibility Officer, full-time or part-time; most Roman Catholic dioceses have a Justice and Peace Commission with an active chairman; the main Free Churches usually have someone with this particular responsibility at district, province or association level. These are increasingly working as teams, in some cases with regular contact with the intermediate ecumenical body.

The kind of teamwork set out above has led, in some part of England, to the appointment of a fully ecumenical Social Responsibility Officer. In 1993 such an appointment was made in Wiltshire, funded by the Dioceses of Bristol and Salisbury, and with the approval and support of the church leaders and Wiltshire Churches Together. Her work has been described as being mainly concerned with 'people within the churches responding to the needs of those outside'. The challenge of putting together such an appointment when all the church boundaries are different was considerable, as many from that area will testify.

But the social issues confronting the churches are the same; a united rather than a denominational response seems the natural way forward. For some years there has been an ecumenical Church in Society Committee for Lincolnshire and South Humberside, with a full-time officer based in Lincoln and acting with and on behalf of all the supporting churches. It publishes a regular bi-monthly bulletin *OPUS*. Cumbria has a Social Responsibility Forum which provides a platform for sharing concerns co-ordinating response from all the churches and initiating projects.

Bristol has a Churches Council for Industrial and Social Responsibility, a merger of the (Anglican) Board for Social Responsibility and the (ecumenical) Social and Industrial Ministry, a 'sector' Local Ecumenical Partnership. Dorset now has a Social Responsibility Officer, working through the denomination social responsibility contacts, and managed through Churches Together in Dorset. Some areas have tried to develop partnerships in Social Responsibility, but faced the problem of funding local Methodist, URC, Baptist or Roman Catholic representatives who could genuinely make a partnership with the Anglican offer.

**iii Encouraging a local response to a national issue.** One example was the lobby of parliament on homelessness in 1992 organised by the Churches' National Housing Coalition. Most intermediate ecumenical bodies gave prominence to this lobby and encouraged local response. In some areas such as Essex, the church leaders gave a lead and committed themselves to being present. In Coventry and Warwickshire the lobby was strongly promoted through recently formed housing associations for the city and county, and was the result of the persistence of one Christian lay man.

Many local Councils of Churches and Churches together have done research on housing needs, and have then taken action to meet these needs. Westminster Christian Council has a very active Homelessness Committee, responding to the needs of the homeless in central London. Intermediate bodies can gather such information and share it.

Telford Christian Council has a long-running housing project, Brunel House, which consists of three terraced houses adapted to provide each of nine residents with his own bedroom. The house caters for 'high tariff; offenders whose prospects of rehabilitation into the community often rely on provision of adequate accommodation and support. Two young men from Brunel House were part of a delegation from Telford to London as part of the housing lobby. An earlier project at Telford launched for the homeless was called *The Stay Project*. A redundant Methodist chapel was converted to provide short-term accommodation for homeless young people. The project acquired considerable publicity when it became a 'Challenge Anneka' in November 1990, which got the project 'up and running', after a problem of lack of volunteers and limited financial support threatened to delay the start.

On the issue of conflict in Ireland, Cambridgeshire Ecumenical Council organised a visit from Archbishop Eames, Primate of All Ireland, to Cambridge in October 1993, including a lecture on *Chains to be Broken – an analysis of a community in turmoil*.

The Essex Churches Consultative Council has published a leaflet on Child Protection, prepared by the Chelmsford Diocesan Youth Office.

Several responses to the International Year of the Family 1994 have been made by MARCEA: a listening course, for anyone interested in helping others (and themselves) to improve their married relationship; a study day for all clergy to consider their relationship with their own family entitled *I Belong to a Family*; and a seminar to introduce courses in effective parenting at school, church or community level. It has also set up an organisation called 'CARE', Churches Action for Racial Equality, to combat racism and provide a resource for churches, schools and other groups. The London Churches Group set up a unique group to respond to the challenge of HIV and AIDS, to act as a centre for information, referral and education; and appointed a worker. It has also launched a company to respond to unemployment, the London Church Employment Development Unity.

**iv Working with Christian Aid and CAFOD Regional Secretaries.** This takes account of the existence of two other regional ecumenical networks, namely the large team of Area Secretaries of Christian Aid, and the smaller group of similar Regional Organisers for CAFOD. They can be co-opted onto the membership of intermediate ecumenical bodies, thereby receiving agendas and minutes, and attending when it seems appropriate. There are ecumenical networks of ecumenically-committed people working with the same basic constituency. In Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire the Ecumenical Committee sponsors a World Development Think Tank, which brings together these regional secretaries with denominational representatives.

**v Working on issues concerned with 'Justice and peace and the Integrity of Creation' (JPIC).** At the international level JPIC has become the focus of considerable commitment and action on these inter-related concerns – stimulated by the World Council of Churches, and such events as the first European Ecumenical Assembly in Basle. The theme itself has not been strongly taken up in England, but there have been some initiatives, and perhaps intermediate ecumenical bodies are in a position to do more. Notable examples were the two *Kosmos* events initiated by Churches Together in Hampshire and the Islands. The first of these was held in Portsmouth in

1991 and the second on the Isle of Wight in 1993. In each case a programme of speakers, workshops, seminars and worship were held for people from the area over a weekend.

**vi. Developing international links and twinning.** Some intermediate ecumenical bodies have developed a specific international link. For example, Telford has developed a strong relationship with Olomouc in the Czech Republic, with groups representing the Telford churches visiting Olomouc in 1992, and a return visit in 1993.

The City of Liverpool has been twinned with Cologne for forty years, and in June 1992 thirty-one people from a spread of Merseyside churches made an ecumenical visit, in response to an earlier visit to Liverpool by a similar party from Cologne.

Leeds has a similar link with Dortmund, and the West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council produced a book *From War to Peace: Recollections and Reflections 1945-1995*, to use during the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

The appropriateness of twinning ecumenically with united churches such as the Church of North India and the Church of South India is self evident. Churches Together in Derbyshire classes as a Special Ecumenical Partnership its relationship with the Church of North India. In 1991 teams of three people each from the diocese of Vellore and Tiruchy-Thanjavur (CSI) were hosted by Cambridgeshire Ecumenical Council and Birmingham Council of Christian Churches. A Vellore-Cambridgeshire link is now firmly in place.

