



VIEWS

FROM THE PEWS

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Lent '86 and
local ecumenism

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Judy Turner-Smith

Acknowledgements

All quotations extracted from individual questionnaires, group reports and letters have been used anonymously. The locations from which they came are only given if they were known and provided the persons could not be identified. Regions were used if no other source was apparent. A few smaller villages have been identified as towns or under counties to prevent any danger of identification.

The publishers are grateful for permission to use the acknowledged quotations.

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CONTENTS

Preface	v
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PART ONE · LENT '86

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Chapter 1 What was it for?	1
Chapter 2 What happened?	5

WHAT'S COME OUT OF IT?

Chapter 3 What people thought	10
Chapter 4 What people said	30
Chapter 5 What can we hear?	41

APPENDICES

I List of Churches	45
II Scottish figures	47
III Welsh figures	49
IV Radio Stations	51

PART TWO · LOCAL ECUMENISM

LOCAL ECUMENISM IN ENGLAND

Chapter 1 Unity	53
Chapter 2 Impatience	57
Chapter 3 The nature of the church	60
Chapter 4 What is the church for?	66
Chapter 5 Other matters arising from the survey	69
Chapter 6 Summing up	74

THE ECUMENICAL SCENE IN WALES	75
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A SCOTTISH CONTRIBUTION	82
-------------------------	----

FOR FURTHER READING AND DISCUSSION	88
------------------------------------	----

PREFACE

At Lambeth Palace on the 7th May 1985 the leaders of thirty-two Churches in England, Scotland and Wales met and agreed to launch a three-year Inter-Church Process of prayer, reflection and debate together on the nature and purpose of the Church in the light of its mission.

They called this *Not Strangers But Pilgrims*, and decided that the first year should include a major process of consultation at the local level. "Instead of the hierarchies passing things down, this time we are trying it the proper way round – the local debate will be fed into the wider national reflection and discussion" (The Archbishop of Canterbury). This book is the result of that year's local debate, and it is published so that local people may know the full extent of their *Views from the Pews*, and so that their findings can be fed into the wider debate. The book falls into two distinct sections and is by different authors.

LENT '86

About one million people took part in a series of Lent discussions based on the book *What on Earth is the Church for?*, which was interpreted in many different ways through fifty-seven radio stations, cassettes and meetings. Most people were in the 60,000-70,000 groups held throughout England, Scotland and Wales. Many, but not all of these groups, afterwards sent in a report on their findings and in addition well over 100,000 people returned individual completed questionnaires.

Since then a trained group of people working in different parts of England, Scotland and Wales, has carefully read and processed all this material. Ten per cent of the questionnaires were then used by *Trumedia* in the Oxford Polytechnic Computer for statistical analysis (this is a quite sufficient sample to gauge the feelings of those who took part) and the rest of the material will also be available for further research.

However, it must be pointed out that the first section of this book is based on the views of the self selected group of people in England, Scotland and Wales who took part in *Lent '86*. **In no sense is it a survey of the views of all British people, or of all British churchgoers, though the invitation to take part in *Lent '86* went to every church and congregation.** But none the less it is the largest cross-section of views yet available and the voices of 100,000 people deserve to be listened to carefully.

The Churches are greatly indebted to the Lent '86 Committee, the radio stations, and especially the groups (many of whom continue to meet) as well as to the regional evaluators and to Judy Turner-Smith of Trumedia who has collated all this material and has written the report under this heading.

The whole task of analysing and evaluating the questionnaires and group reports has been completed in three months, but there is still much more work that can be done. We are very grateful to the Hockerill Educational Foundation and also the Jerusalem Trust for financing the research and the consultations involved in the *Lent '86* project and to the Manuscript Library of Nottingham University which now houses all the material from England. Research students and local church bodies who wish to carry out further research are encouraged to do so and should contact the Librarian at Nottingham University. Material relating to Scotland is at Scottish Churches House and for Wales at the Swansea offices of the Council of Churches for Wales.

LOCAL ECUMENISM

In conjunction with Lent '86 there has also been the first full survey of local ecumenism in England. Over the past fifty years, first in Councils of Churches, and then through Local Ecumenical Projects and their Sponsoring Bodies, there has been a steady growth of structures which bring together individuals and Churches within local ecumenical groupings. Many see these as the first fruits of the unity being prayed and worked for.

During the first part of 1986 a survey of the 600 Councils of Churches, 44 County Sponsoring Bodies and 450 Local Ecumenical Projects in England has been carried out. This shows what is happening in many parts of the country, and also offers a number of models for future co-operation. The encouraging number of these responses have been worked over by a group of assessors and their work has been written up by the Rev. Hugh Cross (Ecumenical Officer for England). There are also separate accounts of the ecumenical scene in Wales and Scotland by the Rev. Noel Davies (General Secretary of the Council of Churches for Wales), and Canon Kenyon Wright (General Secretary of the Scottish Churches' Council).

Together these reports of *Lent '86* and *Local Ecumenism* show a lively scene with some variety, but a great deal of common experience, enthusiasm and concern. It is offered to the Churches as one contribution to the Inter-Church Process for consideration together with *Reflections*:

how Churches see their life and mission and *Observations: perspectives on the Church from Britain and abroad.*

These three books will form the basis for the 1987 national Conferences, at Nottingham, Bangor and St. Andrews, and they in their turn will prepare for the all Britain Conference at Swanwick in September 1987.

At all levels and in all places we pray for a renewal of the Churches' mission and unity.

*Lord God, we thank you
For calling us into the company
Of those who trust in Christ
And seek to obey His will.
May your Spirit guide and strengthen us
In mission and service to your world;
And may we be strangers no longer
But pilgrims together on the way to your
Kingdom. Amen.*

Canon Derek Palmer
Organising Secretary Lent '86

PART ONE · LENT '86

Judy M. Turner-Smith

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Chapter 1. What Was It For?

This first section is a report written as a result of what was known as *Lent '86*, the general shorthand title for a project which was taken up by churchgoers all over the country. It involved more than a million people. How did this come about?

In 1985, a three-year process of consultation between and within the Christian Churches of most denominations in England, Scotland and Wales was launched. This process is called *Not Strangers But Pilgrims*, a title that gives us a clue as to what it is all about, for those who were responsible for it are hoping that the different Churches might draw a bit closer to each other and discover that they are not actually strangers to one another at all but pilgrims travelling the same road. Hopefully, they can then become pilgrims together.

This was formally described as a process of "prayer, reflection and debate on the nature and purpose of the Church in the light of its mission". In other words, church leaders think that God may have something to say to Christians in Britain about their task in the years ahead.

One of the traditional ways in which Christians believe they can hear God is to listen to other Christians. In the past, as far as the institutions of the Church are concerned, this has meant church leaders coming together. This time a conscious decision was made to consult the ordinary lay person as well, not just those who are active in church affairs but those in the pew who do not usually serve the Church in any other formal way. This happened fairly near the beginning of the three-year process so that whatever people said could be taken into consideration by church leaders in the remaining phases. So *Lent '86* was born, a project to consult ordinary people.

A Lent '86 Committee was formed and a study course, primarily for groups, was proposed which could be put out on local radio. For this a special resource book was written by Rev. Canon Martin Reardon called, *What on Earth is the Church for?* It was thought that the radio

stations, which usually put out Lent programmes, might be interested in the project. In the end fifty-seven stations, both BBC and Independent (ILR), took part and the book became a best seller! More than 120,000 copies were sold.

Stations taking up the project, being autonomous, devised their own programmes, and treatments and presentations varied considerably. The Lent '86 Organising Secretary, Rev. Canon Derek Palmer, was heard referring to "57 varieties". Most ran the course for five weeks during Lent until Holy Week. Some had a different speaker for each week, some had panels, some included drama and 'vox-pop', some followed up with phone-ins, etc.

A cassette course recorded centrally (referred to hereafter as Central Cassette Course) was also made available for those whose local radio station was not carrying the course or who might have difficulty receiving their local radio. Some 5,000 of these packs were sold.

All the programmes were derived from the same book, which had a main theme for each of the five weeks:

1. Why Believe in God? – and go to church.
2. What Did Jesus Come For?
3. Why Did the Church Begin?
4. Why Different Churches?
5. What Now?

Both BBC and ITV carried three extra teletext pages each day especially assigned to *Lent '86*, though the coverage they provided was in complementary roles: Ceefax put out background material and questions, and Oracle supplied feedback using extracts from the radio stations' broadcasts and 'phone-ins.

Up and down the country, discussion groups followed this *Lent '86* course. Some groups were already in existence: many more were formed specially to take part, usually drawn from more than one local church.

To handle the feedback from this project, *Trumedia Study Oxford Ltd* (formerly the Television Research Unit of Oxford Polytechnic), which had previously carried out research into religious programmes and audience response, was invited to undertake the task. An individual questionnaire was made available free of copyright, on which responses were to be marked. A copy was bound in the back of the resource book, including the local editions put out by some radio stations and other bodies. It was also available as a separate pamphlet, of which some 250,000 copies were sold.

The questionnaire, although designed to go out with the course, was meant to stand on its own. The questions, while not being unrelated to the book, were not derived from the text at all, nor were they meant to be used for discussion purposes. Rather, the questions were meant to uncover how far those responding were affected by traditional denominational divisions and how they relate to each other and to society. It was felt that this kind of information would be particularly interesting and useful for those involved in the rest of the three-year process of consultation, especially if it revealed whether the historical Churches are moving any closer together.

In Session One, the object was to see how much people were concerned with worship and the religious and how much with social issues and community needs. In Session Two, the questions were to test a theory that churchgoers do not on the whole understand atonement theory and that theology is jargon to the average occupant of the pew. In Session Three, the three-fold objective was to see how closely people related to buildings, if there was a denominational bias in the use and interpretation of the word 'church', and how far the word was seen in terms of the people of God. In Session Four, some traditional sayings of denominations were repeated to establish whether respondents would reply along denominational lines. Session Five was devised, not so much to uncover anything as to stimulate action, or at least prod people into considering action, on a united front.

Of course, this project by its very nature, was bringing people together from different churches and encouraging them to share together in spite of denominational legacies. If there had been no questionnaires returned at all, this much at least would have been achieved.

Many group leaders also sent in written reports, and the findings from analysing these are included in this report. It is fairly certain that 60,000-70,000 groups took part, and that the average number in a group was ten. By no means all people returned their individual questionnaires. In addition, there were many other individuals who listened. There are no firm figures for these, but it is likely that more than a million people took part and that the opinions of more than just those who sent in their questionnaires have been gathered through the group reports.

It must be pointed out that the results from *Lent '86*, however valuable in themselves, cannot be said to represent the views of churchgoers in Britain, nor even of all those who were involved in the project. **What we do have is a fair idea of the views of those who responded.** That was, however, some 100,000 ordinary people, the largest cross-section yet available; so their voice deserves to be heard.

Technical details are not included here. They are recorded in the full research report, copies of which are available for reference and further research purposes from the British Council of Churches.

It is not really accurate to say that all the results are found in this book. Here are only those which can be charted. There are also results which cannot be charted, some of which are not even known to the organisers, but may be revealed in heaven.

"To be honest I didn't expect to be excited by Lent '86. Ecumenically, I seem to be at a dangerous age. I have lived through one too many Weeks of Prayer for Christian Unity, followed by 51 weeks assuming the prayers will not be answered ... But Lent '86 worked as I never expected it to ... The key in our town, and I hope in most towns, was the ecumenical house groups ... for me, there was more real Christian unity to be found in them than in anything else we have done ... For me, the sitting room filled with (old) Reformed friends and (new) Anglican and Catholic friends had become, by the last week in Lent, an end in itself. It was here, as Christians who had occasionally worshipped in each other's churches but had never spoken of our own faith to each other, that we became one Church. I have tasted the fruit of unity; and it was not a cathedral full of peopling singing 'One Church, one faith, one Lord' with the Salvation Army Band, but a roomful of mixed Christians who each needed the help of the others in understanding their faith, and living it ... A kindly and infinitely wise father-in-God will probably take me one side ... and point out that ... my Lent house-group still has A Long Way to Go: So be it – so long as the ten of us can go that way together, and not separated anew ..."

(Extracts from an Editorial entitled "We must go on meeting like this" by Norman Hart which appeared in *Reform* (May 1986); quoted here with permission.)

Chapter 2. What Happened?

What happened to the replies?

In order to process the large numbers of questionnaires and group reports expected; a team of carefully-selected voluntary regional evaluators was set up. They all had a day's special training for their task. Most regional evaluators in turn recruited a few local people to help them with the more routine tasks. This system worked well, though inevitably some were more heavily loaded than others. Scotland and Wales had their own national evaluators (essential for the returns in Welsh!), and the army, who mainly used the Cassette Course, supplied a chaplain. Group reports for Scotland and Wales went to their own national Councils of Churches.

The deadline for returns was April 12th. Those listening to their local radio station were asked to send theirs to them. Those using the Central Cassette Course or taking part without listening to broadcasts returned theirs direct to the Organiser's office. The radio stations were able to look at responses from their own audiences until the end of April. They then had to be passed on to the appropriate regional evaluator.

Extraordinary numbers of responses poured into the Organiser's office. In the end, these had to be sent down for processing to the regions they had come from, though this had not been the original plan. On receiving the materials, questionnaires, group leaders' reports and letters, every piece of paper was carefully labelled with a unique identification code.

There were so many questionnaires involved, it was decided that only one-tenth of those received by the processing deadline could be coded up and used for analysis by computer for the statistical results. This sample number would be more than sufficient to show trends in the responses. The remainder were scanned in order that anything important should not be missed, especially the answer to the very last (open-ended) question. All are available for further research and analysis. Every one of the group reports was read and assessed in the regions before being sent on to Trumedia for further processing.

Who replied?

The total number of replies received has been more than 100,000 (and

three months after Easter, they are still coming in!). The bulk of these, over 80,000, were in the hands of the regional evaluators by the end of the first week of May when the tenth – all that was needed for the statistical side – was drawn off. So the sample actually analysed by computer was 8,007. A few of these were spoiled, so that the eventual usable sample size was 7,905.

Nearly all those replying were regular churchgoers. More than two-thirds were women or over forty-six years of age. The non-waged (housewives and the retired) provided more than half the replies. Nearly a quarter of the rest were white-collar workers and teachers. Less than 7% were clergy. Nearly six out of every ten returns were from the Church of England, more than three out of every ten were from one of the other four mainstream Churches.

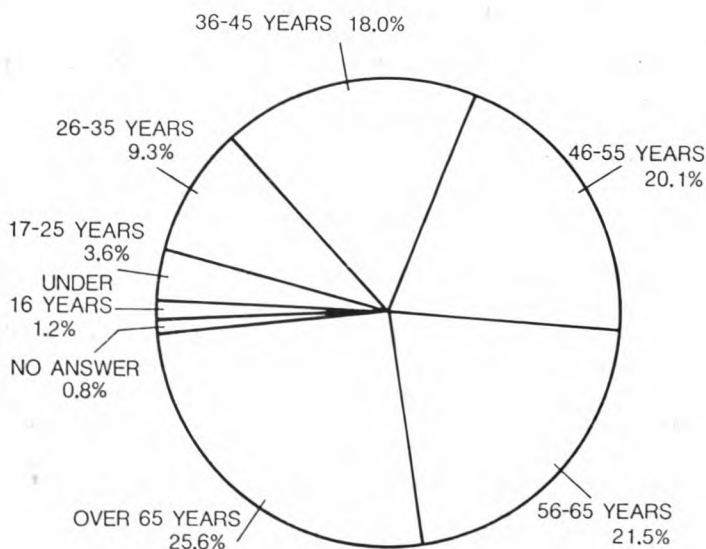


Figure 1.
Sample in age groupings

There is a similar distribution of ages occurring in each denomination except that the over 65s are not so strongly represented among Roman Catholics.

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Valid Percentage of sample</i>	
Females	69	<i>The result given here excludes the invalid cases, 45 people who failed to indicate their gender and 5 whose answers were not clear!</i>
Males	31	

The ratio of females to males was approximately 2:1 in each denomination with the exception of the Roman Catholics where the ratio is 2.6:1.

Occupation

There was a certain reluctance to ask respondents their occupation as it was felt to be too intrusive and in Christian circles social class should be irrelevant. It was pointed out, however, that such information is necessary as it affects the interpretation of the findings and no serious survey of this kind would be undertaken without it. The question merely requested occupation and the regional evaluators classified these into groupings, which are listed in order of the frequency of occurrence; they do in fact correspond to recognised socio-economic classifications, but they are not given in the usual order as it implies a value judgement on people's worth to which the Church does not subscribe.

<i>Occupation grouping</i>	<i>Percentage of sample</i>
Housewives	30.2
White-collar workers and teachers	24.9
Retired and unemployed	22.0
Doctors, lecturers, clergy and other professions, except teachers	10.0
Semi-skilled	3.1
Students	2.5
Directors and similar managerial level	1.6
Unskilled	1.2
No answer	4.3
Illegible	0.1

This breakdown of the sample according to occupation rather confirms the popular image of the Church as a middle-class institution. It should in all fairness be pointed out, however, that those occupations other than middle-class are not normally the folk attending house-group study and discussion meetings: other groups are therefore the

least likely to be represented in the sample. In addition to which, the semi-skilled and unskilled do not generally readily respond to written questionnaires. We cannot therefore categorically conclude that very few people in these categories took part in *Lent '86*; we can only say that comparatively few people in these categories responded on individual questionnaires.

The comparatively small number of students is not surprising in the light of the analysis of the sample by age: this represents nearly half those indicating their age as 25 years or under. The large group of housewives is compatible with the very large percentage of females responding.

There was no separate computer code for clergy as an occupation. A random sample was therefore extracted proportionate to the size of the preliminary response across the regions, and clergy were found to form 6.9% of this mini-sample. This suggests that most of the professional people responding were in fact clergy. It also confirms that the response to *Lent '86* has indeed fulfilled the hopes of the organisers in that it has succeeded in tapping the grass roots, and this report should be the voice of the average person in the pew (who responded).

Church attendance

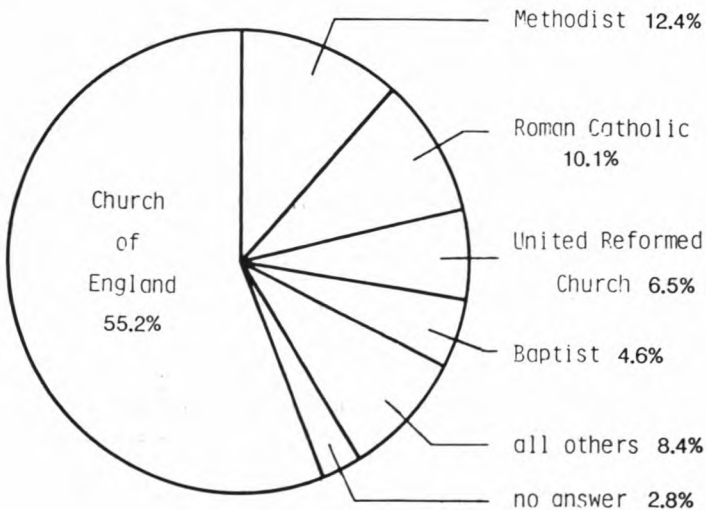
It was anticipated that most respondents would be regular churchgoers. In answer to the question 'Do you go to church?' nearly 88% said that they went at least once a week and fewer than one in twenty said once a month or less.

