



Report on 2009-2012 for CTE Forumⁱ

From Revd Dr David Cornick, CTE General Secretary

The last three years have not been easy years for the churches. The banking crisis and the recession have affected church finances just they have the rest of the economy. One result of that has been that our funding has been frozen for three years, and at best will remain frozen for a further three years. Thus far we have been making bricks with a decreasing supply of straw. In the next triennium we may be faced with difficult decisions about making fewer bricks.

Economic difficulties have been intricately interwoven with the emergence of a new pattern of relationships amongst the national ecumenical instruments and CTBIⁱⁱ. As a result of funding cuts in 2009, all the instruments are now independent. That has allowed CTE to be more responsive to our members, but there has been a concomitant loss of a wider British fellowship in the ecumenical journey, despite CTBI's best efforts. That is symptomatic of the pressures that are acting on the churches. As staffing is reduced and workloads increase, decisions have to be made about which meetings to attend, and which not.

However, the triennium was not composed entirely of gloom! We have much to report which speaks of the vitality of the Spirit and the love of God in Christ Jesus. In 2010 we celebrated the centenary of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910ⁱⁱⁱ from which many date the modern ecumenical movement. The shift of the centre of gravity of world Christianity from north to south and west to east which has marked that century humbles us. Christianity is a growing, expanding movement when seen in a world perspective. 32% of the world's population are Christians - c. 2.6 billion people. Truly the Spirit has been at work. There were no Catholics present at Edinburgh 1910.

Another sign of the Spirit's work in that century is the ecumenical engagement of the Roman Catholic Church with fellow Christians across the world. England has a peculiar religious history, and we sometimes need to be reminded that 49.5% of the world's Christians are Roman Catholics. That made all the greater a privilege for our Enabling Group to be present in Westminster Abbey for evensong during the visit of Pope Benedict XVI in September 2011. 'I come here to-day', said the Pope, 'as a pilgrim from Rome, to pray before the tomb of Saint Edward the Confessor and to join you in imploring the gift of Christian unity.' He reminded us that '...our commitment to Christian unity is born of nothing less than our faith in Christ'. In the midst of financial constraints and the inevitable disappointments of the ecumenical journey, those were words of encouragement and sustenance.

Our last Forum^{iv} rode the wave of Fr Timothy Radcliffe's vision of a changing church for a changing world. It left us with some signposts for 2009-12:

- to continue our support and encouragement of local and intermediate ecumenism
- to improve our communications

- to encourage more joint action by church leaders at every level
- to encourage inclusion in the life of CTE

Intermediate ecumenism

We have taken seriously the instruction to support intermediate and local ecumenism. England presents us with a varied palate of ecumenical activity. There are areas where it flourishes, where new and exciting partnerships are being forged between churches and other agencies in their service of the community. We have noticed some interesting trends.

Firstly, in some places the ecumenical family is growing, and a bigger tent is being created so that more partners from the black majority, Pentecostal and community churches can be welcomed. That is most obvious in metropolitan and urban conurbations like south London and Birmingham. New partnerships are being created, and new possibilities therefore come about. That is a joy, and it means that some of the traditional goals of ecumenism are being re-assessed. The long term intent that the church become one as Christ prays that it should is supplemented by work together along the way, either in community action like food banks or in evangelistic opportunities like *More Than Gold*.^v

Secondly, traditional ecumenism, when supported by leaders and people, still has a sinewy strength, and the power to surprise and create new things. So, we have rejoiced that the churches of Cumbria have taken a step further than most in their pilgrimage by designating the whole county as an ecumenical county, with a Declaration of Intent signed by the leaders of the Church of England, Methodist and United Reformed Church to work together wherever possible.^{vi}

Third, we have noticed that the role expected of County Officers is changing in some places. There is a shift from looking inwards towards the structures of the church to facing the world in mission, engagement and social responsibility together.

Those trends came through clearly in a major piece of work over the past three years, *A review of intermediate ecumenical life in England* (published in August 2011).^{vii} There is, we discovered, no one pattern. What matters is that, with its church leaders, each body should decide what its purpose is and seek to fulfil that calling.

Intermediate ecumenism is in places a fragile ecology, and we have continued to support it through training, conferences and consultations, as well as the encouragement and nurture of some of the people concerned. It achieves a remarkable amount from very little investment.

Inclusiveness

The 2009 Forum^{viii} was our most inclusive yet, and we were encouraged to make CTE yet more inclusive still. The most obvious response to that has been in the broadening of our membership over the last three years. There are now (35) churches or councils of churches in membership.^{ix} We believe that together we truly reflect something of the astonishing diversity of Christian life and witness in England. We are delighted that we now have an Orthodox President, and we continue to work towards the extension of the Presidency to include a President from the Pentecostal family of churches.