A similar visit in the spring of 1992 from Dornakal and Karimnagar diocese was hosted by West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council and Milton Keynes. The opportunity to see multi-faith work in Bradford and to share in Holy Week celebrations in Milton Keynes was a significant experience.

Milton Keynes also has a Leipzig link, with a party visiting Milton Keynes in May 1994.

**vii. Appointing a specialist ecumenical team, eg Industrial Mission.** In many places the churches worked ecumenically in industrial mission long before the intermediate ecumenical bodies came in to being. Industrial Mission is now being tied in to the new structures, as in Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire and Cumbria where a new ecumenical chaplaincy has been started at Sellafield. Where this activity relates to a major estuary as in Tyneside and Teesside, which is itself divided between two intermediate bodies, other methods of ecumenical support have been devised. The boundary issue looms large again.

**viii. Calling regular consultations on important issues.** In Cumbria the Wigton Consultation has become an independent but valued complement to the regular business meetings of the Executive of Churches together in Cumbria (TECTIC). Out of it have arisen a lay training programme *Footsteps* and the formulation of an emergency plan for the county. The group has no authority but can tap into grassroots opinions and ideas. Meeting in the daytime on weekdays however rules out many lay people.

**ix. Preparing Major Incident Plans.** Several counties have been involved with the police in the area in drawing up. Major Incident Plans, to co-ordinate the responses of

clergy, ministers and others with appropriate skills and background any major disasters which occur in the area. In several cases the Social Responsibility Officers of the churches have taken initiative in this, and plans are now in place and operational in several counties, because the different churches have worked together through the intermediate body.

In the review of Churches Together in England (1994) there was a particular emphasis on social responsibility (para 38).

‘There is a widely felt expectation that there should be a greater role for Social Responsibility within CTE structures. We therefore recommend that CTE intermediate level staff should have a clear Social Responsibility brief. The scope for some Social Responsibility Officers at this level to ‘offer their services to other denominations’ should be widely explored’.

As this review and a later Review of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland are implemented, it is likely that it will result in more emphasis on social responsibility in the life of Churches Together in England. This will accord to the call from the 1997 Churches Together in England Forum, for a more holistic approach to ecumenical work, reflecting the five marks of mission and endorsed by the Forum.

### **c. Local Broadcasting**

Local Broadcasting, like intermediate ecumenical activity, operates in geographical areas that lie between the national and the local; hence it is not surprising that those responsible for the religious output of these stations have turned to intermediate ecumenical bodies for support of religious broadcasting in local radio stations has occupied a considerable part of their agenda. Through Suffolk Churches Together, the churches have channelled financial support towards the religious producers themselves and their equipment.

Other areas which have had considerable involvement in local broadcasting include Herts and Beds, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Sussex, Cornwall, West Yorkshire and Manchester.

The Churches Advisory Council for Local Broadcasting (CACLB) has, since the late 1960s, brought together the churches, Christian broadcasters, the Broadcasting Authorities and the trainers to offer advice and support. There have been many changes in the local broadcasting scene in the last few years, with new regional television companies, more radio franchises being offered, and the continuing advance of satellite and cable. Recognising the need for more advice to be offered in relation to these changes, CACLB has been redefining its own strategy particularly in relation to the encouragement and support of those intermediate bodies involved the support of local broadcasters.

The increasing need for financial sponsorship of local religious broadcasting, and the difficulty of providing this through intermediate bodies, have led to an initiative by the Revd Richard Thomas, Communications Officer for the Diocese of Oxford. The Churches’ Media Trust was set up in 1992, to be the ecumenical vehicle for funding and developing the churches’ work in the print and broadcast media across the three

counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. It is formally supported by the three intermediate ecumenical bodies who each nominate a representative to be a trustee. Other trustees, of various denominations, represent specific expertise, and the trust has the support of church leaders in its area. After an initial 'start-up' grant £10,000 from the Jerusalem Trust, the Churches' Media Trust is now raising its income through an annual appeal to congregations in the three counties. The first task of the Trust was to make sure that the one existing religious production post funded by the churches at BBC Radio Oxford was properly supported; and it has worked to provide a new religious production post for Berkshire, and to respond to the country's first Christian-owned independent local radio station at High Wycombe. It has also obtained a special grant to equip a portable broadcast studio to allow parishes and other Christian groups to run special event radio stations as part of their mission outreach. Other counties, such as Cornwall, Devon, Leicestershire and Wiltshire, have shown an interest in pursuing the Media Trust path. The Beds and Herts Churches' Media Trust was launched in April 1994.

However, the financial support of BBC religious affairs producers by the churches has recently come under the scrutiny of senior BBC management. Whilst recognising the breadth of knowledge offered by churches in respect of Christian broadcasting there is concern that financial responsibility could lead to conflict in the area of editorial control. The BBC issued a statement in October 1994 stating that 'BBC Local Radio has a long and sound tradition of partnerships with the local community including churches. Secondments and volunteers should be welcomed – but always within the context of clear BBC editorial control. However, direct cash funding from a church, denomination or particular faith should not be acceptable.

The churches need to discuss whether the pattern of the Media Trust can now be seen to be the right one for media work across the whole country. A consultation of churches and broadcasting organisations will discuss this involvement in the field of religious broadcasting, bearing in mind the growth of Independent Local Radio, cable and satellite television. The 'media trust' approach might take some pressure off intermediate bodies who find that concern for local broadcasting and its financing can easily dominate their own agenda.

#### **d. Ministerial and Lay Training**

There is little experience of intermediate ecumenical bodies taking initiatives concerning the initial (pre-ordination) training of clergy and ministers, although there is no reason why they should not act as a catalyst in this matter in an area where theological training is concentrated especially as there is a policy to cluster the theological education resources of the various churches together in regions. But there is scope for bringing together **post-ordination** or continuing **in-service ministerial education**. All the churches increasingly recognise the crucial importance of the ongoing training of ministers and clergy; and this is a field that has great potential for ecumenical development.