<i>Church Attendance</i>	<i>Percentage in sample</i>
Once or more a week	87.8
Two or three times a month	8.6
Once a month	1.5
Two or three times a year	0.7
Once a year	0.0
Special occasions	0.4
Not at all	0.2
No answer	0.7

Denominational affiliation

Anticipating denominational bias in answer to some questions, it was

important to establish a breakdown of the sample according to denominational affiliation. A small minority responding objected to the question on the grounds that they were Christians first and that it was time labels were abandoned; indeed, some labelled themselves "Ecumenical" (some of these were members in Local Ecumenical Projects). A full list of denominations is found in the Appendix I. Beside these are marked the actual numbers found in the sample; this frequency number should be multiplied by ten to yield the probable total numbers of those whose responses were received by the deadline.



Those indicating 'Christian' or 'Ecumenical' are included in 'All others'.

Figure 2.
Sample in denominational groupings

WHAT'S COME OUT OF IT?

Chapter 3. What People Thought (Questionnaire results)

Answers are often influenced by things like a person's background. Possible bias in the Lent '86 questionnaire responses reflecting people's age, gender or denomination was only looked for where results indicated rather less than an overwhelming majority opinion on a particular question. A similar spread of ages among the denominations took part except Roman Catholics over 65 years old were in short supply, and there were slightly more younger people from the Baptists (proportionately) than there were from other denominations involved. The numbers of men and women replying from all the denominations were similar too. This means the sample was homogeneous. So where a bias was found, the conclusion that it is because of some background factor (age, gender, denominational tradition) is likely to be correct and not because of any quirks in the composition of this particular sample.

People taking part in surveys show a tendency to want to please. So when a large negative vote occurs, feelings are strong on that point.

It is interesting to compare the 'no answer' rates for the structured questions (the open-ended questions are so different they cannot be compared in this way). Mean average rates were worked out for each session:

Session 1	3.8%	Session 4	8.1%
Session 2	5.4%	Session 5	5.9%
Session 3	1.5%		

Was the highest result at Session 4 because people found it harder than other sessions, or less interesting, or were they more ambivalent about the questions? It is unlikely they were just flagging as the rate dropped again for Session 5. The lower rate for Session 1 may represent enthusiasm at the start of the course. The very low rate at Session 3 relates to the different nature of question there as well as a different type of answer mechanism.

There were those who refused 'on principle' to fill in any questionnaire. There were others who refused because they could not see any value in that part of the exercise. Others found it too complex.

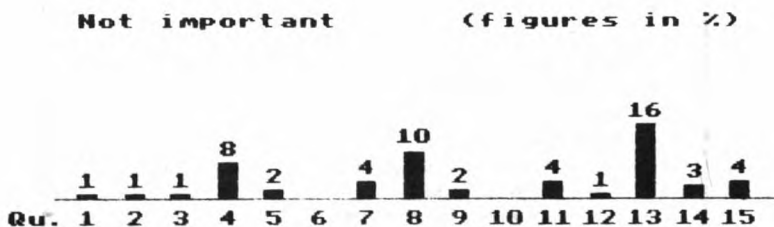
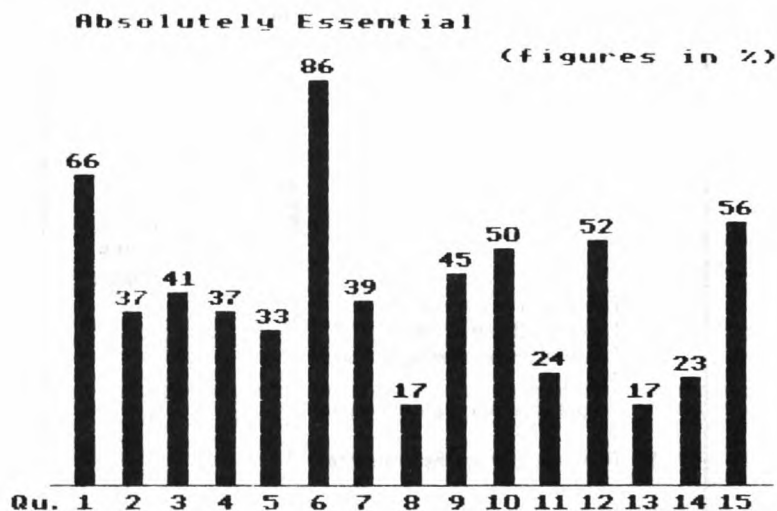
Some people, while complaining that they were unable to see its purpose, or that it did not seem to relate to the book very well, or that it was not much use in discussion, nevertheless filled it in saying they hoped it would be useful. This negative reaction is interesting in the light of the purpose of the questionnaire.

QUESTIONS TO SESSION I

Here are some of the answers people give to the question, 'What on earth is the church for?' Add any answers of your own on line 16 if you wish. Place a tick opposite each answer in the column which most nearly expresses what you think.

	ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
A.					
1. To preach the gospel to all	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. To serve those in need	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. To build up fellowship among Christians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. To prepare people for eternal life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. To speak out against injustice and evil	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. To worship God	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. To work for the conversion of individuals to Christ	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. To heal the sick	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. To teach the faith to Christians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. To help people live and witness as Christians in their everyday life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. To work for a better society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. To be a sign of God's reconciling love for the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. To satisfy people's religious instincts and needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. To comfort and support those who feel inadequate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. To administer the sacraments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16.					
B. Are any of the answers listed above things which you think the church should not be doing?					<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, which?					<input type="checkbox"/>
					<input type="checkbox"/>

There were four options for questions 1-15. The bar charts here show the two extremes. In some cases the majority response lay in between. Where this is so, it is stated. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.



Question 2, the majority indicated 'Very Important' (40%); bias was looked for but not found.

Question 3, the option 'Very Important' drew quite a high response too (38.5%); there was a slight denominational trend, e.g., the answer 'Absolutely Essential' was indicated by 49% of Baptists, 48% of Methodists, 45% of URC, 43% of All Others, 41% of C. of E. and 35% of Roman Catholics.

Question 4, both ‘Very Important’ and ‘Important’ attracted just over 24% each; there is a definite trend with age: almost twice as many over 65s answered ‘Absolutely Essential’ as under 26s. There were a small number of objections to this question on the grounds that eternal life is what the Christian has now and is not only something attainable after death. So this phrase would have been more acceptable if expressed as “To awake people to eternal life”.

Question 5, the majority vote was at ‘Important’ (24.4%), just beating ‘Very Important’ (24.2%). Roman Catholics were strongly represented in those answering ‘Absolutely Essential’, URC and All Others less strongly, whereas Methodists, Baptists and C. of E. were more likely to indicate ‘Very Important’. The current of concern on this kind of subject was always present but is not the priority with the majority, as group reports confirmed. See also the results for question 11 in this Session and Session 5 Pt A question 13 and question 14.

Question 7, a substantial majority (63%) of Baptists answered ‘Absolutely Essential’ which was very much higher than the rest: All others 50%, Methodists 47%, Roman Catholics 41%, URC 38%, C. of E. 37%. A few objected to the wording as they felt it sounded like head-hunting.

Question 8, the majority vote was for ‘Important’ (36.6%). Responses showed a firm age-related trend; e.g., the over 65s were twice as likely to mark ‘Absolutely Essential’ as ‘Very Important’, whereas among the under 26s the response was the other way round. Respondents were generally not so sure about healing being a part of what the church is for. This is reflected in the comparatively high ‘no answer’ score (6.6%).

Question 11, the majority (34.2%) indicated ‘Very Important’, with the next category just over 1% less. There is a slight denominational bias: Methodists and Roman Catholics indicated ‘Absolutely Essential’ more often than the rest; Baptists less often than the rest.

Question 13, most people voted ‘Important’ (36.9%). No significant bias detectable. Respondents sometimes complained that the word “instincts” was ambiguous and the question attracted the highest negative vote in this Session. See also question B below and compare with results of Session 5 question 1.

Question 14, the majority chose ‘Important’ (35.2%), ‘Very Important’ being 0.4% less. There is a regular trend of responses with age, the rating of this phrase becoming more important with each age band.

The open-ended question 16, 86.7% did not add anything of their own. Of those who did enter a sentence here, 645 people (8% of the total sample of nearly 8,000) came up with an expression which really

reiterated one of the phrases already given in the preceding list (questions 1-15). The most frequently indicated by this reinforcing vote are:

10. *To help people live and witness as Christians in their everyday life* (126 people, 1.6%) and
12. *To be a sign of God's reconciling love for the world* (106 people, 1.3%).

These two phrases were also given the highest 'Absolutely Essential' ratings after the two phrases concerned with worship (qu. 1 and 6).

The other expressions being reiterated at line 16 after phrases 10 and 12 drew much lower numbers of votes but they included the two phrases concerned with worship, and another phrase which also drew a substantial 'Absolutely Essential' rating:

3. *To build up fellowship among Christians* (69 people, 0.9%)
1. *To preach the gospel to all* (59 people, 0.7%)
6. *To worship God* (59 people, 0.7%)

Of the remaining phrases, none accumulated more than 50 of these reinforcing votes (less than 50 is considered to be an unreliable quantity for statistics so no further comments can be made about these low-vote phrases).

Another 388 people (4.9%) came up with thoughts of some originality (i.e., not reiterating phrases already in the list) about what the church is for. Many of these coincided. Examples of these are given below.

"To continue the work of Jesus on earth" "To be a channel for the Holy Spirit"
"To be a first approximation to the kingdom" "To be a refuge in time of trouble"
"To minister to the dying and the bereaved" "To minister to the whole man and woman"
"To (help us) become a more complete person" "To counsel" "To live charity (sic)"
"To be the focal point of the community" "To meet as a community"
"To love one another" "To pray and listen to God" "To teach the necessity of listening as well as speaking to God"
"To teach us to know and love God better" "To help people find their place in God's plan" "To solemnize marriage".

Against question B, only 360 people (4.7%) made entries against this question; a few gave more than one answer. The most frequently recorded indications occurred against the following phrases:

13. *To satisfy people's religious needs and instincts* (140 votes, 1.8%)
8. *To heal the sick* (83 votes, 0.4%)
11. *To work for a better society* (64 votes, 0.8%).

This corresponds with the pattern already seen in the bar charts relating to these phrases above, emphasized by the ratings seen against 'Not Important'. With regard to phrase 13, Baptists and All Others indicated this phrase as what the church should not be doing three times more frequently than any of the other denominations. Interestingly, there was a slightly higher tendency for men to make an entry in response to question B than for women (ratio 1.6:1).

QUESTIONS TO SESSION 2

Here are some of the phrases people have used to explain what God has achieved for us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

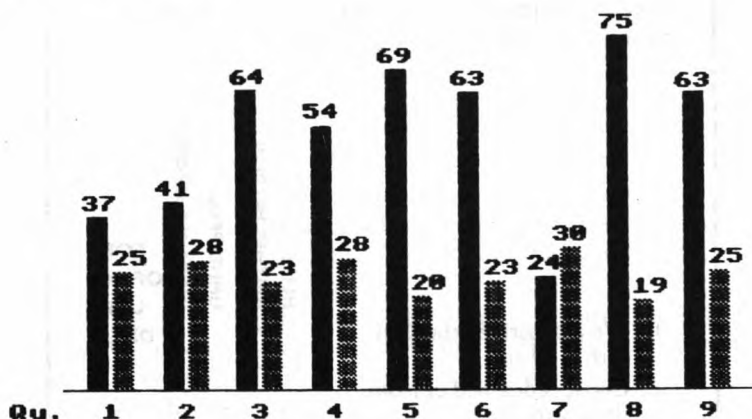
A space is left on Line 10 for you to add any other phrase of your own.

Place a tick opposite each phrase in the column which most nearly expresses what you think.

[illegible]

There were five options for questions 1-9. The bar charts here show the first two and the last two.

■ = Very Helpful (figures in %)
 ▨ = Helpful



≡ = Incomprehensible
 ▩ = Unhelpful (figures in %)



Question 1, there was a firm trend with age: the over 45s were 25% more likely to indicate 'Helpful' or 'Very Helpful' than the 45s and under. It may be regarded as surprising that a clause of such importance, Luther's cornerstone, received a negative vote of more than 17%, which increases to 24% when the high 'no answer' rate is included.

Question 2, there was a denominational bias: URC and Methodists were less likely to find this expression 'Helpful' or 'Very Helpful' than the rest; Baptists were more likely to indicate these responses than the rest. Another comparatively high negative vote and also a high 'no answer' response (7%). A number of people, however, added at line 10 (their own sentence), "Jesus has saved me from my sins".

Question 4, the 'no answer' rate was comparatively high at 6.1%.

Question 7, there was a slight but regular bias with age: the younger the respondent the more likely they were to indicate 'Unhelpful' or 'Incomprehensible'. Some people just did not know what to make of this clause. The actual wording is not dissimilar to the preceding question, but the patterns of response are quite different. 'Neither Helpful nor Unhelpful' scored 21.4% and the 'no answer' rate was high at 8.7%.

Question 8, the highest positive vote in this Session occurred here (along with the lowest negative and 'no answer' rates too).

At question 9, some people added that Jesus has brought humanity hope for the present too.

This Session as a whole provoked much hesitation and even some hostility. Several people said something like: "The questionnaire – very frustrating! How can one express the mystery of Christ in tick boxes!!" [Southern England]. A few said the Truth could not be rated this way.

Many expressed deep disappointment with the language and complained that this was hardly making the Christian faith relevant. Others said that they would not use this theological vocabulary but they did agree with the meaning. The following quotation (actually from a group report) typifies the reaction of disturbingly large numbers:

"A serious difficulty that emerged in the second session was the incomprehensibility, in the view of some members, of the five "key words" used in the text for that session. ("Are they trying to turn us off?"). Such words, used frequently by preachers and evangelists to explain what God did for mankind in Christ, how and why we can turn to Him for forgiveness and salvation, were thought to be 'not part of the common language' and 'hard to use'. Because of this 'blockage' it was evident that some of the most important teachings of basic Christian doctrine were appreciated, at best, only very imperfectly. Whilst the idea of Christ as 'teacher, pattern and example' to our way of life was well understood, our need for 'redemption' and 'justification' was by no means clear, so that opinions about what Christ was doing on the Cross were vague. If this pattern is at all widespread amongst church members, a situation of urgent need is revealed." (Harrogate).

It is interesting to reflect on such remarks in the light of the deliberate framework for this Session (see Chapter 2). It is regrettable that some clergy are known to have discouraged and even prevented their people from filling in the questionnaire on the grounds that it was too difficult for them because of the theological language.

At question 10, some 1,640 people (20.7%) added their own sentence. Some of these (978, 12.3%) really reiterated the sentences in questions 1-9. Those most frequently reiterated in this way were as follows:

3. *We have been reconciled to God through Christ* (288, 3.6%)
8. *Christ is our teacher, pattern and example* (226, 2.9%)
5. *Jesus saved us through his sacrifice on the cross* (139, 1.8%)
9. *Christ has brought humanity hope for the future* (101, 1.3%)
6. *Christ has won the victory over evil and death* (80, 1%)
2. *Christ redeemed us from slavery to sin* (52, 0.7%).

All of these except the last gained ratings in the 'Very Helpful' column of 62% or more. Other sentences were also reiterated, but by less than 50 people.

Some 631 people (8%) entered an original sentence deemed valid in theological terms but which did not really reiterate qu. 1-9. Many of these coincided with each other. Some of the more common examples follow. The first two quotations exemplify the most frequently occurring.

"Jesus came to show us what God is like" "Jesus shows the human face of God"
"God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" *"To show us God loves us"* *"Christ shows us that God loves each person as they are"* *"God has shown us that love has no limits"* *"To teach us complete love and trust in God"* *"Jesus was God's experience of humanity"* *"Jesus shares all of life's experiences with us"*
"Jesus acts as mediator between God and man" *"Christ is a bridge between us and God"* *"He has made a relationship with God possible"* *"Christ is with us always"* *"Christ is my friend"* *"Christ is a friend to all mankind"* *"To seek and to save the lost"* *"Christ's resurrection gives each of us new hope"* *"To give us a philosophy and purpose in life and life after death"* *"Jesus came to give us strength"*
"I can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens me" *"Christ shows me my worth as a person"* *"Healing and wholeness"* *"Christ became as we are to make us to be as He is"* *"Through Christ we have life in all its fullness"* *"Christ has made us new people"* *"Hope for life everlasting"* *"We can have eternal life through Christ"* *"Jesus taught us to forgive our enemies"* *"To teach us to live with each other in peace".*

QUESTIONS TO SESSION 3

Listed below are several senses in which the word **CHURCH** is used today.

Add, at Line 10, any other use of the word you wish.

Please circle up to five of the numbers on the right of the definitions which most nearly express what you take the word 'church' to mean.

A.

- | | | FOR
OFFICE
USE
ONLY |
|--|----|--|
| 1. The building where Christians worship | 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. The local congregation (assembly) of Christians | 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The diocese, district or area | 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The national grouping of Christians | 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The Christian household or family | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. The international grouping of Christians | 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. The body of all Christians, past, present and to come | 7 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Clergy and Ministers – as distinct from the laity | 8 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The Christian denomination | 9 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. | 10 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

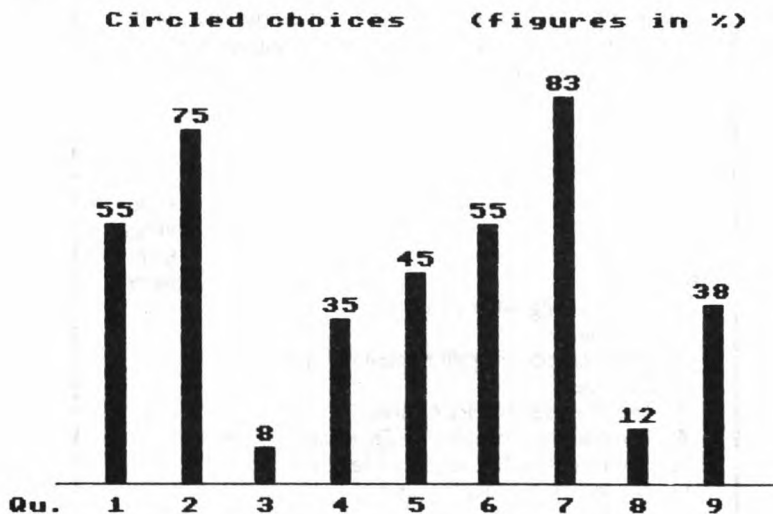
B.