Within our own structures we are striving to ensure that as many voices as possible are heard, and the increasing diversity of the Enabling Group helps achieve that. The first responsibility of an umbrella body like ours is to ensure that the voices of all our members are heard, and not just the loudest or largest (not necessarily the same!). That requires work and vigilance at every meeting, but slowly and patiently we are making progress - not as quickly as we might like, but progress nonetheless. It is (of course) the churches who send representatives to us.

That is particularly difficult for an umbrella organisation like CTE which depends heavily on those whom the churches send to our meetings. However, the creation of a Search Committee within our own governance structures of the Enabling Group and the Trustees is helping us to address questions of balance.

Communications

No organisation can ever perfect the art of communication, and we are always striving to improve our performance in cost effective ways. We are in the business of making connections and of enabling the churches, agencies and bodies in association with whom we work to network with each other. That is why we invest a great deal of time and energy in personal contact and bringing people into relationship with each other. Relationships are the raw material of the ecumenical movement.

We also invest a great deal of time and energy in our web-site, which is being completely overhauled. We have over 5000 page views per day. Our resources are limited - we have one staff member assigned to this for one day a week. However, progress has been good and the feedback encouraging. We also maintain a number of e-bulletins - *CTe-news*,^x a MECA bulletin^{xi} and *Evangelism UK*^{xii} - as well as acting as a conduit for information to help churches work together from a wide range of networks, especially around the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Weekend and the 2012 Games.

Staff have made significant contributions to their specialist areas of work - Joe Aldred co-edited *The black church in the twenty-first century* (DLT 2011),^{xiii} Jim Currin published *Sharing faith the Jesus way* (BRF 2011),^{xiv} and Celia Blackden *Friendship and exchange with people of other faiths* (Grove Books 2011).^{xv} Other staff members have contributed to learned journals in their own research areas.

However, the heart of our communications strategy is the belief that people matter, and that we exist to enable others to work more effectively and efficiently for the unity of the church. That is why our web-site is essentially a working tool for those who are engaged in that work nationally, regionally and locally.

More joint action

The more inclusive we become, the more complicated joint action becomes. All churches have different authority structures, and brokering joint statements on public issues is a task fraught with pitfalls. That is why much of our work in this area happens behind the scenes and unseen. Most people would be genuinely surprised at the amount of co-operation that there actually is between churches - it happens, for example, in strategies about new housing, in chaplaincy work with hospitals and prisons, and in responses to events - the

Olympics has provided an object lesson is how the most diverse groups can work together for a common end.

We contribute to all of those areas, and stimulate joint action wherever we can. However, if we are to do that effectively, we also need to recognise when making statements or courting a public profile is counterproductive. We remain grateful to our Presidents for their sensitivity and guidance in these areas, and for their willingness to make public statements when it is appropriate.

Unity is, in the end, not about instruments, structural architecture, or money. It is about recognising the likeness of Jesus in each other and wanting to grow together in fellowship, service and mission for unity, as Pope Benedict reminded us, is born of nothing less than our faith in Christ. As we grow into Christ, we grow in relationship with each other, and the more we grow together, the more we see Christ in each other, and the more painful our separation from each other becomes.

We exist for no other reason than to enable the churches of England to grow together until separation becomes invisible, and there is '...no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.' (Gal 3:28)

We have been deeply grateful to Peter Whittaker for his guidance of the Board as Convenor during the past eight years, and Forum will have a chance to bid him farewell. We are delighted to welcome the Rt Revd Christopher Foster, the Anglican Bishop of Portsmouth, as his successor.

David Cornick
September 2012

This paper is available on 'Forum 2012' @ www.cte.org.uk (v120926)

ⁱ The CTE Forum is a national conference at The Hayes, Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

ⁱⁱ Churches Together in Britain and Ireland www.ctbi.org.uk

ⁱⁱⁱ www.edinburgh2010.org

^{iv} http://cte.churchinsight.com/Groups/86973/Churches_Together_in/CTE/Forum_2009/Forum_2009.aspx

^v www.morethangold.org.uk

^{vi} <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/pdfs/Declaration%2027%20November%202011.pdf>

^{vii}

http://cte.churchinsight.com/Articles/284383/Churches_Together_in/News_Events/News/Archive_news_for/Intermedia_te_Body_Review.aspx

^{viii} http://cte.churchinsight.com/Groups/86973/Churches_Together_in/CTE/Forum_2009/Forum_2009.aspx

^{ix} <http://www.cte.org.uk/Publisher/Article.aspx?ID=147646>

^x <http://cte.churchinsight.com/Group/Group.aspx?ID=44168>

^{xi}

http://cte.churchinsight.com/Groups/42999/Churches_Together_in/Working_Together/Minority_Ethnic_Christian/Mi nority_Ethnic_Christian.aspx

^{xii} <http://www.evangelismuk.typepad.com/>

^{xiii} <http://www.darton-longman-todd.co.uk/books/9780232527926/Black-Church-in-the-21st-Century>

^{xiv} <http://www.brfonline.org.uk/9781841018621/>

^{xv} http://www.grovebooks.co.uk/cart.php?target=product&product_id=17423