In the late 1980s in Somerset and South Avon, the chairman called together the officers responsible for ongoing training of clergy in the main five churches. Out of this consultation grew programmes of joint training held at Ammerdown, which were much appreciated by those who took part. In Lancashire, an ecumenical approach to post-

ordination training is encouraged by the church leaders, and a joint conference is held every two years.

At a time in the life of the churches when many local ministers and clergy do not have much ecumenical experience to draw upon, the possibility that their ongoing training might be done ecumenically could be vital in the development of inter-church trust and understanding.

It is not only in the training of clergy that ecumenical advances can be made. The Chiltern Christian Training Programme in Buckinghamshire has pioneered ecumenical partnership in **lay training**. It has accredited courses of all sorts for lay people, readers and local preachers, and has had full Roman Catholic participation from the start. Similarly, the Milton Keynes Christian Training Course has been sponsored by the Milton Keynes Christian Training Council, for the training of authorised lay worship leaders in the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed churches. There is an agreed Christian training course based on units and modules, and approved by the churches involved, for the training of their local preachers or lay readers. Once again what has been pioneered here could easily be repeated elsewhere since there is a great overlap in study material and practical skills needed by people moving into greater lay leadership responsibilities.

MARCEA has set up an Ecumenical Certificate in Religious Studies – a lay Christian education programme run ecumenically for those who have done some basic study within their denominations and wish to proceed further. It is validated by the Liverpool Institute of Higher Education, and can be used by those who wish to go on to degree level.

All of this is in line with the recommendations in *Churches Together in Pilgrimage* (p14) that there should be more work together in four major areas, of which one was ‘nurture and training’.

‘There is also a need to enable ecumenical nurture and training of both lay and ordained, though we recognise that substantial theological differences of understanding cannot and should not be overlooked... Formation for the ordained ministry and post-ordination training should be strongly ecumenical and further schemes of joint training should be encouraged.

#### **e. Rural Ecumenism**

Flying over England in an aircraft, one is struck by how much of the country is still resolutely rural. It is hard for those who work and live in towns and cities to remember how different ecumenism looks in the countryside. In one village there may be a parish church and several nonconformist chapels; in many counties, such as Shropshire, Herefordshire and Devon, most villages now have only an Anglican church building. In one or two parts of the country, eg Northumberland, the single church buildings may be a United Reformed church (formerly Presbyterian). Many villages have no resident minister or priest. In larger villages there may be a Catholic church or Mass centre, but most Roman Catholics in the countryside have to travel some distance to Sunday mass. Everywhere the nature of the population is changing – far fewer people being

employed on the land, and many cottages bought up as second homes, and only occupied at certain times by their owners.

Despite all the pressures, there is often a sense of community and belonging in a village that is far stronger than in suburbia; and the parish church still has a strong role as a focus for community life; in fact it may be the only surviving point, thanks to the demise of the village school and shop. An intermediate ecumenical body of a largely rural county can do much to stimulate thinking about this challenging situation. Somerset and South Avon Ecumenical Council undertook a piece of research, which revealed that over considerable sections of the county, the parish church was the only living Christian community. In Cumbria, the Revd Norman Wallwork, the Ecumenical Officer at the time, instigated a twinning programme which brought together two congregations from different parts of the county for visits and exchanges. Since one of the pair was usually a rural church, people were able to share insights into the challenges confronting these churches. Coventry and Warwickshire Ecumenical Council has plotted all the churches and how they are grouped, and where the clergy who serve them live, as the basis for ecumenical planning over ministerial deployment. The South Cleveland and North Yorkshire Ecumenical Council has co-operated with the Northern Federation for Training in Ministry to run a ten-day course at the Keld Centre, North Yorkshire on the theme *Ministry in a Rural Setting* – an opportunity to encounter the distinctive nature, problems and joys of rural ministry.

Many would now agree that the goal should be the creation of one viable Christian community in each 'settlement'. The report of the Archbishops' Commission on rural areas, *Faith in the Countryside* (Churchman Publishing, 1990) said (p26), 'We have heard many times that what is now needed is the enthusiastic take-up of the possibility of single church rural Local Ecumenical Projects'.

The possibility that one church in the village could become the Christian community for people of various traditions, whilst enabling them to retain links with their parent denominations if they wish, has been extensively discussed among the churches. Several denominations have issued guidelines for 'A Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment'.

#### **f. Young People**

Many intermediate bodies have a concern that young people are absent from the ecumenical scene. Realising that their main constituency seems to be predominantly middle-aged or older.

At a time when the ecumenical movement was itself younger and was seen to be a more pioneering and exciting concern, it was easier to involve young people. In the 1950s and 1960s there were quite a number of Ecumenical Youth Councils around the country, and the Student Christian Movement was a major source of ecumenical experience for young people at college and university. The British Council of Churches was able to draw a thousand young people to an occasional major event. Beginning at Bangor in 1950 there was a sequence of such Christian youth gatherings for Britain, including *Edinburgh '68*, *Liverpool '72* and *Dayspring* at St David's in 1976, but in the 1980s it became more difficult to sustain such events.

Nowadays the ecumenical movement is to some extent the victim of its own success, as people take the notion of 'Churches Together' as the norm rather than the exception. As denominational identity is often weaker amongst young people, so it is less likely that young people will want to explore the difference between denominations traditions for its own sake.

As the more formal ecumenical event has declined in its impact on young people, so a whole range of others with an international flavour have grown in influence. Perhaps the most outstanding of these is the *Council of Youth* at Taizé, drawing tens of thousands of young people to that ecumenical community in an almost mysterious way in the 1970s, and still having enough magnetism to draw up to 5,000 at a time throughout the summer weeks. With an emphasis which combines spirituality and the struggle for justice, and with the example and influence of a deeply committed religious community at its heart, it clearly has great meaning for many young people, particularly in the most obviously 'post-Christian' parts of Europe. Pilgrimages to Taizé of groups drawn from different church traditions in the area served by an intermediate body are proving valuable and regular Taizé-style worship appeals to young and old.