Which definition is the most important to you?

Write its number in the box ☐

Only the circled responses are shown in the following bar chart. People were not being asked to make judgements as to the relative importance of the statements.

The 'no answer' rate for this Session was very low at 1.5% which in itself can be seen as a comment.



Question 1, both denomination-related and gender-related trends are discernible. At one end of the scale, 3 out of 5 of the C. of E. and the Methodists circled this response whereas, at the other end of the scale, only 2 out of 5 Baptists did so. The majority, 59% of women, circled it but only 47% of men did so.

Question 3, the highest negative vote in this Session occurred here.

Question 5, the over 65s were more likely to circle this response than the other age groups.

In question 6, no bias is detectable.

In question 7, the highest positive vote in this Session occurred here. This definition also received the highest vote in question B below.

Question 9, the Roman Catholics were more likely to circle this response (5 out of every 10) than any of the others (4 out of 10).

The open-ended question 10, the majority of respondents (84.3%) did

not enter anything here. Of those who did, most entries (654, 8.2% of the sample) used an expression indicating the use of the word 'church' for a spiritual grouping, e.g., "the body of Christ" (very frequent), "all those who follow Jesus", "all Christians everywhere", "the church militant and triumphant". These expressions were very similar to the phrase already used in Session 3 which attracted the highest number of positive indications (see above, 83.5%, 6,604 positive indications):

7. *The body of all Christians, past, present and to come*

The most popular kind of sentence after that category were those expressing some kind of grouping of Christians, from a fellowship group to all the Christians in a particular locality and larger gatherings (184, 2.4%), e.g., "The Fellowship", "Ecumenical group of local Christians".

Some 83 (1%) used an expression which indicated a denominational institution, a national grouping or something of a similar nature or scale. And some 81 people (1%) entered a sentence which indicated a building of some sort, e.g., "The regular meeting place of believers", "House of prayer".

179 people (2.3%) entered a sentence which fell outside all these previous categories, was valid in Christian terms, and also comprehensible and legible(!). Many of these coincided with each other. Here are some examples:

"Fellow Christians of all denominations" "All Christian believers" "All people in whom Jesus is living as Lord" "Any assembly of worshipping believers" "Any number of Christians together" "Truly committed Christians" "The people of God" "The family of God" "The Bride of Christ" "The Servant of God" "The catholic, apostolic church" "An Institution" "Church leaders" "Christ's hands and feet".

Question B, 1,247 people (15.8%) declined to indicate which definition was the most important to them. In a small number of cases where people had entered their own definition as the most important and this reiterated qu. 1-9 (in 249 cases it did so), these are included in the scores presented below.

1. The building where Christians worship – 3.5% (275)
2. The local congregation (assembly) of Christians – 12.7% (1,000)
3. The diocese, district or area – 0.4% (33)
4. The national grouping of Christians – 3.1% (249)
5. The Christian household or family – 7.9% (626)
6. The international grouping of Christians – 4.9% (389)
7. The body of all Christians, past, present and to come – 47.6% (3,763)
8. Clergy and Ministers – as distinct from laity – 0.4% (28)
9. The Christian denomination – 2.6% (208)

QUESTIONS TO SESSION 4

Listed below are a number of features found in the churches.

Add any further features you wish at Line 13.

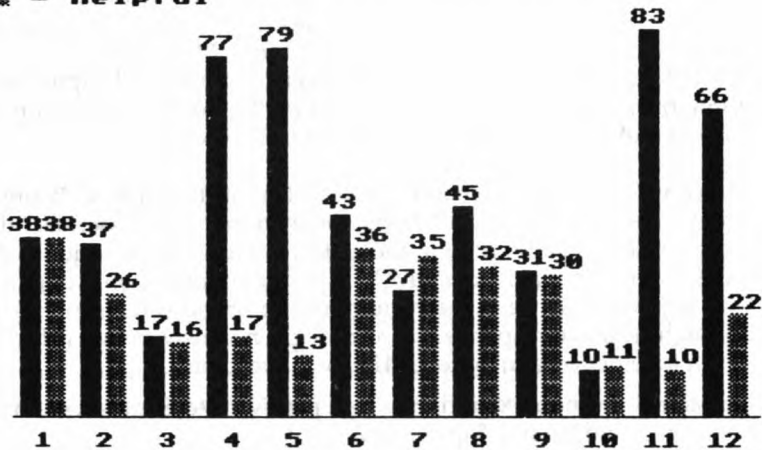
Place a tick opposite each phrase which most nearly expresses how you would classify them.

[illegible]

There were 5 options in Session 4. The 'Optional' category is not shown on the bar charts.

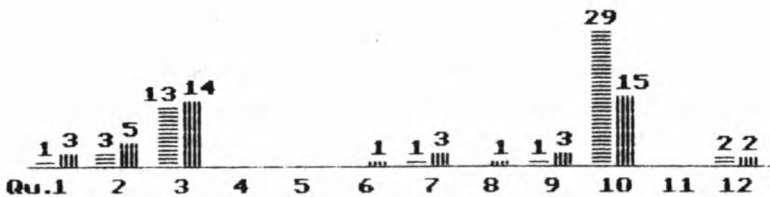
■ = Essential (figures in %)

▨ = Helpful



≡ = Unacceptable (figures in %)

||| = Unhelpful



Question 1, both age-related and denomination-related trends were found. The majority of people of 46 years and over said this feature was 'Essential' those of 45 years and under said it was 'Helpful'. By denomination, the overwhelming majority of Roman Catholics and nearly half the C. of E. said it was 'Essential'; the majority opinion of the rest indicated 'Helpful'. A high 'no answer' rate (9.3%) indicates feelings of some hesitation over this question.

Question 2, trends from all three background factors were found. With regard to age, this feature became steadily more important as age increased to the point where most of the over 65s rated it as 'Essential'. With regard to gender, whereas men were equally divided between voting 'Essential' or 'Helpful', almost twice as many women voted for 'Essential' as for 'Helpful'. With regard to denomination, the vast majority (88%) of Roman Catholics indicated 'Essential' or 'Helpful', the majority (72%) of Anglicans did the same; Methodists, URC and All Others are equally divided between 'Essential', 'Helpful' and 'Optional'; Baptists, in contrast, indicated 'Optional', 'Unhelpful' or 'Unacceptable'. Total 'Optional' votes were 22.9%.

Question 3, only denomination-related bias was found here. Baptists and a sub-group of the All Others voted strongly for 'Essential'; the most popular opinion among the rest, including the majority of All Others, was 'Optional' (total 24.9%). The pattern of response does not bear any resemblance to the pattern for the previous question. Note the high negative response and very high 'no answer' rate (14.6%), which together account for over 41% of the response.

Question 4, again this topic drew a high positive vote. See also Session 1 question 6, and Session 5 question 2.

Question 5, this question did not specify what 'regular' meant. Denominations vary with regard to the time interval between administrations of this Sacrament. Cf. with Session 5 question 3.

Question 6, denomination-related bias was found. Those voting 'Essential' were 60% of Baptists, 56% of Methodists, 55% of All Others, 53% of URC, 45% of Roman Catholics, 42% of C. of E. (43% C. of E. voted 'Helpful'). A high 'no answer' rate here (8.5%) indicates feelings of ambivalence in people; cf. Session 5 question 9.

Question 7, there was a slight age bias: with the under 26s 'Essential' was the most popular, whereas the majority opinion in all other age groups was 'Helpful'. There was also a firm denominational trend: Baptists regarded this as 'Essential'; Methodists, URC and All Others were evenly distributed between 'Essential' and 'Helpful'; the C. of E. and the Roman Catholics regarded it as 'Helpful'.

Several people said they realised it was important but felt inadequate to engage in it, did not have the right words, and similar remarks. The high 'no response' rate (9.3%) correlates with this feeling. The 'Optional' category was also comparatively high (25.4%). See also the preceding question and Session 5 question 9.

Question 8, age-related and denomination-related trends were found. A very strong and regular trend with age occurred, illustrated by the fact that the over 65s were seven times as likely to vote 'Essential' as 'Optional', whereas the under 26s were equally likely to vote 'Optional' as 'Essential'. The vast majority of Roman Catholics voted 'Essential' (72%), the majority of C. of E. also voted 'Essential' (55%); in all the rest the largest vote was for 'Helpful'. A high 'no response' rate (8.2%).

Question 9, there was a firm and regular trend with age, illustrated by the fact that among the under 26s the ratio of those voting 'Essential' to those voting 'Optional' was 1 to every 2, whereas among the over 65s, it was the opposite way round: 2 to every 1 – in other words, this feature became steadily more important with increasing age. The third highest 'no response' rate in this Session (11.8%).

Question 10, the younger age groups appear to be more tolerant (by the examination of those voting 'Optional' and 'Unacceptable'). With regard to denominations, on the same basis of this tolerance guide, the C. of E. is the most tolerant and the Baptists the least tolerant. 67% of Roman Catholics regarded this feature as 'Essential'; the largest group voting 'Essential' after that was 18% (C. of E.); all the rest were below 7%.

Perhaps not surprisingly, here occurred the highest negative vote in this Session and the highest 'no response' rate too (12.1%). The score against 'Optional' was also high (22.4%). Nevertheless, there were indications that 'authority' is acceptable provided it is not presented as 'infallible'. This theme recurred in group reports (see Chapter 4).

Question 12, some respondents objected to the word 'all' in this feature.

The open-ended question 13, 1,310 people (16.5%) entered additional features which they found in the churches (legible entries, 20 were illegible). 84 (1%) respondents offered more than one feature. Many of the phrases coincided with each other. Here are some examples:

"Fellowship" "Fellowship in Christ" "Fellowship with others" "Small fellowship groups" "Friendship and social activities" "A warm welcome" "An open welcome to all" "Sunday school for children" "Preaching and exposition of the Word of God" "Teaching" "Discipleship classes, i.e., teaching in Christian living" "Pastoral care" "The ministry of healing" "Spiritual gifts" "Charismatic Renewal" "Open prayer times" "Collective prayer" "Using lay people" "The priesthood of all believers" "A communion of saints" "Work for peace and justice".

A few people added features which they encountered in the churches which they found unacceptable, e.g., "division" "Ritual" "male domination" "bigotry".

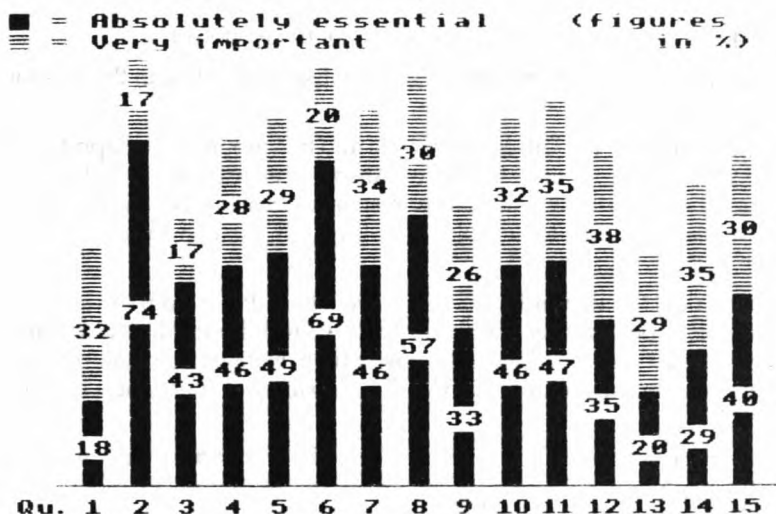
QUESTIONS TO SESSION 5

Here are some things which some people say the local church ought to be doing.

Place a tick opposite each statement, in the column which most nearly expresses what you believe.

	ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL	VERY IMPORTANT	IMPORTANT	NOT IMPORTANT	SHOULD NOT BE DONE	FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
A.						
1. Meeting the religious needs of those only loosely attached to the church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Regular services of worship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. A weekly Eucharist	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Prayers for the church	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Intercession for the world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Teaching the Faith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Helping people to pray	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Helping Christians to relate faith to daily life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Evangelism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Helping Christians to bear witness to Christ	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Encouraging Christians to know and support one another	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Serving those in particular need in the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Speaking out on matters of social and political justice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Giving guidance on the spiritual and ethical issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Working for reconciliation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B. List things you think the Churches in your neighbourhood should be doing together.						<input type="checkbox"/>
.....						<input type="checkbox"/>
.....						<input type="checkbox"/>
.....						<input type="checkbox"/>

There were five options in Session 5. Only the top two are represented in the bar chart.



Question 1, age- and denomination-related trends were discernible. Those of 46 years and over considered this aspect more important than younger respondents. Methodists and URCs considered it to be noticeably more important than the rest. The highest 'no answer' rate in the Session occurs here (10%), indicating some hesitation on this question, but the negative vote is not that high ('Not Important' 5.7%, 'Should Not Be Done' 1.5%).

Question 2, the pattern already seen on this subject in this questionnaire is repeated here.

Question 3, age- and denomination-related trends were found. People in younger age groups, particularly those under 26 years, were more likely to indicate the 'Not Important' category and less likely to indicate 'Absolutely Essential' than the other age groups. There is also a very strong denomination-related bias with the Roman Catholics, followed by C. of E., considering it to be 'Absolutely Essential' while all the rest give the highest vote to 'Not Important' (14%, quite high). The 'no

answer' rate is comparatively high at 7.6%. The time interval is specified in this question; cf. Session 4 question 5 where it is not.

Question 6, the highest 'Absolutely Essential' vote after the worship question. This is a stronger result than at Session 1 qu. 9.

In question 7, 'Important' drew 13.3% of the response.

Question 8, the third highest 'Absolutely Essential' rating in this Session occurs here.

Question 9, the responses seem to fall into two groups with Baptists and All Others voting more firmly for 'Absolutely Essential' than the rest. 'Important' also drew a substantial response (25.3%). Some ambivalence is indicated on this topic again with the high 'no answer' rate (9.7%). See also questions 6 and 7 in Session 4 above.

Question 13, a denominational bias was found: the Roman Catholics rate this aspect noticeably higher than the rest; Methodists also rate it higher than average, the C. of E. lower than average. The majority vote here was for 'Important' (33.5%). The 'no answer' rate was a bit high at 6.2%.

Question 14, 'Important' scored 27.1%. The 'no answer' rate was a bit high at 6.6%.

Question 15, 'Important' scored 21.2%. The 'no answer' rate was again a bit high at 6.7%.

The open-ended question B, some 1,720 people in the sample (21.8%) responded by adding at least one phrase here. Most people offered several. Many of these overlapped with the phrases already listed in questions 1-15 except the emphasis was on jointly undertaken activities. The following list reproduces these phrases with the number of endorsing votes afterwards which have been derived by the examination of the comments offered at B.

1. Meeting the needs of those only loosely attached to the church	129
2. Regular services of worship	1,720
3. A weekly Eucharist	199
4. Prayers for the church	482
5. Intercession for the world	354
6. Teaching the Faith	291
7. Helping people to pray	426
8. Helping Christians to relate faith to daily life	238
9. Evangelism	595
10. Helping Christians to bear witness to Christ	403
11. Encouraging Christians to know and support one another	1,572

12. Serving those in particular need in the community	1,438
13. Speaking out on matters of social and political justice	243
14. Giving guidance on the spiritual and ethical issues	135
15. Working for reconciliation	692

These results cannot meaningfully be presented as normal percentages of the sample as those replying supplied several phrases each.

There were another 1,704 subjects in the comments which did not overlap with the phrases in 1-15, though very many coincided with each other. Here are several examples of these, which give some idea of the range of the comments.

"Everything that conscience permits" "Everything" "Anything and everything"
"Pulpit exchanges – frequent" "Visiting each others' churches and having meetings with each other" "Listening to each other" "Inter-church fellowship groups"
"Housegroups to learn more of each other" "Bible study in united groups" "Joint discussion groups" "Church history study groups" "Studying other Faiths together"
"Joint meetings to hear speakers" "Praise meetings" "Socialising" "Social gatherings to get to know each other" "Summer camps/treks/garden parties"
"Joint outings" "Pilgrimages together" "Singing" "Choirs and music" "United open air meetings"
"United Good Friday processions" "Having visiting priests from overseas and clergy Third World placements" "Working together to increase racial tolerance"
"Praying" "Praying together for peace" "Working for unity of all Christians" "Showing God's love, not arguing" "All helping the young to understand and respect the different Churches for eventual reconciliation"
"Joint youth work" "Visiting the sick" "Luncheon clubs for the lonely" "Running drop-in centre for the unemployed, teenagers, elderly" "Working together bringing care to all in the community"
"Caring and counselling service" "Joint activities helping the local community" "Combining in supporting local projects and causes"
"Working together on community projects" "Housing associations" "Campaign against drugs" "Studying and responding to world needs" "Pooling resources"
"Sharing buildings/halls, etc." "Close excess buildings to come together and use finances better".

Chapter 4. What People Said (Group Reports)

In addition to the thousands of individual questionnaires which poured in, hundreds of group leaders reports were also received. Some regions produced more than others, even allowing for differing populations, and by no means all groups returned them. One Regional Evaluator recorded, "9300 people (in Sussex and Surrey) sent in questionnaires, yet only 220 or so group reports came in." Nevertheless, reports were received from every kind of parish, and it is strongly suspected that the views of an even larger number of people have been tapped in the group reports than by questionnaire as by no means all group members completed theirs.

The great majority expressed appreciation of Martin Reardon's book, though inevitably there were some criticisms from a small number. A few found it too long, others found it too short; some thought it was too hard, others that it was too trivial. A fair number of individuals made comments like 'Many thanks for this; for the first time I think I know what I believe.' One clergyman said it was the best Lenten discussion book he had seen in twenty years, and another remarked it had given him enough sermon topics for many months to come. It is now by request being translated into three other languages.

Some reports concentrated on the content and presentation of their local radio station. These programmes received a more mixed reception than the book upon which they were loosely based but then the "57 varieties" put out contained different flavours. The one remark which seemed to appear in every report from those using the Central Cassette Course was that the music was not appreciated!

Other reports concentrated on summarising the discussion which had taken place in their group over the weeks. Many included their conclusions, their recommendations and even their action. Quite apart from any other results which may or may not emerge as a result of the perusal of the written feedback from *Lent '86*, it is clear that the course has already had some important results. In many places, ecumenical groups were specially formed for the course, some excited by the fact that it involved local radio, others because they knew this was happening all over the country. Collectively, there was a high appreciation of the value of meeting in groups and many people have written that their group has decided to continue meeting.

A remarkable unanimity has emerged from the mass of written material. While it cannot be held that the group reports were truly representative in strict research terms, the unanimity suggests that this

voice from the grass roots is authentic and demands the most serious attention.