The Iona Community in Scotland has, to some extent, acted as a similar focus for young people in Britain, particularly in Scotland. The rebuilding of the youth camp there in the late 1980s is a sign of that Community's continuing commitment to and involvement with young people. Other notable regular youth gatherings include *Greenbelt*, bringing together thousands of young people at the August bank holiday weekend each year and *Spring Harvest*, which is not specifically a young people's event but does involve a large number of young people, with an evangelical and charismatic emphasis.

With all this as background, some intermediate bodies have taken steps to initiate some kind of youth movement. Berkshire has initiated *YELP*, standing for *Youth Ecumenical Link Project*: a conference was held in October 1992, aimed at bringing together young people willing to be involved in the development of a youth section of Churches Together in Berkshire. The discussion centred around the isolation young people can feel within their churches, and how this can be overcome. A group met several times in the following months, and collectively felt a need for spiritual development and future aims. The hope is to involve more young people around the county through the activities of the core group, and perhaps to set up several groups in specific local areas.

Devon has initiated Young Christians Together in Devon, 'to formulate an inter-denominations core group of young (17-30) Christians...with the aim of furthering unity and evangelism.'

A successful initial meeting was held in Exeter in October 1993, but the problems of geography in a large county and the constant mobility of young adults provide considerable challenges. In January 1994 the Ecumenical Officer for Devon initiated a 'Seed Group' weekend, fifteen young people, mainly from Anglican and Roman Catholic backgrounds, met at a residential centre near Honiton for a weekend of sharing stories, asking questions and learning together. One of these reported, at the end:

'superb weekend, great to meet other like-minded Christians. Worried at first, but no need, we all shared our lives, faith, love. Not enough time. I have great hope for the future. A small group of young people which will definitely grow and bear fruit.'

A Youth Chaplain has been employed for some years in Telford. He has helped to support an International Christian Arts Festival in Telford, named *Drumlin*: a network of young church folk from two dozen churches in and around Telford, called *WYC Wrekin Young Christians*: and an Ecumenical Youth Fellowship for the Central Telford Ecumenical Partnership, meeting on Saturday evenings, called *Fotex Kundenservice*. He has also spent time with several churches in the area acting as a consultant, working with local churches in their efforts to develop ministry amongst young people. Telford has also developed the Youth Work Resource Centre, providing resources covering a wide variety of subjects from worship to games, including video equipment, books and information about resources elsewhere. The Ecumenical Youth Chaplain, until 1992, the Revd Philip Smith, vigorously campaigned to encourage the church to take young people and their views seriously, and to enable them to participate effectively within the church's life. He departed in 1992, and funding uncertainties cause a gap, but in 1994 the Revd John Foreman was appointed, albeit in a part-time capacity linked to a local pastorate.

Milton Keynes has also had a Youth Chaplain, in the person of the Revd Michael Burns. Amongst his activities has been the organising of pilgrimages, such as the *Easter Pilgrimage* on Easter Monday 1993. For some time the Christian Council has had a Youth Commission, and recently it has been struggling with the re-forming of that Commission after a period of less activity. Visitors to the Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes notice how often organised groups of school children are there exploring the significance of the building and its many-sided ministry.

MARCEA has been involved in working in various ways with young people in the Liverpool area. A second young people' *All Night Vigil* in the Anglican cathedral was held in October 1993. For the past few years, an *Easter vigil* has taken place in Coventry Cathedral, with a great variety of activities, including the baking of bread for the dawn eucharist.

### **g. The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women**

The decade for many church people in the 1990s denotes the *Decade of Evangelism or Evangelisation*, but another decade, the *Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women*, was initiated by the World Council of Churches in 1988. Its aim has been to encourage the churches' recognition of women, rather than a campaign by women for this; though the latter is how it has wrongly been viewed. The rather cumbersome title has not helped the impact of this decade in Britain, but a great deal has been happening concerning the recognition of women's roles in the church and particularly in ministry. Half way through the decade, the Church of England took the decision to ordain women to the priesthood; and one is conscious on all sides of the increasing number of women taking responsibility and leadership in the Church at every level. Many denominations have taken up this concern – the Church of England has established a network of people in every diocese. The United Reformed Church has SPIN, Sharing People In Network – 'to help men and women to work together in the church in equal partnership'. The Methodist organisation principally led by and

involving women called, simply, *Network*, publishes an excellent quarterly magazine *Magnet*, dealing with gender issues and providing high quality worship material suitable for both sexes. The United Reformed Church, Methodist Church and Baptist Union of Great Britain all have groups set up by women ministers for their mutual support.

Some intermediate bodies have taken up the concerns of this decade with enthusiasm; others have not felt it to be a priority.

Some of the strongest activity has taken place in the north east of England; a North East Ecumenical Women's Group planned a major event at Durham Cathedral in January 1992, where the *Durham Quilt* was unveiled, depicting lives of women of faith through the ages who have given leadership in church and society and influenced others in quieter ways.

On Merseyside there is an Ecumenical Christian Women's Network, set up in response to the decade in 1988, and still going strong.

In Lichfield Cathedral in March 1994 an ecumenical group of women from Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Worcestershire and Staffordshire planned an event to celebrate the decade entitled *Blooming Women*, with an emphasis on sharing the gifts and experience of women through worships, seminars and major speakers. The intermediate bodies in the area did much to advertise and report the event. Later in November 1994 at Carrs Lane, Birmingham, there was a day to reflect on the Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women (August 1994). The Birmingham Council of Christian Churches helped with co-ordination and publicity.

An intermediate body might consider appointing one of its members (or co-opting someone who could keep the Council informed about events associated with this decade in the area, and suggest ideas that might be discussed, not least the role of women in the intermediate body itself.

Which leads to the question – are intermediate bodies themselves content to follow traditionally male styles of leadership and decision-making? Whereas many lay women have been active in the ecumenical movement and at local Council of churches level, has the perceived need to challenge churches to see ecumenism as a dimension of everything they do had the side-effect of marginalising women? The involvement of the handful of female church leaders working alongside bishops at the intermediate level may prove to be of long-term significance. Intermediate bodies need themselves to be an example of growing male-female partnership and mutuality in their own membership and in all that they initiate.

### **Postscript**

The shared concerns described in this chapter are not exhaustive. The list could be endless. Intermediate bodies often find it helpful to be in contact with ecumenical agencies dealing with specific issues. Some have been mentioned in this chapter – Christian Aid, CAFOD, the Christian Enquiry Agency, the Churches Advisory Council for Local Broadcasting, the Churches Rural Group focused on the Arthur Rank Centre. All these are related to Churches Together in England at national level. Other such related agencies or bodies which have a presence at intermediate level include:

Association of Interchurch Families

Bible Society

National Retreat Association

Student Christian Movement

Focolare

YMCA

YWCA

The Fellowship of Prayer for Unity

National Association of Christian Communities and Networks

## 8. COMMUNICATIONS

As the work of intermediate ecumenical councils develops, the question of communication becomes more important. With whom do they want to communicate, and why, and with what content? And therefore what means of communication are appropriate? The answer to the first will include:

- Local churches in the area and their individual members – whether in a Local Ecumenical Partnership, a Council of Churches or ‘Churches Together’, or in none of these.
- The general public in the area.
- Church leaders with responsibility for the area.
- Those with particular responsibility for an aspect of the church’s life and ministry in the area.
- Other people in the media, eg local radio, television, newspapers.
- National or local government; significant commercial undertakings, Chambers of Commerce etc.

The answer to the ‘why’ is presumably to pass on clear information about what is going on, so that the sense of being part of a ‘movement’ is encouraged, and the whole image of the ‘Churches Together’ movement is as strong as it can be.

Therefore the content of what is to be communicated will start with the simple information about the life of the ecumenical council or forum, with details of future events, stories of co-operation and good practice from near and far; information from the wider ecumenical scene, moving outwards from the county to the regional, the nation, the continent and the wider world. The difficulty soon becomes not what to include, but what to exclude.

Most intermediate bodies have come to the conclusion that a regular and simple bulletin-type publication is the first essential element in this task; and since 1990 more and more intermediate bodies have managed to create something of this kind, albeit with limited resources. Very often the editing of this publication falls upon the County Ecumenical Officer, and this can involve a significant part of his or her time. Not surprisingly, production standards vary considerable, and most County Ecumenical Officer wish that more could be done. But a start has to be made somewhere. Even an intermediate body with limited resources such as Devon has recently managed to improve its bulletin from a very basic production to something which is visually much more attractive and accessible. ‘Desk-top publishing’ is increasingly in use.

One or two bodies have sufficient resources to produce something more professional; for example, the annual report of Telford Christian Council a 30-page diary of the year’s activities with well-produced text and photographs – an excellent advertisement for the Council’s activities. One or two intermediate bodies – Surrey and Herts and Beds – have produced videos or sets of slides illustrating the work in their area.

Sussex Churches has produced an annual Ecumenical Directory, with lists of its own officers and working groups, and details of local ecumenical groups and partnerships, as well as denominational addresses and contacts. Humberside Churches Council has produced a practical directory *The Church in Humberside*, a complete listing of every place of Christian worship, every full-time minister in every denomination, and a list of Councils of Churches and 'Churches Together'. These directories involve a great deal of work, and need continuous updating; but they can be recommended as invaluable tools for others to copy.

Other intermediate bodies have worked on maps of their area, with details of every place of worship of every tradition. Norfolk produced such a map in 1992, and Somerset and South Avon have done the same. Herts and Beds have produced a map showing places of worship and ministers in charge for the main traditions. Again the initiative takes a great deal of work, but these maps have proved to be the bases of significant discussion about the 'profile' of the area – for example, illustrating how far the Church of England is the only viable presence in a great many rural parts of both counties.

Intermediate bodies often express frustration that it seems so difficult to communicate their concerns and information to the person in the pew. Information sent to Councils of Churches, 'Churches Together' or ministers of local churches frequently seems to stop there. Good communication requires an input of money and time, both of which are at a premium. This leads back to the financing of intermediate bodies, the subject of the next chapter. Without good communications much of the work of an intermediate body will be largely wasted; but within the limitations of the situation, attention needs to be given to this subject. A major need is to get ecumenical news into parish magazines, and other denominational publications. One County Ecumenical Officer says: 'a single organ of communication is not possible; several ways of presenting information must be prepared, targeted at different audiences'.

The Communications Officer of Churches Together in England (until August 1994), Jackie Sheppard, organised a series of days to train County Ecumenical Officers in the skills of communication. These days focused on the importance of working with the media, with emphasis on the writing of effective press releases, and good performance in radio interviews. As a result several CEOs have developed an entrée to the columns of their local press. The Communications Unit of the Church of England at Church House, Westminster has an annual programme of training days on skills relating to radio, television, public speaking and the production of publications such as newsletters. The latter 'journalism days' could be particularly useful to hard-pressed County Ecumenical Officers. Churches Together in England's video *All Together Now* (1993) includes material on the work of County Ecumenical Officers.

One final point – there are now twenty-three churches (or in some cases, Councils of Churches) which have become members of Churches Together in England. They should be regarded as of equal status, even if of very different sizes. Intermediate bodies ought therefore to take steps to establish communication with congregations of smaller churches in their area, and to encourage them to participate in local ecumenical groupings. They may be able to be represented at intermediate level, but where there is only limited energy and personnel the local should take priority.

Personal communication with the intermediate officer could be very valuable in developing relationships and representation.

## 9. FINANCE

Those with little experience of ecumenism often ask the question –‘who pays for all this?’ (for example, Churches Together in England nationally, and the intermediate bodies). The answer is – the churches (at whatever level) which have created them. So at the intermediate level, it will be the church structures that correspond to that level which should bear the main responsibility for funding the intermediate body. Just how its appropriate percentage of the budget is found will depend upon the polity of each denomination. Naturally it should be in proportion to the size of that church in the area covered. It is not appropriate for Churches Together in England to give a general ruling as to the proportions that should be paid in each area; these should relate to the actual strengths of the churches, which certainly vary in different parts of England.