Perhaps the other striking thing is that the major concerns expressed in the group reports endorsed the findings from the individual questionnaires, particularly as expressed in the unstructured responses to the very last question. This merely serves to underline the point that this grass-roots voice deserves to be heard. Moreover, it is important to point out that these comments derive from a wide spread of denominations. Indeed, among the group reports are one or two denominations which did not appear in the questionnaire sample, e.g., the Free Church of England (from Essex).

Overall there was a widespread range of remarks but the contentious subjects upon which one might have expected volumes of comment were conspicuous by only their rare mention, e.g., the ordination of women, the Bishop of Durham, "*Humanae Vitae*", etc. Also rare have been expressions of heresy, bigotry or blinkered narrow-mindedness.

Throughout the range of remarks, one theme common to virtually all the group reports occurred. This was the deep longing, even demand, for unity. It is clearly being felt as a spiritual call by thousands of lay people. This was so strong that it informs all the five sub-headings under which the reports have been summarized. There was strong condemnation that it was the clergy, especially the denominational hierarchies, who have prevented unity from taking place, being concerned to protect vested interests. Whether or not this is actually so, this was certainly what the lay feeling as reflected in these reports declared. Much frustration, anger and even pain amongst the laity was expressed in this area.

"Why won't the hierarchy and the Church authorities allow us to do more together?"
[Royal Navy group]

"At the national level, the church hierarchies need to realise that their reasons for delaying unity are not widely shared at grass-roots level." [West Germany]

"It was felt strongly that the laity are far more ready to accept unity which would probably be much further ahead except for church leaders of all denominations and the so-called cleverness of the theologians." [Guernsey]

"Although denominational differences probably serve a useful purpose in adding colour and variety to the Church, they should not be seen as an insurmountable barrier to greater unified activity. The view was expressed that theologians may get in the way of Christian unity and may be doing the 'church corporate' a disservice. True unity would probably arise from the grass roots rather than be imposed from above." [Basingstoke]

"I will deal with one point only which seemed to be at the forefront of our minds: there was a sense in which we felt that there is a readiness in lay people to accept other denominations 'warts and all' – a readiness to work together, share worship, fellowship and many other things – a readiness to care and minister to each other and the community at large. Somehow, however, there is a sense of inhibition which it is felt stems from the ordained ministry, which hinders with dogma and doctrines, which, though important, sometimes seem to cloud the issues, that God loves all mankind and that we are commanded to love one another and our neighbours as ourselves. Tongue in cheek, one member suggested that a Lent course should be organised entitled, 'What on earth are the ordained ministers for?'" [Sheffield]

The other main theme repeated in many of the reports was the surprise and delight group members experienced on discovering that there was not as much difference between the denominational traditions as they had thought. Knowledge of each other's traditions, they said, often proved not only inadequate but even grossly inaccurate, having been based on rumour rather than fact. For many, this discovery of more accurate information and common ground, quite apart from any other result from the Lent '86 course, was encouraging, even liberating.

"Our Group found the experience of sharing our faith and understanding of God very enlightening and stimulating." [Newbury]

"Over the weeks we discovered to our surprise that we were not divided principally by different beliefs but by Church Order." [Southern England]

"... we were delighted to find we have so much in common ..." [New Milton]

"Ignorance and misapprehension of each other's traditions emerged. Correct information and misunderstandings (were) resolved, so deep respect for each other's traditions and friendships were born." [South West]

Against this general background, five major themes were found to be concerning people: joint worship including the Eucharist, joint meetings of every kind, joint evangelism, sharing resources, and joint action in the community.

Joint worship

Given that worship is one area where respondents feel confident and positive, it is perhaps not surprising that it emerged as the foremost pre-occupation in the group reports. There was a call for united worship as a normal event, mostly regularly and at frequent intervals, though some desired this only occasionally such as on festivals. There was also a desire to visit each others' normal services, not just one-off visits but on a regular basis to facilitate understanding of different forms of worship

and each others' traditions. Some group members said that, even before Lent was over, they had begun to visit each others' churches. Together with these comments were similar ones approaching the same concern from a different angle – not that members of congregations should move around but that the clergy and ministers should do so in order that flocks, other than their own, might come to know them. In other words, 'exchange of preacher' should be the norm, not just something confined to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This would assist mutual understanding.

"We thought we ought to be able to accept our different customs and traditions even though we did not particularly enjoy certain forms of worship. But we did recognise that it is the attitude of our hearts which counts and not the way in which we conduct our services." [Cambridgeshire]

Such remarks apply to worship in general. There were also more specific concerns such as services being designed to appeal to the young, or to be more intelligible to those less familiar with church services, and for the whole atmosphere to be more open, warm and welcoming for the outsider. Such specific remarks apply, however, whether the worship under consideration is united or not.

The most frequent specific concern does not, however, fall into the same category. This is the strong desire for joint Holy Communion or Eucharist. Sometimes it may have been true that those contributing such remarks were unaware of the difficulties which have prevented this in the past, but a remarkable number were aware, sometimes more acutely after group discussion, of the difficulties both from differing understandings of the Sacrament itself and from less than mutual recognition of ministries. This does not seem to have inhibited the desire for joint Communion but rather to have increased the pain at its absence. It did not seem appropriate to respondents that such an expression of oneness in Christ should have to wait until formal unity might be achieved.

This concern was usually expressed in terms of united celebrations but also found expression in terms of the Sacrament being available to all Christian believers regardless of denomination, what some call an open table, which need not, of course, occur only in joint situations.

"We think that Christ must wring his hands in anguish at the way we have allowed the Eucharist, Mass or Communion to become such a divisive exercise – who can and who can't; who may and who must. Shame on us. It was a simple meal with a simple, straightforward message for all generations and men have made it impossible for all His sheep to share." [East Midlands]

These expressions of concern about joint worship and united Communion emphasise the overall, deep-seated longing for unity.

This unity was not unqualified, however, and repeatedly people used a phrase such as 'unity not uniformity', 'unity in diversity', 'diversity without division'. There was a clear recognition that, in matters of worship in particular, people are individuals with differing needs and tastes. Much freedom and variation is therefore both necessary and desirable adequately to meet those needs. Diversity, it was felt, is good.

"Strength in diverse traditions. Use the diversity to enrich ourselves and reach the many different needs of those not yet come to know the Lord." [Telford]

"Everyone in the group thought that the differences between our churches were blown up out of all proportion and diversity is a good thing, in fact it was likened to a bunch of mixed flowers." [Southern England]

Some groups discovered that they included people who had already changed denominations, usually for reasons of convenience on moving house, getting married, etc., and not from conviction. Some proclaimed that they all worshipped in churches which suited them and did not worry about their church's theology.

Other less frequently expressed comments also occurred from which two persistent but less major requests appeared: desire for joint healing services and 'Songs of Praise' type services or other music-based worship. The benefits of combining for musical celebrations are several and obvious. They are less obvious in the area of healing services, though this may indicate the context in which they have been experienced hitherto, and would certainly militate against the very real danger of identifying this ministry with particular individuals rather than as the ministry of Christ himself. The results on this subject from the individual questionnaires, however, indicate a certain hesitation about healing in the Church as a whole. All these activities were envisaged as constituting, or taking place within, public worship.

"Any Christian should be allowed to enter any church and worship, according to the tenets of that church, without restriction." [Sussex]

It was also recognised that the patterns for the way forward which are appropriate in town situations do not usually apply in small village situations where the only formal place of worship is the Anglican parish church:

"How [do we] make village Anglican churches into a place where all denominations feel they can be accepted into worship without becoming Anglicans? This obviously raises national issues as well as local ones." [Suffolk]

Joint meetings

Apart from public worship, there was an enormous demand for joint

meetings of every kind, from vast gatherings through local assemblies to small discussion groups. Some single events were envisaged ("an open-air meeting/a cathedral get-together, a mega-event for all Lent '86-ers"); indeed, some such have already taken place, like the day at Worth Abbey in April when 6,000 people from groups in Sussex and Surrey came together. Other events were clearly intended to be of an on-going nature. By the time the course ended, many people were committed to continuing in their housegroups and many more were clamouring to go on sharing together, being very keen to continue the enriching adventure of exploring each others' traditions, anxious not to lose the momentum and feeling they had only just begun. There were even requests for study of church history to enlarge inter-denominational understanding, for a whole course to cover more fully 'Why Different Churches?', Chapter 4 of Martin Reardon's book.

"Would it be possible to do a follow up of Chapter 4 of the book – studying together the historical facts about the evangelisation of the country, the Reformation, and the origins of later and earlier splits in what most of us believe to be the one Body of Christ?" [Southern England]

Others also thought church leaders might benefit from this, as one Canon remarked,

"Chapter 4 'Why Different Churches?' should become compulsory reading for every newly-appointed ecumenical officer nationwide." [Kent]

A few were not interested in this side.

"Reasons for division did not interest the group – it is the here and now Christianity which counts." [West Midlands]

"It emerges that we are much more concerned with what happens at our differing services rather than the history or theology behind them." [Emsworth]

Also requested were ecumenical meetings for teaching and study of other kinds including Bible study, discussion and prayer (for each other, for local needs, for world issues, for renewal, etc.), and for more teaching and guidance in prayer itself. Several expressed that there was a concern for more Bible reading but people needed help to understand it. Also the "churchy" vocabulary – theological terminology, ecclesiastical and liturgical – caused problems; some of it should be jettisoned anyway, they said, but whatever is used, it needs to be explained.

"It was agreed unanimously that there is still a great deal of archaic (and therefore unintelligible) terminology used in Churches. This can be found in matters pertaining to Doctrine as well as in hymns, psalms, etc. It was strongly recommended that such language should be replaced by contemporary words and the modern idiom." [Royston]

"Language of worship not good for people today in describing Jesus. ... Justifier,

they suggested, meant nothing. Redeemer – very little except to older people who remembered pawn shops ...” [Yorkshire]

Such remarks were numerous and squarely endorsed the opinions already strongly expressed in the questionnaires. The need and thirst for much more teaching generally from church leaders was expressed through some of these comments. Some had discovered things about their own tradition as well as those of others; and some had uncovered or became embarrassingly aware of holes and blanks in knowledge of the Faith generally as well as of their own tradition. One group enquired, “Where was God when Jesus died on the Cross?”; and a group leader reported that, at the end of the five weeks, one person said, “By the way, what is justification by faith?” Comments like these were not unusual.

“We feel the church should give more Christian teaching. If parents don’t know what they believe, how can they answer their children’s questions?” [North East]

“More education please!! Church presents material in far too difficult a fashion and wonders why people aren’t interested.” [South Midlands]

“Great need for education of lay people in Bible study and Christian Doctrine.” [Dursley]

“I was particularly asked to mention that they felt a need for deeper teaching by the church in matters of the faith and its practical application to daily living.” [Catford]

There was also a much lighter side in this demand for joint meetings. People recognised part of the ecumenical problem has been that different congregations have not mixed socially. (Indeed, members of the same congregation often did not socialize.) Again a whole range of suggestions were made to rectify this including coffee mornings, picnics, socials and outings; the last embraced suggestions for small and large groups right up to pilgrimages for several congregations together. The purpose of all of these was again to facilitate the process of coming to know one another as people and as Christians, to foster friendships, promote mutual respect and understanding, and to dispel ignorance and suspicion. One woman said,

“I got to know more people well on this course than in several years’ attendance at church services.” [Brockham]

Joint evangelism

Suggestions under this heading once more included a wide range from the occasional joint acts of witness, such as Good Friday or Palm Sunday processions, to more regularly occurring patterns, such as activities of outreach undertaken together.

"Great need for unity in mission to the local community." [Dursley]

"We feel more is needed in the witness of united mission and Christian education."
[Merseyside]

Included was everything from wardens in streets welcoming newcomers on behalf of all the churches in the neighbourhood to door-to-door visiting in pairs to present the Good News. For this kind of activity undertaken by individual lay people, however, the need was quite often expressed for help and training to give people the confidence, the right approach and the right words.

*"[We] need help in evangelising – not in old ways but making friends with people, gaining their trust, and when they bring up the subject of belief, share with them what it means to us in a gentle, unhurried way. **We** must respond to **them**."*
[South West]

More formal activities were also envisaged, such as special evangelistic services, open air events and missions of various kinds. And some saw a potential in local radio here.

The actual word 'evangelism' seems to be disliked by some as having a hard-sell connotation and other expressions were used in preference such as 'outreach', 'sharing the Faith' and 'sharing about Jesus'. This probably underlies the muted priority given to evangelism as such on the individual questionnaires. This area in particular was one where people sometimes said they realized, as the course progressed, that it was important not so much to ensure a future for the Church (hence some of its rejection if it is just to encourage people into church pews) but because it is part of what the Church is for, to spread and share the love of God.

"Mission is too often seen as being for the filling of the pews rather than the forwarding of God's kingdom." [Netherlands]

Such remarks make abundantly clear that evangelism is for God and not to gain recruits for particular denominations. It makes no sense therefore for such activity to be undertaken unless it is united.

Indeed it was felt it would be good if all church notice boards were reworded to say 'Christian Church' with the denominational description relegated to a sub-title or removed altogether. A good number said they would ask for it to be done. People said this could be easily executed and it is a simple but much-needed sign of unity in today's divided world, an act of witness in itself. Witness was the urgent reason for unity.

"Some members of the group felt that if Christians loved each other as much as they ought, it would become apparent to the unbelieving world. It was admitted, though, that this was already happening in places, and even the welcome given to strangers at the church door made an effect on people." [Northampton]

In this area of dealing with strangers, church language again came under criticism.

"[There was] a common frustration with Christian jargon and a willingness to search for new ways of communicating the 'old, old story'." [Norwich]

A few suggested that evangelism would take care of itself when they reflected,

"Many older ones did not attend church in their 20s." [Southern England]

"One participant suggested that the Church may be taking on itself too much of the blame for the unbelief and godlessness in society, and that, in any case, it should not seek to be attractive at any price: when necessary it had to make a stand for truth, even at the cost of being unpopular." [East Midlands]

While there may be truth in such remarks, they were not the majority opinion.

"The most important thing we can do locally is to spread the Christian faith both by example and by readiness to answer questions concerning our faith. We ought to be able to show that there is a relevance between our human situation today and the gospel message of Jesus." [North East]

"Let us do as much together as we can and learn from one another, not acting like politicians always squabbling and debunking, but together holding up Christ for all the world to see." [East Midlands]

"Everyone came to the end of the Lenten series with a greater awareness of the need of the Church to proclaim its mission. There was concern about the Church's lack of impact but no clear understanding of how to develop each individual's sense of mission in the face of today's social and political problems." [Loughborough]

"We should make more friends among non-Christians." [Sussex]

"Introduction of Cross or fish on doorpost of Christian houses to both bear witness and offer help." [Telford]

Sharing resources

Comments categorized under this heading tended to be of a more practical than spiritual nature. Sharing premises and eliminating redundant ones, pooling financial resources, joint youth work, Sunday Schools and other church-based meetings, (e.g., for women), sharing equipment, sharing leaders and clergy, common notice sheets, joint magazines and publicity.

"We should like to see a more positive sharing of Church resources in the area in which we live. In particular, we would advocate and support training and education of children and young people within the Church on an ecumenical basis. Much energy seems to be wasted in trying to run parallel organisations which could be united to better and more powerful effect and as a witness to the inherent unity of our faith." [Merseyside]

That last sentence epitomizes frequently occurring comments that much effort is duplicated under present structures. The general scene would be much better if mere liaison were improved. Clashing dates often entailed cooling of relationships and sometimes tensions for individuals wanting to support more than one event. It was suggested that clergy and other church leaders from all denominations should meet at least once a month to co-ordinate on dates and integrate activities.

"[We found] a willingness to improve communications with a view to better co-ordinated work and witness. Some practical suggestions will be discussed at the joint church prayer breakfast [attended by ministers/priests/elders/of the local churches]." [Norwich]

Some people advocated joint preparation classes for membership both for baptism and for confirmation, and even for marriage. Some recommended joining or forming a Local Ecumenical Project or Local Covenant. These two points seem to have come from people already experiencing these things, which is encouraging for others looking for a way towards unity.

A number of requests, unlikely to have originated from experience, were also made for joint training for ordination. This, it was felt, would mean that at least the clergy would understand one another and each others' traditions, and that this would go a long way to educating the Church as a whole to accept and appreciate denominations other than one's own.

"It is time for ... interdenominational training of clergy. [Also] train them in communication and evangelism." [South West]

Joint action

This subject occurred in many group reports with a wide variety of suggestions. There were two underlying assumptions behind the comments; first, that the Church is there to serve the local community (though not necessarily at the national level); and secondly, that it is wasting resources and effort and perhaps sacrificing both efficacy and efficiency if the different churches act separately where they could act together in a common locality or cause.

"CAFOD should not exist separately from Christian Aid." [Reading]

"There were several suggestions for co-ordination of community care through an ecumenical parish office, what one called a 'soul centre'." [Regional Evaluator, Sussex and Surrey]

"We decided to get to know our local community better." [Peterborough]

All kinds of subjects were suggested from crèche facilities for young

mothers, to lunch clubs for the elderly, from projects for the unemployed, to counselling services. Some were probably primarily for those connected with the local churches, for example, joint pastoral visiting and visiting of the sick. Others were for all and sundry without discrimination. Many were aimed at groups with obvious needs such as single parents and marriages under stress. Others were more concerned with general support for matters of local concern, mentioning various causes and events. Some mentioned that Christians should be playing their part in statutory and voluntary bodies and programmes. A few mentioned Christian responsibility at work, in industry, and in business and commerce.

"A contemporary alternative to the 'selling of possessions and giving to anyone who has need' might be the time and talents scheme." [South Woodham]

The common factor seems to have been the desire to be the body of Christ in the world or, to put it another way, to translate Faith into action.

"It was agreed that Social Action ought to follow from faith." [Leicester]

The same group focused on several specific issues and the reason for involvement was revealed in this remark:

"Unemployment was seen as a real need in which the Church should be involved. The Church needs to let people know they are important ..."

Personal ethical considerations in terms of individual moral codes and actions did not occur and the emphasis was upon the collective responsibility of the people of God.

"The Church is primarily to worship God as indicated in the 1st commandment; then to meet social needs of the times – 2nd commandment 'love thy neighbour as thyself'." [Kent]

There was also a minority but persistent concern about the lack of Christian standards and R. E. teaching in schools.

Two other topics occurred which did not refer to the local context: (i) a concern for world peace and/or nuclear disarmament; a minority stated that this is *the* priority for the Church at this point in history and that even the search for unity may only serve to distract Christians from this urgent task; (ii) a concern for the (so-called) Third World; some wanted to study the needs, others wanted to campaign and take action to meet those needs.

Both of these were unusual types of contribution in that they clearly involve political action, which is not a frequently occurring subject in the group reports, and the results from the individual questionnaires suggest that it is not very high on the agenda of most Christians.