In 1992 Churches Together in England undertook a survey of all intermediate bodies and their financial structures. This survey was revealing in many ways; for example, it showed what a very wide range of financial patterns there were, from intermediate bodies that existed on an ‘expenses only’ basis, with a very small budget – right up to bodies like the Telford Christian Council which becomes an ‘umbrella’ for a great deal of ecumenical work, financed through the council. The latter therefore has a budget of approximately £350,000 and employs 35 people. There is some evidence that where particular diocese/districts are contributing strongly to one thoroughgoing intermediate body, they seem less prepared or able to fund neighbouring ones realistically. There is thus the danger that those intermediate bodies in the forefront forge ahead, while other parts of the country are allowed to become ecumenical backwaters.

It is obvious that the churches are struggling with the effects of recession at this time, and it is difficult for many to see ways of increasing their financial commitment at the intermediate level. Indeed one or two appointments are under threat already.

To those who say ‘we do not have the financial resources’, we have to reply, ‘what are the priorities to which limited resources are applied?’. When ecumenism is merely consultative and co-operative, it is inevitably a financial extra. When ecumenism is able to break through into commitment and the sharing of resources for joint employment of staff, it can lead to more ecumenical use of personnel. However, this is unlikely to happen without a skilled ecumenical officer who can give time to building mutual trust between churches and to discovering where joint work is appropriate.

Some income can certainly be gathered in by intermediate bodies from local Councils of Churches and Churches Together (see *chapter 5*), but without considerable changes in the pattern recommended in *Churches Together in Pilgrimage*, this is never likely to be more than a helpful addition to the budgets of intermediate bodies.

The overall message is that there is great scope for ecumenical work at the intermediate level, but there is a lack of time and personnel to carry it through; in particular, the more that the intermediate bodies take up the more pressure is put upon the officer of that body. The majority of intermediate bodies run on the strength of a part-time or even ‘spare-time’ appointment, yet many of their officers are in practice working far more hours than their contract specifies. Everything, therefore, comes back to the financial questions – if the churches will that more should be co-ordinated and encouraged at the intermediate level, are they also prepared to will the means? Can they give **national** consideration as to how

finance can be made available at the intermediate level? This is being discussed as a matter of policy by the United Reformed Church, who circulated a discussion paper on this subject in early 1994; and the Methodist Church, with its connexional structure, should surely favour this approach. The issue was also discussed at the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England at the end of 1994.

## 10. STRUCTURES

As more and more of the concerns outlined in this handbook are taken on by intermediate bodies, careful thought will need to be given to the structures necessary to support the action. The complaint goes up, 'more and more structures, more and more meetings'. However, all these meetings arise from the desire to consult, to share, to act together. It is no longer acceptable for a denomination to plan an initiative, and later in the day to invite others to share in it, claiming that this is to act ecumenically. Ecumenical co-operation deserves joint planning from the beginning.

No blueprint can be given for the structures necessary to run intermediate bodies. The pattern needed for a large new town body like Telford Christian Council will be different from that of a county-wide ecumenical council, which will be different again from that of a large metropolitan area.

However, elements of a common pattern are beginning to emerge. A number of the intermediate bodies identified on pages 35-37 of *Churches Together in Pilgrimage* in 1989 were then called 'Ecumenical Councils' or 'Sponsoring Bodies'. Taking their cue from the inauguration of Churches Together in England in 1990, they have changed their name to 'Churches Together in...'. At the same time many have adopted a structure similar to that of Churches Together in England. This provides for a **Forum** or **Assembly** which will meet less frequently, and involve a larger number of people, including local representatives; an **Enabling Group, Council** or **Executive** – the key ongoing decision-making body, including recognised church leaders. To this most intermediate bodies find that they need to add a smaller group as **Standing Committee** or **Administrative Group** consisting of a smaller group of officers, meeting in-between the Enabling Group or Executive.

The value of a regular, but not too frequent, larger gathering has been widely recognised – a Forum or assembly, which gives more opportunity to gather representatives from local ecumenical life to a county or city-wide event, for the sharing of vision and the deepening of understanding. Often these events, occupying a day or half-day, will focus on a particular issue or area of concern; an element of shared worship and celebration is invariably present. In some areas these meetings have specifically been asked for by LEPs and local Churches Together, and they are means by which the intermediate body can begin to service local ecumenism.

An Enabling Group Council or Executive is essential to ecumenical work at intermediate as well as every other level. One of the principles of the Churches Together movement is that decisions are taken by the churches and not simply by a body of representatives appointed by the churches and left to get on with ecumenism as if it were just another department of church life. The Enabling Group, Council or Executive (it may also have other names) is the body which keeps an overview of all the churches (and, in intention at least, not only the five largest churches), and makes sure that any major decisions have the support of the decision-making bodies of all the member churches.

Enough time needs to be given to the key meeting of any intermediate body (Enabling Group, Council or Executive) to achieve its purpose. A meeting that takes place only twice a year for about 2 hours is hardly likely to be able to bring a radical ecumenical reshaping to the life of the churches at that level. The intermediate level is as much under pressure of time as of money (*see chapter 9*). Without sacrificial giving of both, there is little chance

that the intermediate body will be able to move the churches 'from co-operation to commitment'.

However, if church leadership is to give time to such a meeting, that time must not be wasted by discussion of administrative details which could be left to a trusted ecumenical officer, or to a small expert group. Many intermediate bodies therefore have a small Standing committee or Administrative Group which helps the ecumenical Officer with the day-to-day administrative details.

## 11. INVOLVING CHURCH LEADERS

An essential element in the life of Intermediate Ecumenical Council is the involvement of the appropriate church leaders. Indeed in some areas this has been the key to all other advance; the church leaders have given a strong public lead, so that acting ecumenically becomes increasingly the norm rather than the exception.