Chapter 5. What Can We Hear? (Some Conclusions and Recommendations)

To draw together the mass of material received and make coherent sense of it has been a daunting undertaking, particularly in the short time span. It is therefore the more remarkable that the main points should emerge so clearly and facilitate the presentation of the recommendations. Despite the self-selected nature of the sample with all the recognized methodological objections which could be raised, this is still the largest amount of data collected which represents the views of ordinary Christian people in the mid-1980s.

What has become clear is that there is quite a strong demand for "Lent '87". As Andy Radford of Severn Sound put it,

"From a quick glance at some of the completed questionnaires that have been arriving by the hundred, the roar of the crowd is More! More! More! There is no doubt that both nationally and locally the series has been a tremendous success."

"We hope and pray that the exercise may be repeated." [Wandsworth]

While it was made clear to Radio Station Managers that *Lent '86* was a one-off project, it may be right in the light of this kind of demand from the public to explore possibilities for future years. Each area is being encouraged to run its own course in 1987 but already the possibility of another centrally-prepared course is being looked at for 1988 because of this response.

The findings from *Lent '86* have included some obvious and expected things, e.g., Believer's Baptism is more important to Baptists than others, older people prefer traditional patterns. Other things have been less expected, or at least, the vociferousness of the response about them has been.

As it has already been pointed out, this survey has succeeded in tapping the 'vox pop' sector of those responding as there are not many clergy in the sample. The grass-roots people have found a voice and the title, *Views from the Pews*, appears to be accurate. This is what ordinary people think the Church is for, what it should be doing and what it should be seen to be doing. The Church is actually perceived by the vast majority of respondents as *all* Christians together. It would seem both wise and right for the contents of this response to be considered seriously by Church leaders, and perhaps not just as part of the three-year *Not Strangers But Pilgrims* process but beyond the planned period of consultation.

There has been the discovery for vast numbers of participants that what they thought other denominations believe is not accurate and there is much common ground or at least similarity between them. To be different is not wrong. This has gone a long way to removing much prejudice and fostering mutual respect and understanding. It has also seen the beginning of a journey of mutual exploration so that differences are no longer to be feared but rather enjoyed. Now people can learn from one another. Diversity is enriching.

There is a strong impression that people are more flexible in their attitudes to other denominations than only ten years ago; this has to be recorded as an impression only as there is no earlier comparable study to which to refer. However, Ron Alldrige, of BBC Radio London, confirms such an impression when he wrote, just before Lent, "A Roman Catholic conference of lay people faced with the same kind of questions [about how much unity they want] recently, was found to be far more open and radical than its leaders would ever dare to be. This is not clergy or church swapping yet but a measure of acceptance to work and worship together."

The current of opinion for unity is overwhelmingly strong, with mutual recognition as a very minimum if full organic unity is to be delayed. A federation might be the most feasible way. Now is the time to become one. A single name would be possible but uniformity is definitely NOT wanted. In particular, the areas delineated in Chapter 4 need proper attention in order to proceed with the matters respondents suggest, even demand, should be done jointly:

- worship, including the Eucharist/Mass/Holy Communion
- meetings, especially for teaching and fellowship
- evangelism
- use of resources, especially youth work and liaison
- action in the community.

The unity current was strong in the last session of the individual questionnaire, especially the last open-ended question. It is even stronger in the group reports and it is clear that the demand goes further than mere co-operation. The response also seems to uncover that the priorities of the clergy and the laity do not coincide in matters of unity, and there is much pain, frustration and anger among the laity at the situation as it is. It has to be recorded that people think that if reconciliation cannot be achieved within the Church, then it cannot help others in the art of bridge-building nor set the kind of example which the love of Jesus makes imperative.

Those responding from experience of working out unity at the

grass-roots level in Local Ecumenical Projects, while not minimizing the cost of such undertakings (sacrifice is a frequent expression) and the sheer hard work involved, make encouraging noises. This suggests that the increase of Local Ecumenical Projects may well be a useful way forward.

There is a considerable thirst for more teaching so that ordinary people in the pew can learn more about other denominations, about their own denomination, about the Bible, its meaning and relevance, and about the Christian Faith (theology without the technical language). People know in their hearts that Christianity is relevant, but Jesus is hidden by the jargon. There was a lesser but considerable demand for teaching and study in prayer, and helping people to relate the Faith to daily life. It was felt that more courses like *Lent '86* might help meet this kind of need and more joint publications were advocated. This is an obvious and practicable point for action in the future.

Evangelism and social concerns, although they received comparatively low votes in the individual questionnaires, both received more emphasis in the group reports. It is therefore possible that their importance in people's opinions grew during the actual process of the course. Certainly, people were asking for help with evangelising or outreach, and seem to be afraid to share their faith.

These conclusions are used near the end of the video report on *Lent '86*, where they have been telescoped into the following captions:

GRASS-ROOTS FIND A VOICE
JESUS HIDDEN BY JARGON
AFRAID TO SHARE
ENJOYING OUR DIFFERENCES
TIME TO BECOME ONE

There have also been what might be called the uncharted results from the *Lent '86* exercise. Clifford Longley, religious affairs correspondent of *The Times*, was the first to draw attention to some of these: "Quite a few local radio chiefs are said to be scratching their heads as they contemplate piles of post, visible proof that the much-derided 'God-slot' is an amazing audience puller, given the right circumstances. Jammed switchboards told the same story ... Many stations reported that they had rarely been so swamped ..." *A religious revival on the air, The Times, April 18th, 1986.*

Also surprised were some of the clergy, discovering for the first time the potential of local radio. Other uncharted results are equally important: the ecumenical groups who refused to disband, barriers collapsed, prejudice dispelled, mutual respect born, friendships

made, plans brought before local church leaders, proposals and resolutions put to local Councils of Churches, and more. The long-term effects may be beyond measure. If the Spirit of God is, as many believe, behind all this, may that indeed be the case.

Let the last words be those of the participants. Here are some final thoughts and recommendations culled from the group reports. Again they are only a sample, and many more could have been quoted if space allowed. They are not in any ranking order.

"[We] desire publications to be ecumenical whenever possible." [Southern England]

"[We have] a willingness to make sacrifices and to compromise to achieve unity." [Dursley]

"Very many strands of thread can be woven together to make a piece of material, yet they constitute one whole. Can Christians too not be one whole though our strands differ? Are we not woven together through the love of Christ?" [North East]

"Our group found the experience of sharing our faith and understanding of God very enlightening and stimulating. We feel that the Churches should do all that they can to encourage this sort of sharing, and recommend their members to experience the regular acts of worship of other denominations." [Newbury]

"We have various proposals to make locally to further this [unity], ecumenical prayer and study groups being at the hub of future plans." [London]

"There is a need for a better educated Church membership on a theological rather than a denominational basis, and the next generation of Christians need to be brought up to a wider vision and a more outward-looking response to the Gospel." [Netherlands]

"In the principles of unity should be enshrined the two freedoms: freedom to worship in the local church of one's own choice, and freedom to worship and take Communion in each other's churches." [Alresford]

"We need to accept ourselves as different but equal in the sight of God. We have unity already in Christ. Man is creating disunity through liturgy and doctrine." [Stockport]

"[We recommend] a universal Church with no head but a council of representatives." [Ascot]

"The Church is an exclusive, introverted group." [RAF Station, West Germany]

"[We recommend action] to prevent the Church being so frigid; it stops all emotions, leaving people to find that release elsewhere." [Peterborough]

"Thought for pilgrims: However far we may think we have travelled, we deceive ourselves if we think we have arrived." [Southampton]

"[We need] a church that travels lighter." [Sussex]

"The prejudice which affects each individual is the starting point for change." [East Anglia]

The course has strengthened my own personal convictions and given me an insight into other denominations which I might otherwise never have had.

I feel the course has opened up a door leading to a new concept of our brothers and sisters in Christ. I feel it is our responsibility in this village to keep that door ever open and, if possible, to remove it from its hinges, and lose it." [North East]

APPENDIX I

List of Churches

The numbers in the right-hand column are those which actually occurred in the sample used for statistical analysis, i.e., among the tenth drawn off at the end of April. These numbers should therefore be multiplied by 10 to yield the probable total numbers of those whose replies were received by the deadline. In the end, the total number of individual responses received has been in excess of 100,000 and the denominational breakdown pattern of them all would not necessarily coincide with the following table.

Denominational Title	Nos. in sample
1. <i>Participants in the 'Not Strangers But Pilgrims' process</i>	
African Methodist Episcopal Church	1
Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland	363
Calvary Church of God in Christ	—
Christian Brethren	16
Church of England	4362
Congregational Federation	22
Council of African and Allied Churches	—
Greek Orthodox Church	1
Independent Methodist Church	7
Lutheran Council of Great Britain	6
Methodist Church, inc. its Scottish Synods	982
Moravian Church	9
New Testament Assembly	—
Old Baptist Union	—
Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales	801
Russian Orthodox Church	1
Salvation Army	69
Seventh Day Adventist	1
Shiloh United Church of Christ	1
Society of Friends	45
Unitarian Church	1
United Reformed Church	515
Wesleyan Holiness Church	1
Church of Scotland	88

Congregational Union of Scotland	7
Roman Catholic Church in Scotland	29
Scottish Episcopal Church	47
United Free Church of Scotland	—
Baptist Union of Wales	3
Church in Wales	70
Presbyterian Church in Wales	28
Union of Welsh Independents	3
2. <i>Observers</i>	
Baptist Union of Scotland	4
Church of Ireland	—
Methodist Church in Ireland	1
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	—
3. <i>Also shown in sample</i>	
Multi-denominational membership	65
Other Afro-West Indian Churches	2
Pentecostal	26
Various "House Church" groups	17
American Churches	—
(some occurred among the Forces in West Germany)	2
Christian/Ecumenical/Evangelical/Non-Conformist	71
No denominational affiliation	92
Other Faiths	12
No answer	130
Illegible	2
Invalid entries (errors)	2
	—
	7905

APPENDIX II

Scottish Figures

As the religious scene in Scotland is rather different, a separate breakdown of the one tenth sample (198) was made. There were no significant variations in comparison with other areas. (5 responses were rendered invalid by errors during processing so that only 193 responses were actually used in statistical analysis.) It should be borne in mind that even when these figures are multiplied by ten to yield the probable total numbers, the result only applies for those whose responses were returned by the date when the sample was drawn off. The actual numbers taking part were far greater.

<i>Age</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>
Under 16 years	4	Females	155
17-25 years	12	Males	43
26-35 years	19		—
36-45 years	34		198
46-55 years	43		
56-65 years	41		
Over 65 years	43		
No answer	2		
	—		
	198		

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>
Housewives	55
White-collar workers and teachers	49
Retired and unemployed	38
Doctors, lecturers, clergy and other professions, except teachers	28
Semi-skilled	3
Students	10
Directors and similar managerial level	2
Unskilled	4
No answer	9
	—
	198

<i>Church attendance</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>
Once or more a week	183
Two or three times a month	9
Once a month	1
Two or three times a year	1
Once a year	—
Special occasions	2
Not at all	1
No answer	1
	<hr/> 198

<i>Denominations</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>
Church of Scotland*	83
Scottish Episcopal Church	47
Roman Catholic Church in Scotland*	28
Methodist	8
Congregational Union of Scotland	8
Church of England	6
Baptist Union of Scotland	4
United Reformed Church	2
Salvation Army	1
Christian Brethren	1
Christian/Ecumenical	5
No denominational affiliation	1
No answer	4
	<hr/> 198

*people naming these denominations also occurred in other areas

APPENDIX III

Welsh Figures

A postal strike in South Wales considerably delayed the returns from that country. The total number of individual questionnaires received by the Welsh evaluator was 4,200. Regrettably, most of them missed the computer deadline so that the processed sample was only 165 instead of the true tenth of 420. What follows here is a breakdown of that 420 by age, sex, occupation, church attendance and denomination, which reveals a pattern similar to that from all other areas. It should be borne in mind that even when these figures are multiplied by ten to yield the probable total numbers, the result only applies for those whose responses were returned. The actual numbers taking part were far greater.

<i>Age</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>
Under 16 years	8	Females	269
17-25 years	22	Males	142
26-35 years	35	No answer	9
36-45 years	64		
46-55 years	72		420
56-65 years	111		
Over 65 years	102		
No answer	6		
	420		
<i>Occupation</i>		<i>Actual Numbers</i>	
Housewives		129	
White-collar workers and teachers		93	
Retired and unemployed		94	
Doctors, lecturers, clergy and other professions, except teachers		31	
Semi-skilled		21	
Students		23	
Directors and similar managerial level		2	
Unskilled		4	
No answer		22	
Illegible		1	
		420	

<i>Church attendance</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>
Once or more a week	388
Two or three times a month	18
Once a month	2
Two or three times a year	3
Once a year	—
Special occasions	—
Not at all	2
No answer	16
Illegible	2
	<hr/>
	420

<i>Denominations</i>	<i>Actual Numbers</i>
(Anglican) Church in Wales	215
Presbyterian Church in Wales	36
Methodist	34
Roman Catholic	33
United Reformed Church	33
Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland	29
Union of Welsh Independents	5
Congregational Federation	4
Baptist Union of Wales	3
Pentecostal	2
Wesleyan Holiness	1
House Church	1
No denominational affiliation	6
No answer	16
Illegible	2
	<hr/>
	420

APPENDIX IV

Radio Stations and Evaluation

Fifty-seven B.B.C. and I.L.R. Stations took part in *Lent '86*. The questionnaire included a question about which station (if any) had been listened to. However, figures are difficult to arrive at because people sometimes put down stations such as BBC 1 or 2 and a number did not know which one they were listening to! A number also indicated that individuals listened to the course on radio, but the groups did not listen as a group. One person claimed to listen to no less than five different local stations!

We have therefore no firm figures of total listeners but all the indications are that about a million people were involved in the course in one way or another, and about 60% of those who replied had listened to a radio course. Another 25% indicated that they had used the central cassette instead, and we presume the remainder (15%) used the resource book, perhaps combined with local series of lectures or sermons.

The proportion using these varied very much and the North East and Kent had the highest radio proportion and London and the West Midlands the lowest. The evaluation of all replies (however they were originated) was carried out in 19 geographical regions. The name of the volunteer evaluator is given followed by the participating stations from their regions.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Scotland</i> | (Tim Honeyman) BBC Scotland, Radio Clyde, Radio Forth, Moray Firth Radio, North Sound, Radio Tay, West Sound. |
| 2. <i>Wales</i> | (Keith Evans) BBC Radio Wales, BBC Radio Cymru, Marcher Sound, Swansea Sound. |
| 3. <i>North East</i> | (Bill Marsh) BBC Radio Cleveland, BBC Radio Leeds, BBC Radio Newcastle, Pennine Radio. |
| 4. <i>North West</i> | (John Hudson) BBC Radio Cumbria, BBC Radio Lancashire, Manx Radio. |
| 5. <i>Yorkshire</i> | (John Littlewood) BBC Radio Humberside, BBC Radio Sheffield, BBC Radio York. |
| 6. <i>Merseyside</i> | (Richard Rigby) BBC Radio Merseyside, Radio City. |
| 7. <i>North Midlands</i> | (Bill Grattidge) BBC Radio Derby, BBC Radio Nottingham, Radio Trent. |
| 8. <i>West Midlands</i> | (Harold Cavers) BBC Radio Stoke, BBC Radio Shropshire, BBC W.M. |

9. *East Midlands* (Tricia Towell) BBC Radio Leicester, BBC Radio Northampton, Leicester Sound.
10. *South Midlands* (Gwyneth Drummond) BBC Radio Bedfordshire, BBC Radio Oxford, Chiltern Radio, Mercia Sound.
11. *East Anglia* (Dorothy Spence) BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, BBC Radio Norfolk, Radio Orwell, Saxon Radio.
12. *Essex* (Basil Hazeldine) Essex Radio.
13. *London* (John and Joan Williams) BBC Radio London.
14. *Kent* (Sydney and Una Ratcliffe) BBC Radio Kent.
15. *Sussex and Surrey* (Christopher Herdon) BBC Radio Sussex, County Sound, Radio Mercury.
16. *Southern England* (Gillian Moore and Pam Smith) BBC Radio Solent, BBC Radio Guernsey, Radio 210, Two Counties Radio.
17. *West of England* (Jeanette Nicholson and Joan Cook) Great Western Radio, Severn Sound.
18. *South West* (Sarah Makin) BBC Radio Devon, BBC Radio Cornwall.
19. *Germany* (British Forces) (John Holliman) British Forces Network.

Radio Course Survey

After *Lent '86* all the local radio stations were invited to send in a return sheet on how their courses had been structured. In all thirty-seven stations kindly provided information on this survey. Seven stations issued their own courses on cassettes which were sold before broadcasting, and another five put them out after transmissions. In twenty-eight stations they used a team of speakers to present the main input while the remainder (9) used a single speaker each week. Most stations presented their programme from their studios, but two did so from a public meeting and three used a radio car to broadcast from a house-group.

Where there was a continuous evening programme, stations used the time between the presentations and the phone in, in a variety of ways. Twenty had a basic music programme and nine a studio discussion group and others had a mixture of the two. Twenty-nine stations had a 'phone in' either in the same night (26) or at some other time (3). In half of these the questions were answered by the speakers and half by a panel which sometimes included the speakers. Radio Forth also used the phone for voting on certain questions. In all but three cases there was a sufficient supply of callers on each of the five evenings, and seven stations had too many to cope with. Fourteen used letters in the programme and seven had follow-up letter programmes.

PART TWO · LOCAL ECUMENICAL BODIES IN ENGLAND

Hugh Cross

Chapter 1. Unity

At the same time that individuals and groups taking part in Lent '86 completed questionnaires and sent in reports which have been analysed and described above, a series of questions were put to local councils of churches, local ecumenical projects (LEPs) and sponsoring bodies (county or borough Interchurch bodies responsible for LEPs and other forms of local ecumenism in their area) about their understanding of what the Church is and what it is for, as part of the NOT STRANGERS BUT PILGRIMS process. What were they concerned about? What can we hear them saying? Here we shall try to listen to what was said in England. Two things come over very strongly indeed: Christian unity and people's impatience for it. We shall deal with these in the first two chapters and then come, in further chapters, to their views on the nature and purpose of the church and other matters.

Much in common

It would have been very surprising if they had said nothing about unity, since *Not Strangers But Pilgrims* is a search for new ways by which the churches might work together. Over and over again mention was made of the "wider vision", the "broader experience", that Lent '86 had given those who shared in the house groups.

One fact that emerged frequently was the pleasant surprise people experienced in finding that as Christians they had so very much in common. This in itself is a sad reflection on the inverted life of so many churches which prevents people from discovering each other and learning from each other. There was delight and astonishment in the discovery that, although sometime the language used was a bit different, Christians were agreed on the basic things they believe. Myths and misunderstandings were dispelled as people shared their faith and prayed together.

Responses referred again and again to "mutual enrichment". It was not just that the old misunderstandings were being cleared away.

Something much more positive was taking place. The value of ecumenical activity as a mutual exchange of gifts was experienced. The gifts were the spiritual treasures which each brought to give to the others, so that at the end of the course Christians had helped each other to enlarge their spiritual resources and to acquire new insights into what they believed and practised.

If they doubted it before, those who participated in *Lent '86* very quickly learned the truth that Christian unity is about belonging together. The churches are so often seen as competing with each other, or at best co-existing, but the clear message that came through was that they cannot do without each other, or, to put it positively, they are each essential parts of the whole Church. That also implies that every single person who is a member of a church is an essential part of the whole. Long-lost sisters and brothers were finding each other again. *Lent '86* was a family reunion!

What kind of unity?

People were finding each other and discovering for themselves a new relationship with fellow Christians. What were the particular discoveries they made about Christian unity?

As we have already seen, one message that came over clearly was that it was in the essentials of Christian belief that there was unity. The basic faith of the Christian Church was what the members of the churches shared in common. The other side of that coin is that the matters which divide are not essentials. That does not mean that they are not important. It means simply that it is not by those issues that a person is known to be a Christian or not. The divisive matters may define membership of one of the churches, or of a section within a church, but they are not essential to Christian belief.

Does that mean that there is room for diversity in the Church? Yes, came back the response, for it is often in the diversity that unity was found. New understandings of one's own tradition are discovered by learning about the traditions of others. Variety can be an enrichment of unity and some can find unity through the diversification which makes up the whole. A fear is sometimes expressed that the ecumenical movement is engaged in an attempt to bring uniformity to the Christian Church. The impossibility of such a course of action, even if it was truly the object of the ecumenical exercise, was quickly seen through by the groups. In fact one response was quite specific that unity did not require uniformity.

If unity is not about uniformity what positive things can we say about it? For many people Lent '86 provided them with a new sense of inclusiveness which was reflected in the survey of local ecumenical bodies. As one response put it, "a new catholicity" was discovered. This is what some described as a "wider vision" or "broader horizons". They were suddenly released into that larger community which makes up the Church, rather than feeling confined to one part of it. The discovery for many people was that God in his wisdom has brought together in Christ a very much greater company of people than they had previously imagined to be his Church, and it included groups of people of whom they had not known before; for, as F. W. Faber's hymn has it, "the love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind".

The discovery of the inclusiveness of the Church led to another revelation. Not only is unity about inclusiveness, it is also the product of tolerance. Among the exciting experiences reported was the breaking down of prejudices many of which had been of long standing. It is when people are able to meet face to face, to share their beliefs, to pray together, that they find that the falsehoods about each other with which they have grown up are not true and so no longer acceptable. Prejudice is the first casualty of truth.

Is unity possible?

There is no doubt that Christians are divided. The existence of so many denominations or churches is itself evidence of this fact. Some have come together to form new units, but this has not greatly altered the general picture of a Church divided. It is not only into 'churches' that Christians are separated, but even within churches there are differences of understanding about interpretation of faith and practice. Mention 'mission' or 'evangelism' at a council of churches meeting and immediately another set of differences not based on denominations suddenly appears. We should not be surprised at this, since it is in the nature of human beings to differ from one another. But is it possible for Christians to unite in spite of these differences?

The answer is that it certainly is possible. A number of the expressed frustrations arise out of a firm belief that unity is possible. Not only is this believed, but many responses declared that their belief that unity is possible arose out of their experience. The local ecumenical projects specifically said that they had proved that the denominations could work together, and the fact of the very continued existence of LEPs, councils of churches and sponsoring bodies was itself evidence

of the truth of this.

Is unity necessary?

Unity may be possible, and there may be even certain forms of coming together which demonstrate that it is possible, but is it necessary? Does not the ecumenical movement involve too much effort, too much bureaucracy, too much change? For churches that are beleaguered by so many other problems this could be one more optional extra to add to already crushing burdens.

The replies say very clearly that unity is by no means an extra for which one may opt or not. Unity was seen as being essential. Indeed one of the responses says just that, that there had been "a gradual shift of general opinion from unity being a good thing to an essential thing".

The evidence is also available in the responses that unity is essential to mission and evangelism. It is further evident from the replies that in order to see the wholeness of the Church one has to see all the separate units playing their part. Negatively the same truth is expressed by the hurt expressed when some Christians will not share in the ecumenical movement. Positively we may say that that Kingdom for which Christians pray in the Lord's Prayer is a Kingdom of which St Paul writes when he says, "God will ... bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head" *Ephesians 1:10*. Unity is at the very heart of Christian belief and practice, and as the LEP at Bowthorpe, Norwich, said, "Denominationalism is a provisional model, and the Christian Church in each area is a more theologically valid model".

A wider unity?

One subject which does not receive much attention in the replies is that of relations between Christians and people of other faiths. One or two councils of churches mentioned it, but they were the exception. This omission may be because it was perceived as irrelevant or unimportant. On the other hand it is possible that those who participated were concentrating on the Church and its own unity and did not therefore examine that wider unity which is sought through dialogue with people of other faiths.

Chapter 2. Impatience

Many responses refer to "impatience", "frustration", "disappointment". At each level this was felt, from the co-operative of the council of churches, through the commitment of the LEPs, to the shared oversight of the sponsoring bodies. All expressed distress.

There is a keenly-felt disappointment that comes through the replies. It is disappointment with the brokenness of the Church. These groupings are of people heavily engaged in and committed to ecumenical life and activity, and ever and again there surfaces a disappointment that the rest of the folk in the churches have not yet caught the vision of unity and become committed to it. Unity makes such good sense and seems so logical that these practitioners of unity wonder why the others do not see it. They are disappointed because the message they have been preaching for so long seems still to fall on deaf ears. The denominations go on being separate, thinking unilaterally, acting as though they were the only ones engaged in mission.

Disunity is not only disappointing but also frustrating. The Milton Keynes Christian Council spelt it out when they said, "we strain against the remaining barriers, frustrated by our inability to finally grasp Christ's gift of unity". What is needed is seen, but trying to overcome the barriers to reach the goal becomes frustrating because it seems to move further away all the time, and the hurdles seem higher the further along the track one runs.

Frustration leads to impatience. The Hertfordshire Sponsoring Body, for instance, spoke of "what had been done had been in spite of denominational structures", a clear example of impatience with structures which prevent joint action. LEPs also spoke with impatience of structures which were "tiring and confusing to our people to relate to", as Blackbird Leys put it. Many were the calls for the Churches to "get their act together" and streamline their processes in the face of the urgency of ecumenism.

Structures were only one element of a number of complaints that were aimed at the denominations. Another was that the churches were narrow and self-centred in their thinking and hide-bound when it came to action. Constantly in the replies came calls for the churches to "think ecumenically", and an impatience with their inability or unwillingness to do so.

A more serious charge was that the churches were largely

indifferent to ecumenical matters. LEPs asked that the churches would stop seeing them as "aberrant deviations from normal church life" as Telford put it, and realise that they are a reality and nearer being that "sign, instrument and foretaste" of the Kingdom of God which the Church itself is meant to be. Those who are 'out in front' ecumenically, the councils of churches and the LEPs, are expressing more and more impatience with parent churches which write them off as the interest of a few enthusiasts, and peripheral to the real life of the churches.

On a much more practical plane is the impatience that arises from councils of churches and LEPs trying to cope with the volumes of paper produced by divided churches. LEPs are especially vulnerable to this, receiving forms and other literature from several denominational headquarters at once, each of which demands separate responses from already overworked individuals. An example of this impatience is the cry from Grove Hill, Hemel Hempstead, that the denominations "may be expecting too much from some people (particularly clergy), since many LEPs are small groups with lots of different affiliations". Impatience with clergy was another element in the frustrations expressed in the responses, and we shall deal with later on under "Other matters arising from the Survey".

At this point we ought to be reminded also that people were impatient with what are called 'theological barriers'. These are often the hidden hurdles that suddenly appear and trip up the eager ecumenical enthusiasts just when they think they are winning the race. Theology has come to be regarded as a mystery which can be unravelled only by experts, and therefore the average members of the church are not expected to have any theological insights. "Why can't we have interchangeability of ministry?" the people ask. "Ah, yes, well, there are theological reasons why not, which are too complex for simple folk like you to understand" is the reply. Theology is always made to sound difficult and too complicated for ordinary mortals, and there is a growing impatience with this. "People in the pews", said the Essex Area Sponsoring Body, "have a different kind of theology from the professional theologians. Different questions seem important and they tend to answer them with their hearts and their spirits rather than only in their minds". The whole exercise of *Lent '86* was an attempt to listen to what the Holy Spirit was saying to and through the churches and that is a theological statement. The responses from those who participated are also theological statements. Perhaps if the churches listen the impatience of many will be rewarded.

On one particular issue there were a great many comments. It was inevitably the question of sharing Communion. There is not only

genuine puzzlement at the refusal to allow people to share the Eucharist, but a growing impatience with those who refuse it. There may be good theological reasons for refusing to allow it, but they clearly have not been spelt out to people in terms that they find satisfactory or convincing. The growth of close ecumenical relations in councils of churches, local covenants, and inter-church families makes this increasingly a matter of great importance to people, and a continued embargo will be more widely and more vigorously challenged. It is on such issues (and there are others) that people express impatience with the slowness with which the churches move towards change. Those who share the life of local ecumenical projects frequently give voice to irritability with the rest of the Church which seems to take so long and seems so reluctant to learn and apply the lessons learnt in the LEPs.

Chapter 3. The Nature of the Church

The exercise was aimed at discovering what is the nature of the Church and what purpose it has in the world. What insights were there on which it might be possible to build?

The three different forms of ecumenical co-operation with which we are concerned make an interesting study in ecumenical instruments. LEPs are local; councils of churches, for the most part, cover a larger area; sponsoring bodies are a form of ecumenical sharing at a point where decisions can be made. Each demonstrates a different element of truth.

Councils of Churches

It was to the councils of churches that the central planners looked to help put into effect the course for *Lent '86*. They were to contact their local radio station if the radio people had not first got in touch with them. It was their task to arrange for groups to meet, and for the groups to be ecumenically mixed as far as possible. They were to find and brief group leaders, and the councils of churches were to supervise the sending in of the individual questionnaires to the radio stations for analysis and evaluation. The fact that *Lent '86* was as successful as it clearly was is due in no small measure to councils of churches taking very seriously their task of co-ordination. The *Lent '86* operation was in itself a means by which it was possible to see the role of the council of churches as a tool for Christian unity.

Not only were they asked to co-ordinate and arrange locally the *Lent '86* programme of study, but they were asked also to reply to a questionnaire of their own. 193 out of 680 did so, and for purposes of a survey 28% (which was what the ratio was) is good. Clearly this responsibility, too, was taken seriously. Often a survey of this kind gets answered by an official, the chairman or the secretary, and some clearly were. The great majority of the responses, however, show that there was a corporate consideration of the questionnaire, and that is a further indication that the role of a council of churches as a forum for local churches is also taken very seriously.

In the survey there were two questions, the answers to which are important here. The first asked what statutory or voluntary bodies they were represented on and the second asked what "areas of individual church responsibility" had been handed over to them and were "being

dealt with more or less effectively as a consequence". The detailed answers to these are contained in a report to the councils of churches and can be read there. It is sufficient for us to discover that a significant number are seen by outside bodies (voluntary and statutory bodies) as representing the churches, a means of communicating with the churches, and a convenient means by which the churches could be represented on those bodies.

Answers to the second question, about the handing over of responsibilities, showed how far local churches were using councils of churches as a tool for ecumenical co-operation, acting "together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately" (*Lund principle*). The list of activities was interestingly varied, ranging from Christian Aid, through Week of Prayer for Christian Unity activity, to day centres and help with mentally handicapped.

The evidence from the councils of churches showed very clearly that it is possible for Christians to co-operate together on a wide range of matters, and there is certainly a role of co-ordination that needs to be fulfilled. Nevertheless there are limits to what a council of churches is able to do, and these, too, became clear. When asked what they were afraid to do they replied in a variety of ways that the answer was that they were afraid to engage in any controversy. In other words, although a council of churches is a useful tool for ecumenical action and its member bodies support it as far as each is willing to go, its strength and effectiveness are limited to the commitment of its least committed member body.

Some councils of churches have reached such a state of unanimity that they are now ready to move on to the next stage, and several responses indicated that the council was considering becoming a local ecumenical project, or a cluster of related projects.

Local ecumenical projects

Local ecumenical projects (LEPs) provide another and very different formula for ecumenical activity. They are a more advanced form of inter-church action than are councils of churches, because, unlike the councils they are based on a covenanted commitment between the churches. Some share buildings, some are local covenants (ecumenical parishes), and some are projects where everything is shared in congregational life and sacramental ministry. They first saw the light of day as 'areas of ecumenical experiment', but very soon (within five years)

moved from being called 'experiments' to being called 'projects'. The change of name was important.

LEPs were first given tentative approval to test out the consequences of Christians worshipping and working together in close commitment. They were called experiments so that no one should be embarrassed if they did not succeed. That they did succeed and have grown in number is itself a sign that what they set out to test has been proved possible.

Yet, they complain, the churches still do not take them seriously enough. Telford's response bore the remark, "It would be helpful for ecumenical work and LEPs no longer to be treated as extraordinary special cases: viz. aberrant deviations from normal church life with ... constant questioning of 'whether or not the experiment should be allowed to continue'". There is a strongly held belief, and a right one, in the LEPs that they represent far more nearly what the Church ought to be than the denominational congregations. Coulby Newham, in Middlesborough, said just that, that they wished the churches would treat them "as a real church".

"A real church" is a united body containing a variety of Christians who share together in missioning with Christ in God's world. Wellingborough Council of Churches made a profound remark underlining this when they spoke of "the impossibility of effective evangelism as separate denominations, and the priority of mission as identification with the local community and commitment to serving its needs". "Denominations can work together," said the Ramsgate LEP, "Denominational barriers disappear ... and the mission of the Church becomes central in our thinking and praying". Southgate, Bury St Edmunds, said "unity is the only really effective base for mission and many of our recent converts have spoken of our obvious unity as being the thing which first drew them to us". There were many more testimonies of the same kind. Yet the denominations are still not hearing the message of the LEPs that unity is not a thing to be feared, but in fact is right at the core of Christian faith. As we said earlier, unity has been shown by the LEPs to be not only possible but essential.

When the Heslington, North Yorkshire, LEP replied to the question, "In what further ways can the Denominations assist your LEP to be a more effective instrument of mission?" they said, "By recognising that LEPs have a vital role in creating the future of the church in this country; therefore being able temporarily to put more resources into individual LEPs for the long-term benefit of all." This statement is one that deserves studying, and it represents much of the thinking in LEPs. There is no doubt in the minds of those who share in LEP life that LEPs

have a vital role to play which will benefit all.

We have seen that the councils of churches have the role of co-ordination and representation. Local ecumenical projects have a different role. As we have remarked earlier, LEPs were first given the task of experimenting in the area of close relationships between Christians of different traditions. By sharing buildings, by sharing in the common life of a local church in worship and sacramental ministry, and by sharing in local covenanted mission between churches in a locality, they were to test how far the Lund Principle (that the churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately) could be applied. By their own life and experience they have given evidence that it is possible to live by the Lund Principle.

Why were they asked to test this principle? They would answer, and history would agree, that the test was applied so that, if it proved successful, the denominational churches could follow the LEPs. In other words, this was the "vital role in creating the future church" of which Heslington speaks. This may help partly to explain the impatience of the LEPs with the Churches. "We played wedding music for you, but you wouldn't dance". *Matt. 11:17* "We've done the experimenting. We've shown it's possible. When are you going to believe us?" they ask.

The LEPs demonstrate that not only is structured unity possible, but there is a strengthened sense of mission when Christian people come together. The LEP testimony of a new and living experience of unity in mission is part of the "vital role in creating the future church" which is theirs. LEPs can also be seen as "sign, instrument and foretaste" of reconciliation in Christ, to borrow a phrase from the Anglican/Reformed report, *God's Reign and our Unity*. Is it any wonder then that the LEPs are impatient with the Churches? The phrase from Telford, "aberrant deviations from normal church life" can be more truthfully applied to the denominations than to the LEPs. Deal, in Kent, pleads for "a new impetus towards Christian unity" to be set in motion, "leading to one Church in this land" adding for good measure, "if those at the top could take a leaf out of what those at the ground roots have done and are doing!"

Consider the matters over which the LEPs have found the most difficulties. They are interchangeability of ministers, sharing communion, common baptism, membership, complicated structures, varieties of overseas mission agencies, and so on and so on. For people in the LEPs these are not problems. They are matters which can be settled. They become problems because the parent Churches cannot agree on them. More than that, as we have shown earlier, the LEPs have

experimented in these areas the possibility of applying the Lund Principle and have proved that its application is possible. They have the right to ask when "those at the top" are going to "take a leaf out of what those at the ground roots have done and are doing".

Sponsoring Bodies

Sponsoring bodies are a quite other kind of ecumenical tool. They are usually found at county level throughout the country. All of them include the church leaders, i.e. bishops, provincial moderators, district chairmen, area superintendents, divisional commanders, and most of them have other people to serve on them. The 'other people' include clergy and lay people in most cases, as well as ecumenical officers.

Their task was originally to provide pastoral oversight and care on behalf of the Churches for LEPs. More recently their programmes have been extended to include concern for religious broadcasting on local radio, industrial mission and in some areas co-operation with local councils of churches, although in this last case relationships are harder to form. In a handful of sponsoring bodies there are tentative experiments being made in shared decision making.

Sponsoring bodies have a difficult task to perform. They are themselves a form of ecumenical experimenting. They experiment ecumenically at a level which is more local than countrywide, but not local in the sense in which we speak of local ecumenical projects. They were set up by the Churches to act as a buffer and a bridge between the official Churches at the top and the LEPs at the local level. The 'buffer' meant that they could protect experimenting LEPs from too rigid application of denominational regulations. The 'bridge' meant that they were two-way channels of communication. On the one hand they are protectors and counsellors and on the other they are monitors to ensure LEPs and others do not become detached from the Churches.

Their task is further hampered by the variety of the roles their members play in their own denominations. The power a Roman Catholic bishop has to take decisions is very different from that of the Baptist Area Superintendent. Yet both may represent their churches on the same sponsoring body and usually do.

At a different level from the LEPs they, too, are aware of having a vital role to play. Like the LEPs they are frustrated by the brokenness of the Church. The Hertfordshire Sponsoring Body said, "... there was a general feeling of frustration that, although the Sponsoring Body did

help in sharing church responsibilities, ... nonetheless, what had been done had been in spite of denominational structures. It was pointed out that the structures of each Church are not designed for Christian co-operation and that each functions as if it were the only one in its area. It was difficult to see how the trust that had built up at the personal level on a Sponsoring Body could be expressed at administrative levels with each denomination and no-one could see how to make a breakthrough here".