The classic case of this is in Merseyside, where the co-operation of Archbishop Derek Warlock and Bishop David Sheppard, together with successive Free Church leaders, became an enormous influence, central to the development of MARCEA. This now has a strong and multifaceted life, being organised as a common synod, and it is of increasing importance to the denominational decision-making bodies. After years of bigotry and antagonism between the Protestant and Catholic communities in Liverpool, the co-operation and friendship established by Archbishop Derek Warlock and Bishop David changed the whole religious climate. The whole story is documented in *Better Together*, and brought up-to-date by *With Hope in our Hearts* (published 1988 and 1994, Hodder & Stoughton).

Another equally significant but less widely publicised model has been that of Milton Keynes, with the unique appointment of an 'Ecumenical Moderator' (see *chapter 1*).

Elsewhere church leaders have found that the intermediate body provides a natural meeting place and focus for co-operation. Sometimes, as in Norfolk, the church leaders gather for a morning meeting before sharing in the wider Ecumenical Council in the afternoon.

In West Yorkshire the leaders insist on having an hour's theological discussion introduced by one of them at each meeting. They also have a 24-hour residential 'in camera' meeting once a year. Elsewhere, as in Somerset and South Avon, there is an understanding that at each meeting of the Ecumenical Council one of the church leaders will be present then a residential meeting once a year is an occasion for all the leaders to meet with the council.

A pattern which has been found most successful in many regions is for the church leaders to share together in a **joint visitation** to a particular town, usually lasting a day or two, and involving meetings with local leaders, visits to significant projects and a major public meeting, which has often been well attended. In Surrey such visitations have been organised to Guildford, Leatherhead, Working, Banstead, Dorking and Farnham. Newcastle Church Relations Group has had a practice for the past ten years of every six months the church leaders visiting a town for a day – schools, factories, hospitals – and then in the evening holding a public meeting. Many local people still express surprise at seeing church leaders of different traditions working together as colleagues and enjoying Christian-name friendships!

It cannot be over emphasised how important to the life of the intermediate body is the involvement and support of the church leaders. But there are practical problems. Anglican and Catholic bishops have enormous demands on their time, with their responsibilities both in church and society. Free Church leaders (Methodist chairmen, URC moderators and Baptist superintendents) tend to have larger areas to serve, often containing as many as six or even eight intermediate bodies. Clearly they cannot be at

every council meeting of every one. A measure of delegation is often seen as the best answer; church leaders will not need to be present for all the details of the oversight of Local Ecumenical Partnerships, but they will need to be involved where major policy decisions are taken about them. The problems raised by the lack of coterminous boundaries are considerable and often frustrating.

### **Church Leaders' Covenants**

When a growing relationship between church leaders has developed and mutual trust has become natural, a personal covenant between these leaders has often been signed as a statement of commitment, and a public lead for others to follow. The covenant sets a context within which ecumenical relationships may develop, affirming what is done in neighbourhoods and in the specialist interest groups within the region. In Norfolk and in Suffolk, on the same Sunday in November 1991, the church leaders gathered with large congregations in the Cathedrals of Norwich and St Edmundsbury for such events. Similar covenants have been signed in Lincolnshire (1982), Merseyside (1985), Lancashire (1987), West Yorkshire (1987) (renewed 1997), Newcastle (1988), Cumbria (1989), Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire (1990) (renewed annually), Devon (1991), and there is a 'declaration of intent in Surrey (1993).

However far the teamwork develops, it is very important that everyone involved remains sensitive to the quite different patterns of authority and leadership exercised in the different churches. The kind of leadership that is exercised by an Anglican diocesan bishop is quite different from that of, say, a Baptist general superintendent – indeed the latter may very well not be at ease with the phrase 'church leader', since Baptist polity emphasises that leadership and authority reside essentially in the local church. The general superintendent does have a role in leadership, and of representing that church at a wider level, but it differs from that of a bishop. Free Church members can overestimate the influence and authority of Anglican bishops. In many ways the Salvation Army has the clearest authority structure. It is also important to remember those churches which do not have a recognised pattern of 'church leaders' in this sense at all, for example, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Church of England and Roman Catholic Bishops are usually happy to meet and share with their perceived 'opposite numbers' in the Free Churches. They come to recognise the conciliar nature of the United Reformed Church, the connexional nature of the Methodist Church and the authority resident in the local church in the Baptist and Congregational traditions. These limit the extent to which the 'leaders' can commit their constituency, but, conversely, make it possible for someone other than the chairman, moderator or general superintendent to represent non-episcopal churches at the intermediate level. However, some County Ecumenical Officers say that constant changes of representations weaken the intermediate body.

It is important that it is made clear to all concerned what authority is being given to representatives on intermediate bodies to speak for or commit their churches. It is clear that an intermediate body only had authority accorded to it by its member churches, though it is hoped that it will increasingly win respect and confidence from its constituency.

The question has been raised, 'Have the church leaders entered these covenants in a personal capacity, or on behalf of, and with the agreement of their churches? And how far

does the covenant bind their successors?' There have been different understanding in different places, but usually the covenant has been entered into with the knowledge and agreement of the church concerned. Very often, when successive church leaders come into office, it has been found helpful to arrange a re-signing of the covenant.

## 12. THE ROLE OF THE ECUMENICAL OFFICER

The survey undertaken by Churches Together in England and already referred to – *At the Intermediate Level* – revealed that by 1993 nearly every county or large city in England had some kind of ecumenical officer working with its intermediate body. The majority of these were ecumenically appointed either full-time or part-time; in a few cases the work was covered by somebody acting in their ‘spare-time’ usually working with others. In some cases an Anglican Diocesan Ecumenical Officer was also acting as the Ecumenical Officer for the ecumenical body.

The exact breakdown in 1994 was:

Full-time (Birmingham, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Milton Keynes, Telford, West Yorkshire)	8
Part-time	27
Spare-time	6
Anglican Ecumenical Officer acting as County Ecumenical Officer	6

Naturally their role varies, and depends on the number of hours available per week. Central to each role is the servicing of the Ecumenical Council for the area, and the implementing of its decisions. Much of the responsibility for responding to the range of issues addressed in this publication falls on the shoulders of the Ecumenical Officer. Most report that the demands of the job continually outweigh the number of hours available. One full-time Ecumenical Officer reported attending 225 meetings in 1993. As more work that was previously done denominationally is now being tackled ecumenically, someone has to do the co-ordinating and enabling. As more communication becomes vital, someone needs to edit the bulletins, to communicate with the media. Sometimes the Ecumenical Officer can act as a catalyst, and the work can then continue under its own momentum; in other cases a continual ‘servicing’ role is necessary.