When asked what areas of denominational church responsibility could be shared more effectively the sponsoring bodies listed a variety of matters. Ministerial appointments, broadcasting, industrial mission, other chaplaincies, social responsibility, boundaries, urban deprivation, strategic planning and deployment of personnel were all listed. However, it was not always possible to share these, either because "we do not have the resources of personnel" (Somerset and South Avon) or "general shortage (of clergy) or differences centred around the nature of ordination which affect eucharistic function" (Lichfield Diocesan Area Liaison Group). Lichfield ventured the remark that "this situation could be eased if the sponsoring body had wider powers, but this seems unlikely in the present state of 'separateness'".

The sponsoring bodies see their role partly as one of leadership and sometimes this is specifically that of making decisions at county level or its equivalent. Some, such as Sussex and Milton Keynes have even gone so far as to use one of their number on occasions to represent them all.

Like the local ecumenical projects the sponsoring bodies have been and are experimenting in forms of unity and finding that the Lund Principle is sound. Like the LEPs, too, they are frustrated because the brokenness of the Churches makes the task harder.

Chapter 4. What Is The Church For?

By their life and from their responses we have seen that the councils of churches, local ecumenical projects and sponsoring bodies indicate that the nature of the Church is to be united rather than to be divided. We have seen, too, that they are impatient with the Churches because they seem to move so slowly towards unity and to be so hard of hearing when it comes to hearing the results of the experiments in unity.

Purpose

What do they say about the purpose of the Church? The words 'mission', 'evangelism', 'witness', are found over and over again. So, too, are ways of understanding them. Clearly the belief of all three groups is that the Church's role in the world is an outward-looking one.

Essex and Barking Area Sponsoring Body were clear that unity goes together with mission when they said, "it is now only possible to think of the churches' involvement in the world and with the concerns of the world in ecumenical terms". Greater Manchester County Ecumenical Council supported this, too, "mission should be conducted ecumenically," they said. In a different way the Kensington Council of Churches made a similar statement, "A shared proclamation brings a deeper understanding of God's Kingdom as a central part of the Gospel message". But Abingdon Council of Churches warns "if we had waited until we completely understood and agreed with each other we would never have got anywhere. It is through common action that we found our way towards common understanding".

Within those responses are references to mission and proclamation. Wellingborough Council of Churches had a clear definition of mission when they spoke of "the impossibility of effective evangelism as separate denominations and the priority of mission as identification with the local community and commitment to serving its needs". Here there is a plain understanding that mission is larger than proclamation or evangelism, but includes both.

Mission

However it is defined and whatever its component parts, there appears

to be a general expectation that mission is what the Church is in the world for. Lincolnshire & South Humberside Sponsoring Body says it "expects mission to figure high on the agenda of LEPs and churches working towards LEP status". That is specific. It is also implied in such negative statements as that from the Mid-Wilts Sponsoring Body which claimed "we have more experience of the difficulties than of the success stories in mission" and Milton Keynes Christian Council's commitment in the future to "investing as much energy in ecumenical mission as we have in ecumenical structuring and becoming as energetic in relating to non-church as to other churches". Further reinforcement was provided by two councils of churches. Wokingham, in Surrey, said "theologically we must see ourselves as agents of the Kingdom and not maintenance workers on structures and buildings". Wearside, in North East England, complained "90% of church members are so involved in maintenance that they have no wish to be involved in the larger concerns of the Kingdom".

Different perspectives

If, then, the expectation is that the Church should be engaged in mission, what is the nature of that mission? Both the South Yorkshire and the Greater Peterborough Sponsoring Bodies said in almost identical terms that they had no difficulty with a common "understanding of mission", but Greater Peterborough went on to say that "in planning work together we quickly find differences of attitude in how the missionary work should be approached". However, this may indicate that more work needs to be done locally on how churches evaluate such different approaches and on whether or not these need be an obstacle to co-operation.

One of the terms already used is 'evangelism' and it is a specific form of mission. In Leiston, Suffolk, two declining churches were brought together in an LEP and they say, "the church now uniting has been built up and is engaging in effective evangelism". Enfield and Forty Hill Churches, an LEP in North London, said "we realise increasingly the importance of a united body in house to house visitations". There are also references to "witness" as in Good Friday processions in which so many councils of churches now engage. Witness is also effected by the unity exhibited by people engaged in the life of LEPs, as for instance, in Southgate, Bury St Edmunds, where it was said, "... unity is the only really effective base for mission and many of our recent converts have spoken of our obvious unity as being the thing which first drew them to us. Disunity turns the world off!"

Wellingborough Council of Churches' definition of mission being "identification with the local community and commitment to serving its needs" is confirmed by implication in many of the other responses from the three ecumenical groupings. Such issues as urban areas of deprivation as described in the Church of England's "Faith in the City" report and "the Channel Tunnel" mentioned by Kent Sponsoring Body and "rural priorities" by Gloucestershire Sponsoring Body, are examples of specific matters of such Christian concern. When the list of concerns of councils of churches is considered, mission extends through Christian Aid to housing for teenagers and care for mentally handicapped.

Chapter 5. Other Matters Arising From The Survey

Resources

References to resources make interesting reading, for they are another recurring theme in the responses. A number of LEPs pointed to the fact that coming together in unity brings "mutual enrichment" by making available much wider resources of personnel, talents, finances and buildings for the common mission. Resources of liturgy and spirituality not only give evidence of the diversity within the Church, but, as Stockbridge LEP put it, "differences in emphasis ... help to enliven the life and work of the Church".

How we use this treasure store of resources is a concern expressed in some words from the Leicester Diocesan Area Ecumenical Body, "we are disobedient to (God) when we misuse ... resources in duplicating work". Ludgershall LEP wished the "hierarchies would unite and stop wasting God's resources in duplication" citing the closeness of Church House and Westminster Central Hall as an example. Essex and Barking Area Sponsoring Body specifically mentioned the Church of England which was in a "privileged position" and whose "resources and influence" they felt, could be "turned to the advantage of the wider church". Cumbria Ecumenical Executive Council gave an example of shared resources when they told how during the teachers' industrial dispute the Methodist church organised seminars for Christian teachers which were open to all. They did this because both the Anglicans and Roman Catholics could not arrange such seminars because they would "be seen as employers because both churches run schools in the county".

Sharing

'Sharing' was a word that occurred frequently in a variety of contexts. "Completely sharing in mission" was a sponsoring body response to the question about what might be better done together than separately. As we have just seen, the negative of that was the sinful misuse of resources when churches duplicated work.

Lichfield Diocesan Area Liaison Group spoke of their disappointment that there was "little opportunity for exchanging ministerial resources" and a number of others spoke of their desire to share personnel. It was not only clergy who might be shared, but others also,

for instance lay preachers and readers, youth workers and others.

There were several points at which the desire was expressed that the Churches should share more in the field of social responsibility and sometimes this was expressed as an irritation that they did not – a waste of resources by duplication. Greater Manchester County Ecumenical Council even reported, "One of the Methodist Chairmen has in recent years dissolved two or three of his denominational committees (on social responsibility, on education, on industrial mission) and declared that his District should now work through the parallel ecumenical sector groups".

Mission and unity councils or their equivalent were another target for those who wanted the churches to share more. Surrey Council of Churches specifically said, "They still meet denominationally. Is there not a place for such councils to meet ecumenically?" Strategic planning, such as the Churches' approach to new housing developments and deployment of personnel provided further opportunity for sharing.

Then there were the specific references to the Church of England's "ecumenical canons" which some felt would make sharing ministerial resources easier. There was also a cry repeated many times in LEP responses for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches to unite.

Education and training

The comment by Norton Lees and Heeley Council of Churches "One of our theological insights has been the lack of it!" highlights what many felt, namely the need for more opportunity for study and learning. *Lent '86* gave many people a chance to study and learn from other denominational traditions than their own. At the same time many felt they could be better informed about their own tradition.

We mentioned earlier that many people feel that theology is made too much of a mystery and this in itself sparked off calls for greater chances to study and learn and thus be better theologically equipped. Specific requests were made for lay preachers/readers to be trained ecumenically and for ecumenical training for other workers in the churches.

Training of clergy was not forgotten either. Wootton Bassett LEP, for instance, recognising that for the present "there seems to be no way for the Roman Catholic Church to enter into any consultative arrangement for appointments to covenanted parishes", asks if there might be "in-service training for those who find themselves appointed to such a

parish without previous ecumenical experience". Westcliff, Scunthorpe, LEP thought that the most significant contribution to effective mission "would be to ensure that all ordinands are given a wide, ecumenical education and training in those skills, e.g. of sensitivity, which are essential for practising humble co-operation".

The success of the *Lent '86* course has been reflected in the number of requests for another in 1987. This comes through from councils of churches, LEPs and from sponsoring bodies. Since such an opportunity for ecumenical learning is not to be provided centrally many sponsoring bodies and some councils of churches are finding themselves under pressure to arrange something locally in that year.

Clergy

"*Lent '86* has revealed how strong is the feeling of the laity that we should do much more together. The clergy do not always share this view!" (Cheshire Church Leaders). "Our true commitment to mission and church unity ... ebbs and flows with the depth of commitment for this with clergy changes in the area" (Horbury Council of Churches). "Some members of the council felt that more support should be given from the clergy" (Bushey and Oxhey Council of Churches). "The people in the pews welcome each other but external officialdom seems slow to act" (Harpenden Council of Churches). "Many felt that the laity were ready for joint communion but that the clergy were holding back" (Teddington Council of Churches). "The clergy ... had lost contact with what was going on and found themselves unprepared for the very strong lay initiative which has followed" (Stevenage Council of Churches). "Many groups who met without clergy seemed to have experienced feelings of considerable liberation! There is a strong feeling abroad that the clergy do not represent the mind of the church and need to be dragged along by the laity" (Essex and Barking Area Sponsoring Body). "People in the pews have a very different kind of theology from the professional theologians. Different questions seem important and they tend to answer with their hearts and their spirits rather than only in their minds". (Essex and Barking Area Sponsoring Body).

These are a selection of statements found in the responses and reveal a serious concern not only among lay people but also among the ordained and the church leadership about clergy/lay relations. Other comments are veiled, as, for example, the Wootton Bassett LEP's request for in-service training for clergy appointed to a local covenant, and Westcliffe, Scunthorpe, LEP's request for ordinands to be trained

in, "e.g. sensitivity". There is certainly a strong tide of opinion up and down the land, revealed in these responses, that this is a considerable cause of frustration of ecumenical hopes and desires.

The sensitive matter of clergy appointments, especially to LEPs, is referred to in many of the sponsoring body replies, making the point once again from a different perspective. All of which leads to the question whether or not it is the clergy who are the "blocks" to ecumenical action as the North West report suggested. If the answer is that this is very largely true, the Churches are faced with the urgent question of when this particular concern of the laity is going to be listened to and action taken on it. At the same time it needs to be recognised that large numbers of the clergy are in the forefront of the ecumenical movement and wish that all their colleagues were, too!

Authority

In reply to the question, "In what further ways can the denominations assist your LEP to be a more effective instrument of mission?" the West Bretton LEP replied "would any good come out of an answer to this?" Such a reply, evidently a cry from a bad experience, reveals a weariness and cynicism with the inability or the unwillingness of church authorities to take steps towards closer unity which would reflect the desire of people in the local situation. The LEPs over and over again suggested in their replies that life would be easier if the authorities were to "take a leaf out of what those at the ground roots have done and are doing" as Deal said.

The sponsoring bodies, too, echoed this. They find themselves trapped between progressive ecumenical activity at the local level and inability to relax regulations, much less unite, at the top. The sponsoring bodies, like Janus, are expected to face both ways, but unlike Janus do not have two faces and find themselves much more like spectators at a tennis match watching an interminable rally!

The sponsoring bodies speak of attempting to provide leadership, and frequently do, but in the end they are accountable to the denominations which appoint them, and for one the accountability is "upward" while for another it is "downward". They attempt, sometimes with great success, decision making in common, but, as Hertfordshire suggested "in spite of denominational structures" so that they feel themselves unsupported and exposed.

Authority is linked with communication. We referred earlier to

problems with theology and in particular the question of shared communion. Authority involves clear communication so that people understand better the reasons for decisions which are made.

Councils of churches, LEPs and sponsoring bodies all referred to the complication of the unmatching boundaries. Each group is affected by them in a different way from the others. Attempts are being made to meet the difficulties; can the churches find the solutions?

Chapter 6. Summing Up

What stands out in the responses from local councils of churches, local ecumenical projects and sponsoring bodies?

First there is the unmistakable surprise, excitement and joy which people experienced as they discovered, rediscovered, or confirmed that Christians have so much more in common than divides them and that what is held in common is the core of faith outside which it is possible to differ quite widely.

Arising out of that is the certainty that the Church is the whole people of God unitedly sharing a common life and purpose. That purpose is missioning with God in the world – identification with the world and serving its needs, as Christ did.

The survey revealed a great deal of impatience and some important matters which require resolving. The frustration is not all in one place, but is found at every level of church life, and needs people at every level to find the keys which will release the locks that cause the difficulties.

There are signs of hope, too. The fact that *Lent '86* itself and the responses to it were taken so seriously means that Christians are concerned about the Church and its purpose. If at times they expressed impatience or anger it was because they believed there are solutions to be found to the seemingly endless difficulties they encounter. If at times the clergy, or the hierarchies, or the theologians, or whoever, are criticized, it is because they are held in regard and are relied on to participate in unblocking the blockages.

It may be true that those who participate in councils of churches, local ecumenical projects and sponsoring bodies, are ecumenical enthusiasts, but it is also true that their enthusiasm is soundly based on scripture and tradition. In spite of some very hard things said about the Churches, those who responded believe firmly in the Church and have caught the vision of what it might be, and therefore should be listened to ...

"If you have ears", says the author of the book of Revelation, "then, listen to what the Spirit says to" (and perhaps through) "the churches!"

THE ECUMENICAL SCENE IN WALES

Noel Davies

Introduction

On May 24th 1986 between fifteen and twenty thousand people from Wales and beyond came together for an ecumenical festival on the theme 'God's Family', at which Bishop Desmond Tutu was the chief guest. The occasion was the thirtieth anniversary of the Council of Churches for Wales and the tenth anniversary of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches. The success of the Festival was a sign of the growing need among Christian people in Wales to celebrate together and to find ways towards a greater growing together both locally and nationally. The Festival has given new hope and confidence. We must now find ways of building on this experience of renewal and fellowship.

In Wales *Lent '86* went hand in hand with the preparation for this Festival through discussion groups using the God's Family pack, often through integrated local programmes. Despite some difficulties with the timing of some radio programmes a large number of groups met during Lent and around three thousand questionnaires were returned. The indications are that there were more English-speaking groups than Welsh-speaking groups. For many they proved to be not only stimulating but also a further impetus towards greater unity locally.

The Council of Churches for Wales

During recent years the Council has grown both in the breadth of its programme of activities and also in terms of its significance within the life of the churches and people of Wales. Many examples of this could be quoted but the most recent is the Churches' involvement, through the Council, in the dispute in the mining industry. During those months the Churches' initiative became one of the key efforts towards reconciliation and was a sign that the churches can still have a prophetic role within Wales, especially when the churches are committed, as they were in this case, to acting together. This carries important lessons for the churches' witness and unity in the future. So far, however, both the Churches and the Council itself have been slow to learn these lessons

and to act upon them with commitment. Now we need to discover ways of strengthening and deepening our witness to the nation and people of Wales. This must be a priority. What kind of 'ecumenical instruments' are necessary in order to undertake this task most effectively?

The Search for Unity

From the beginning the search for unity has been central to the Council's agenda. In 1975, as a result of discussions fostered by the Council, a Covenant for Union was agreed between the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, the United Reformed Church and certain congregations of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. This was a very significant milestone in the search for unity in Wales. But when the Commission of the Covenanted Churches was set up in 1976 to foster the Covenant it removed from the centre of the Council's agenda the responsibility for the Covenant. The result of this is that non-covenanted churches have tended to be excluded, or to exclude themselves, from the debate about unity. How can these churches be involved more fully in the search for unity? Can they be brought into the Covenant or do they need to find other ways of expressing their growing unity? These are important and urgent questions not least in terms of the kind of 'ecumenical instruments' that are necessary in Wales in order to foster the search for unity more effectively.

The Covenant for Union in Wales

The developments within the Covenant over the last ten years can be summarised in terms of four developments. Firstly, in 1979 the Commission published its first major document, *The Principles of Visible Unity in Wales*, which outlined the fundamental principles upon which further progress towards unity within the Covenant could be made. Generally, the responses were positive though not enthusiastic! All the churches raised questions about some fundamental issues while giving assent to the main directions of the document. They focussed particularly on what the document said about ministry in the Church and asked for more work to be done on some specific issues. Consequently, the second development has been the publication in March 1986 of a second major document, *Ministry in a Uniting Church: From Recognition to Reconciliation*. This examines some of the questions raised

by the churches and suggests ways forward towards the reconciliation of ministries. The document 'believes that a fully reconciled ministry will only be possible within a uniting church and therefore outlines a pattern of ministry to be adopted in a uniting church and the steps towards the inauguration of the scheme of union which would bring this about'. The Churches are now in the process of formulating their responses. The third development is the approval in 1981, and the widespread use, of the Covenanted Churches' rite of Holy Communion. Joint eucharists, using this rite, have been a key factor in fostering relations between Covenanted Churches in recent years and many thousands share in such celebrations regularly. Both the rite itself and the joint celebrations have become signs of the growing unity between the churches. It is a matter of concern and frustration to many that, while inter-communion on special occasions to foster unity is a regular feature of ecumenical relations, full eucharistic fellowship between all the Covenanted Churches is not yet possible. The Commission has had to recognise that this must await the fuller agreement and reconciliation which is hoped for through 'Ministry in a Uniting Church'. The fourth development is the very difficult attempt to enable progress within the Covenant at the national level to become effective in the life and mission of the Covenanted churches locally. Area Planning Committees have been set up at a regional level throughout Wales (with variable effectiveness), Church leaders groups are meeting regularly, at national and regional levels, and ecumenical field workers have been seconded by their Churches to work one day a week to foster the Covenant. These developing networks, set alongside local Councils of Churches, are vitally important in encouraging local progress towards unity. Nevertheless, progress has been slow in many places. This is the area which needs tackling most urgently at the present time.

The Welsh Language

During recent years increasing official recognition has been given to the Welsh language in the life and institutions of Wales. Around 20% of the population speak Welsh – the proportion is higher within the churches. The Welsh language is deeply rooted in the Celtic Christian tradition especially through its extensive body of literature. It introduces an additional factor into the search for unity in Wales. How can the churches be enabled to perceive this linguistic diversity as enriching and not as yet another cause for division? This is an essential need as the churches seek to express their unity and wholeness as Welsh-

speaking and English-speaking churches and as they seek to engage together in a ministry of reconciliation for the nation and people of Wales.