A vital but underdeveloped area is the involvement of the Ecumenical Officer in the ‘intermediate’ level councils of the various churches, eg diocesan, provincial and district synods, URC district councils, Baptist association meetings. The Ecumenical Officer should also have an entrée to the Roman Catholic Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. Clearly no County Ecumenical Officer can be expected to go to everything, but the opportunity should be there, and papers sent automatically.

If all these roles are to be carried out, then the Ecumenical Officer’s work must be properly supported and recognised. There is a clear need for a properly drawn-up contact, for clear lines of responsibility, and a support group, which should not be confused with any executive group. Ecumenical Officers ought not to have to be preoccupied with the funding of their own posts, and where there is such a wide range of possible activities open to them, some ready means of advice and encouragement is clearly needed. In some ways the job can often be a lonely one, and can have its own stresses and strains; although the Ecumenical Officers themselves would emphasise how varied and fulfilling the work can be, when properly accepted and understood.

The Ecumenical Officer is the crucial middle-man or woman between the local and the national (and international); reflecting local concerns to the national bodies, and communicating insights and information from the national and international to the local.

The relationship with Churches Together in England (and, through it, with the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland) is therefore crucial. The two Field Officers are committed to serving the intermediate bodies; there are meetings of County Ecumenical Officers, and a constant pattern of contact in between. Through the bi-monthly bulletin, *Pilgrim Post*, the intermediate level is kept informed of all that is happening; and Ecumenical Officers draw on this publication for their own bulletins.

The crucial role of the Ecumenical Officer was clearly identified in the review of Churches Together in England (1994) (*para 7(a)*): 'One of the priority tasks facing the Ecumenical Officers at intermediate level should be to seek to understand, and to interpret to others, the ecclesiology and authority structures of each member church.' This calls for considerable expertise and experience.

Yet the financial pressures referred to in the previous chapter cannot be avoided. Some part-time posts and one or two full-time ones are threatened as reviews take place. Not all in the wider church are convinced that these posts are a priority. Michael Hubbard's call (*chapter 2 (b)*) for a full-time Ecumenical Officer in each area seems only a distant dream. Some would argue that a team of denominational ecumenical officers (part-time - as in the Newcastle Church Relations Group area - may spread the load and the involvement, and help to avoid threatened cuts. Indeed, as intermediate bodies face up to the large range of tasks open to them, and set out in these pages, the more it becomes clear that this can only be done effectively through a growing teamwork of the denominational and ecumenically appointed ecumenical officers; close co-operation here is essential, particularly if the County Ecumenical Officer is not full-time.

A good partnership between the denominational and ecumenically appointed ecumenical officers is vital, the review of Churches Together in England (1994) said: 'An agreed code of practice should be developed governing the relative roles and responsibilities of ecumenically appointed and denominationally appointed ecumenical officers.' The Enabling Group of Churches Together in England commented: 'Agreed, but flexible guidelines (rather than a uniform code) should be drafted.'

If the majority of appointments are to continue to be part-time, it raises the question, whether people of sufficient experience and calibre will continue to be attracted to these positions. Experience shows that the Ecumenical Officer has considerable opportunity to exercise, not just an executive, but a prophetic role for the area - opening up new possibilities for co-operation, encouraging new Local Ecumenical Partnerships and communicating a vision of ecumenism through the spoken and written word. Theological experience and insight are at a premium. An officer who has the understanding, qualifications and sensitivity required to earn the trust of the church leaders has great scope for the development of ecumenical work.

*Churches Together in Pilgrimage* (p32) said: 'If sharing between local churches is to be adequately supported, there needs to be at the intermediate level a strong ecumenical body to provide that support. Employing an ecumenical officer whose expertise and time are available to local churches and to church leaders is one means of ensuring that the intermediate bodies can fulfil their role more effectively. This lay behind the Swanwick proposal for ecumenically appointed ecumenical officers, 'full-time if possible'.'

No group of people is more crucial in the development of the ecumenical movement in England than the intermediate level ecumenical officers, and the councils that they serve. As the review of Churches Together in England (1994) put it, 'The real function of the Ecumenical Officer should be a developer of vision, and channel of shared inspiration.'

### **13. CONCLUSION**

Those who look at the ecumenical scene in these islands from abroad notice that this pattern of intermediate level ecumenical action is almost unique in the world, and provides a model that many are interested in following. If local ecumenism is where the main action is, how can the good stories be shared, and the places which are running into difficulties be helped? How can the experience of the local be reflected and shared at a wider level, the challenge the denominational 'status quo'?

The English pattern of intermediate bodies serving the local and being supported themselves by the staff of the national bodies provides a pattern that could be developed in other parts of the world. An additional 'plus' in the English situation is something that is unique in Europe. Only here are there three main 'streams of Christianity existing side by side in a reasonable balance of numbers: Roman Catholic, Anglican and Free Church (including Independent Pentecostal and 'new' churches). In England this has led to a rich ecumenical experience, not in every place, but at all levels, giving the church in England much to contribute to the ecumenical movement world-wide. Pope John Paul referred to this when, after his visit to Britain in 1982, he spoke of Christianity in Great Britain as 'an important ecumenical ground'.

But the whole pattern of intermediate level ecumenism is quite fragile, and could easily be undermined by cost-cutting decisions and by a weakening of commitment in the next few years. If ecumenism is seen by church leaders as an optional extra, they will be tempted to cut back on support for ecumenical bodies. If it is seen as a priority, it may point the way to a proper sharing of resources.

The evidence of all that has gone before is that in the counties, large cities and new towns of England there is considerable life and much potential for growth, which needs to be nurtured and shared.