Local Ecumenical Projects

There are few such projects in Wales despite continuous efforts to encourage their formation. The oldest established is at Penrhys, a housing area established during the last twenty years on an exposed hillside between the two Rhondda Valleys. It is a small fellowship worshipping and witnessing in a community with enormous social and community problems. It involves all the member churches of the Council. Although it is now set up 'within the spirit of the Covenant' it does in fact predate the Covenant. Another project at Pentwyn, a housing area outside Cardiff involves all the Covenanted Churches and is the direct fruit of the Covenant. It involves an Anglican priest and a Free Church minister, who are themselves members of a wider ministerial team working in the larger area of which Pentwyn is part. Despite some difficulties in the early years this project has developed in a very dynamic and encouraging way. The relation between the growing congregation and the community is close (not least through the Church in Wales school which is the centre for the project at present). These projects are significant because they constantly point towards directions in which the covenanted churches need to move if the Covenant is really to have a creative influence on the life and witness of local churches and are illustrative of the small number of LEPs involving all or most of the churches at present. There is a growing number of situations of shared ministry between two churches or denominations, often including covenanted and non-covenanted churches within one community. They include Welsh-speaking and English-speaking pastorates, in urban, rural and valley communities. This kind of community ministry is a particularly encouraging development, being primarily fostered between the four Welsh language Free Churches, at the initiative of the Free Church Council for Wales, but not confined to those denominations. The churches involved have yet to put as much effort as they should into this kind of project, so that during the next few years there will be far more than the ten or so that exist at present.

There are also a number of examples of shared buildings involving the Church in Wales, the Roman Catholic Church and most of the other Free Churches, in most if not all cases involving two denominations only in any one situation. Finally discussions are currently going on in a number of places about the possibility of an LEP or community project.

It is hoped that there will be some developments over the next year or so, not least as a result of the publication during the autumn of 1986 of *Shared Ministry*, which tries to provide guidelines for such projects within the Covenant. Nonetheless, what is outlined here is not encouraging. Why is it that steps taken by churches at a national level through the Covenant, and which have resulted in measurable progress in the churches' relationships to each other at that level, have not been translated into similar progress at the local level? What is necessary in order to release into the local situation what is undoubtedly the dynamic possibility of the Covenant?

Local Councils of Churches

There are approximately ninety local councils with which the Council of Churches for Wales is in touch, of which between one-third and a half make regular subscriptions and can therefore be assumed to have a more active awareness of the wider ecumenical movement in Wales and more widely. Many of the remainder can be assumed to have little or no active life. Others organise activities such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and Christian Aid Week, but do not otherwise engage their member churches in any really creative relationship.

All the Councils of Churches were invited to respond to the questionnaire which was linked to *Lent '86*. Only ten responses were received! All were from relatively active councils. Seven were set up in the mid-sixties, one in the early 40s and two within the last six years. This would be broadly representative of the remaining councils. They were all councils in urban rather than rural areas. This reflects the distribution nationally, more than 80% being in urban areas and most in predominantly English-speaking rather than Welsh-speaking communities. No councils in Wales employ staff, even on a part-time basis. Five of the councils which responded include the Roman Catholic Church as a full member, and another two have close relations with the R.C. Church. Two of the councils include a black-led congregation amongst their members. The former figure would probably reflect the Welsh norm, but since there are few black-led congregations in Wales, mainly in Cardiff and Newport, no general conclusions can be drawn. All the respondents hold united services on a regular basis, one weekly during Advent and Lent and daily during Holy Week, one on a monthly basis, others quarterly and others at main Christian festivals. This is more encouraging than I would have anticipated and probably represents a growth in united worship. It is likely that the Covenant for Union with its emphasis on regular joint worship, including Holy

Communion, has had an effect on this growth. Only one council, in a mid-Wales town, has extensive links with local statutory and voluntary bodies; another in North Wales, has some links with voluntary bodies; others either have casual links or none at all. This pattern is also quite general in that the majority of councils understand themselves primarily (or exclusively) as bodies which relate churches to one another and not as enabling the churches together to relate to the local or wider community. This is an urgent challenge to local ecumenism in Wales.

By far the most thoughtful response to the questions in section 2 of the questionnaire summarizes what other councils also report: The council 'has certainly broken down barriers and increased understanding that we share a common faith and purpose ... though whether all members of our congregations have been so touched is another matter'. This is the fundamental question for all local councils in Wales: how do insights gained and commitments made within the council become effective in the minds and lives of congregations within the community. All too often (and the responses confirm this) the local council is little more than a meeting place for interested people rather than a proper forum which is representative of, and represents the commitment of, the local congregations. The same response underlines another fundamental problem, namely, that 'the potential for greater things does exist ... if only we could harness it properly'. The reason for this failure is clear: 'The strength of the council in terms of will as well as resources is not such as would enable us to strike out and map new territory ... We either lack the vision or, if we have the vision, it is muted because of our parochial outlook and those (understandable) ties to the past and present that prevent each of us from wanting to move away from our familiar territory - emotionally and not just geographically'. Fundamentally, it is a question of the proper role of a local council and the local congregations' commitment to it. Is it seen as a convenient, though often ineffective, means of co-operation or is it perceived as an instrument and sign of the churches commitment to each other and to the local community, such as will enable their growth in unity as churches and as a community? This is certainly not a representative response; but what the responses say is certainly only too representative of the local ecumenical scene in Wales.

Conclusions

The ecumenical scene in Wales (as elsewhere, I suspect) is both

encouraging and frustrating. There is tremendous potential for progress towards commitment in unity and witness within the various initiatives which have been taken during recent years. It is frustrating because lack either of will or imagination (or both!) has meant that in only a relatively few places have the possibilities of these initiatives been worked out locally. In those LEPs, community ministries, shared pastorates within (and outside) the Covenant, and the more hopeful Councils, there is the potential for considerable growth in unity and common witness. As we search together for appropriate ecumenical instruments for the future we must face the urgent need for releasing this potential much more effectively locally, through both ecumenical and denominational channels.

A SCOTTISH CONTRIBUTION

Kenyon Wright

The Christian Faith was brought to Scotland by the sturdy Celtic missionaries from Ireland. The Reformation came via Geneva, John Calvin and John Knox. In both cases the traditions were significantly different from their parallels in England and Wales. The Faith and the Church have thus contributed substantially to Scotland's sense of national identity and distinctive character. It may therefore be little surprise that the Ecumenical Movement has been something of a late growth.

Historic denominational divisions have been deep in Scotland, reflecting partly the Irish situation with which Scotland has been closely linked. These non-theological factors, combined with tenacious loyalty to theological principles, have combined to make the growth of formal ecumenical relations slow. At the national level, six denominations within Scottish Churches Council have been engaged for many years in a Multi-Lateral Conversation towards church unity, and produced last year a final report entitled *Now Is The Time* expressing the conviction that there were no longer fundamental theological obstacles to unity and that a scheme could be drawn up. Five of the six churches involved, including the Church of Scotland, belong broadly to the Reformed family, while the sixth, The Scottish Episcopal Church, is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Though this scheme is still under discussion, it seems unlikely that the participating churches will be ready to go forward as proposed, but that they will recognise a considerable measure of agreement and ask the Conversations to go on working. Unlike the Inter-Church Process *Not Strangers But Pilgrims* however, neither the Baptist Church nor the Roman Catholic Church have been participants in the Multi-Lateral Conversations (except as observers).

At local level there are more signs of new life. True there are still few formal ecumenical parishes in Scotland – the first, at Livingston New Town, in which four churches are committed, has many critics but seems to have generated a very infectious enthusiasm among its own members. The others – in Murrayfield Edinburgh, in the growing union of two City Centre churches (St Cuthbert's Church of Scotland and St John's Episcopal Church) and in the Morningside United Church, all seem in good heart. There are similar ventures in joint

congregations in Irvine and Falkirk – and many examples of shared buildings – even between the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church – as in Aberdeen. The main emphasis however has been on closer common working for Mission and Service – reflected in the growth of more than one hundred and twenty Local Councils of Churches throughout Scotland – the majority of them including the Roman Catholic Church as a full participant.

At national level too, the working groups related to Scottish Churches Council, usually include all the churches – and are gradually co-ordinating work in areas such as Christian Education; Social Responsibility; Peace; World Development; World Mission; and several others. There is no doubt however that the Inter-Church Process has, both locally and nationally, stimulated a new enthusiasm. The Scottish Steering Committee includes all the major churches Protestant and Roman Catholic, and the Scottish Inter-Church Conference in St Andrews, April 1987, promises to be the first occasion on which representatives of all the churches in Scotland – and of local groups throughout the country too – will meet together ‘in Council’ to mark the way forward for the Church and its witness to the Kingdom.

In some parts, deep abiding prejudices between the Protestant and Roman Catholic still echo something of the Northern Ireland situation. The traditional loyalty to the Word of God; the continuing strength and influence of the main churches in a country where the church-going percentage of the population is still double that of England and where the Church retains a recognised place in the life of the nation, has not proved easy soil for the delicate plant of ecumenical co-operation.

It surprised many that, to put it bluntly, *Lent '86* worked! Apart from the difficulties already mentioned, there is little tradition of Lent study in many churches in Scotland – but the renaming of the Scottish Study Guide as *Springboard '86* was not so much a concession to this as a means of enabling the Study to be done at any time of the year as appropriate. Groups sprang up to an unprecedented and frankly unexpected extent. Well over two hundred groups sent in reports – many of them are continuing – and the degree of awareness and enthusiasm was something of a tonic. Many had anticipated that the whole exercise would, by the experiences of the past, be a fairly low-key affair – taken up by the ‘ecumaniacs’, well known, and who might be expected to respond to such an initiative. In practice however it is clear that the response went far beyond this and reached deep into local congregations in many parts of the country.

Why did it work? Perhaps because for the first time all the major

churches, including the big two (The Church of Scotland and The Roman Catholic Church) participated fully and were together in the Scottish Steering Committee – but the national response was in fact very varied; some of the national church papers gave it constant and enthusiastic coverage, while others gave it scant mention, even when many of their congregations were deeply involved. Perhaps it worked because Radio Scotland – a national station in Scotland – gave the entire Study great prominence in its Sunday services throughout Lent, and in a special Service of Celebration at Easter, while the independent local radio stations all participated in varying degrees – though group responses to the radio programmes varied from the highly enthusiastic to the scornful! Perhaps it worked because, alongside the main Study Book, there was a Scottish Guide Book *What Is The Church?* – though again groups were varied in their enthusiasm for or commitment to one book or the other! Perhaps, and this seems in the end the only possible explanation, it simply happened that the time was right. Though we must always be careful of invoking His guidance too glibly, surely we may say in retrospect that the Holy Spirit has been at work, and that in many parts of the country at local level, in congregations and ecumenical groups there was something of a pilgrimage of discovery.

The many responses received make that pilgrimage of discovery clear. What in fact were the groups led to discover? Six elements seem to come through.

1. A discovery of one another. Many groups spoke of a joy, sometimes almost naive, at their happiness in being together, and in discovering one another as Christians:

"the project has been so full of new insight and understanding, and so worth while in bringing me into contact with Christians I would only have met for polite small talk if at all without its stimulus, that I enthuse at length."

"we want to continue our pilgrimage together – for some of us at least it has become a precious time of fellowship and we will not lose sight of each other."

This sense of discovery is not all joy however. There is a recognition of the pain still felt at the impossibility of complete inter-Communion. There is in many groups a growing awareness of the misunderstandings caused by our use of language.

"as our fellowship grew and openness to each other's differences emerged, we became aware of our ignorance of each other's beliefs and practice. We also believe that this growing together is still being frustrated by ecclesiastical barriers from the top."

"stock religious phrases seem to have sudden shifts of meaning in different denominations. Apart from obvious examples such as 'being saved' we would

include for example the word 'faith' – to some an inter-link system of beliefs they hold about God; to others that by which they commit themselves to Him; some also use it for the teachings of their own denomination referred to as 'the faith'."

Universally however the reaction to this is a desire for increased knowledge, greater fellowship, and deeper understanding.

2. Discovery of lay 'gifts'. Many groups seemed to rediscover the gifts of the Spirit shared by lay people. In several there was even some astonished rejoicing that

"we seem to get on so well without the minister"

One group went so far as to say

"all went well until the minister joined us in the four sessions"

Against this many appreciated greatly the theological guidance given by the clergy and ministers, but this did not detract from the sense of liberation often felt.

"most of us have been people with problems; few have been leaders in their congregations; yet the sharing has been simple but deep"

There was behind this a gentle but persistent questioning of the nature of leadership and initiative. One group, significantly composed entirely of women of different denominations, said:

"the Inter-Church Process suggests that the 'leaders' have decided to look at church structures and to invite ordinary Christians to join together to talk and then to send their findings to the central point to enable the 'leaders' to know how to proceed. The question is, having got insights of ordinary Christians, why do the 'leaders' need to restructure – isn't it all very paternalistic?"

3. The discovery of community. This was both a rediscovery of the community of Christians with one another, and in many cases the re-affirmation of the community as a whole, in the secular world, and the need for the Christian community to relate to that.

"Let the Church be open to the future. Let the Church be willing to risk change. We must continue to live out the story of God's love for the world in prayer and in action. We are learning to trust the Spirit as the travelling people of God engage with the lost, the lonely and the frightened along the way."

4. This led to a discovery of the Church itself, a joyful re-affirmation of the people of God together, seen not primarily in a structure or a hierarchy but in the community of Faith, Hope and Love. This was often side by side with a very profound criticism of the Church. Love is certainly not blind.

*"The Church is like a very dirty window through which we glimpse a great shining light. The miracle is that the light **does** penetrate the window and we do in fact see, albeit through a glass darkly. Surely we can start here and clean the window or some of the accretions."*

Again from a womens' group defining what they want to say to the Church

"(a) The future is more important than the past. God's Spirit is promised to the Church in order to 'guide us into all truth' – surely forwards, not backwards! Yes, of course we value our history, but must not be imprisoned by it. If we allow ourselves to be imprisoned by 'old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago' we separate ourselves from the living Spirit and dig our own separate graves: graves of denominational separation, sexist separation, racial separation, social/class separation. God is Lord over history and cannot be confined, constrained or circumscribed by it. He is not only the God of our forebears but of our children's children.

(b) Let everyone be adult and encourage responsible participation in worship, church life and the spreading of the good news. To see God as companion or friend stimulates our sharing.

(c) Please recognize that the parish system has had its day. It does not foster community and can be an obstacle to that. It is merely a territorial convenience for the purpose of collecting funds for the support of the Church. Instead basic communities should be encouraged where 'people actively bind themselves to each other in commitment as an expression of their commitment to Christ' to face up to today's challenge, not yesterday's.

*(d) The present system as it works is that there are two levels, the clergy who run the church and the laity who are allowed to belong to it. Our structures prevent any real responsibility being entrusted to laity. We are forced into the role of **real** sheep.*

(e) One has to preserve a sense of the absurd to see, for instance, Presbytery, as a response to the wandering untrammelled Son of God.

(f) Adults need to know more about their faith. They should be educated in the faith, but be allowed to reflect on that themselves.

(g) Women's experience can be expressed as: Competition, NO: co-operation, YES. Confrontation, NO: consultation, YES. Independence, NO: interdependence, YES. Omnipotent leadership, NO: group authority, YES.

(h) The use of inclusive language remains a vital aim."

5. There was a discovery, or perhaps a re-discovery, of the Bible. Many groups expressed their sense of the Biblical message coming alive through their common experience and study.

6. The discovery of Hope. Groups were frequently highly critical and often deeply saddened by divisions, misunderstandings and lack of

sensitivity. Despite it all however there breathed through the reports a sense of hope and of looking forward.

"We look forward enthusiastically to future developments nationwide and feedback from this first venture. We have agreed to continue meeting and to investigate other ways in which we can work jointly in our local area."

This was typical of the majority of groups which ended with both hope and commitment. Some pointed to the gaps which might be filled in future study together.

"This process is not just about Church unity but about the role and purpose of the Church in the world. One senses that the groups possibly focussed more on the former and did not entirely get into this latter area. The danger could be that we see the process as merely church based rather than world focussed. I would hope that our Council of Churches in responding to the results will also help to develop this wider concept of ecumenism."

Where do we go from here? At one level many practical and concrete suggestions emerged – some of them local but several to be taken, along with denominational response, to the next stage of the process. One small example must suffice:

"The churches could integrate their theological training schemes; their lay training schemes; and their work in the world. If obedience to love brings revolution then the Church in Scotland must engage as much in Pilton (Edinburgh) as in South Africa."

At local level, Scotland will undertake another study in Lent 1987, on the topic *Pilgrims Together*. This will use the rich feedback given (of which only a sketch is given here) to ask questions about the next stage and to give all the groups an opportunity during the fourth week of Lent, to speak directly and immediately to the national conference taking place in St Andrews from the 3-5 April 1987.

Something has happened – something is happening! Whether the stirrings are the beginning of a new life and even a new Reformation, is not ours to command or to design. We can only respond faithfully in the hope that the time *has* come, that the pressure both of the Spirit and of the world are truly upon us to rethink and reshape our response to the call of God in Christ, to be *Not Strangers But Pilgrims Together*.

For further reading and discussion

The Unity Scene *by John Matthews* B.C.C. £3.25

Mission and Evangelism : A programme for local churches
by John Matthews B.C.C. 95p

Down to earth : Stories of church based community work
edited by Wendy Godfrey B.C.C. £3.25

Local Church Unity – Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Projects
and Sponsoring Bodies B.C.C. £2.25

Ministry in Local Ecumenical Projects *edited by Hugh Cross*
B.C.C. £2.50

Starter Pack for Local Church Unity B.C.C. £1

Local Churches in Covenant: Catholic Information Service

Video Report on Lent '86 B.C.C./C.T.S. £10

Reflections : How churches see their life and mission
B.C.C./C.T.S. £2.95

Observations on the church from Britain and abroad
B.C.C./C.T.S. £2.95

£2.

Views from the Pews begins with a popular account of what individuals and groups who took part in Lent '86 want to say to the churches involved in the Inter-Church Process 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims'. This analysis of the Questionnaires and Group Reports is by Judy Turner-Smith, Senior Research Officer of Trumedia Study (Oxford) Limited. It is accompanied by a survey of local ecumenism in Britain today. Hugh Cross, Ecumenical Officer for England, writes about Local Ecumenical Bodies in England. The Ecumenical Scene in Wales is described by Noel Davies of the Council of Churches for Wales; and a Scottish contribution comes from Kenyon Wright of the Scottish Churches' Council. The message from all these is the same: it is time to become one and to engage together in God's mission to the world, whilst valuing the different traditions and insights we bring to our common task.

Views from the Pews is one of a series of books and audio visual material published as part of the Inter-Church Process 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims'.

The series also includes:

Reflections - how churches view their life and mission.

Observations - perspectives on the Church from Britain and abroad.

Video report on Lent '86 introduced by Sally Magnusson.



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