

Reflection of the Month: Sharing our sufferings

Eric Southwick writes:

The bombing of concertgoers in Manchester, many of whom were young people, has shocked and saddened people around the world. The tragedy has touched so many lives, the images of the victims beaming with innocence remind us that it could have been us or our children attending some gathering filled with hope and excitement, the joy of a shared experience enjoyed by thousands of others.



This dreadful event reminds me that, some years ago, I visited the city of Caen in Normandy, France which had suffered devastating bombing in the battle to liberate it during the Normandy landings. The city had been the scene of fierce fighting as the retreating forces resisted the invasion resulting in 70% of the ancient city being destroyed and 2,000 civilian lives being lost.

Photograph's which formed part of an exhibition in the Eglise Saint-Jean portrayed the extent of the devastation of what once had been a beautiful Norman city. The rubble surrounding those ruins gave no clues as to the buildings which had for hundreds of years stood and been the home for countless generations of Caen's citizens. The destruction of the buildings pointed to the great loss of life and the trauma suffered by those who had survived the battle for the city.

The Eglise Saint-Jean had been restored to its former beauty but the exhibition bore testimony to the cost of conflict and the pain inflicted upon its residents. It was easy to see why those who had lost so much would be resentful of those who had caused this devastation by bombing the city and why there had been a warning that Britons were less welcome here than in other parts of France.

However, there was further evidence of the battle on a wall of the church, the remains of a carved wooden statue of Christ. Apparently, the SS had set fire to the original cross on which the statue had hung, an act of deliberate vandalism. The fire had destroyed most of the statue, all that was left was the carved noble head and the charred remains of the torso with an open chest cavity created by the flames.



Underneath this sorrowful image someone had written of the way in which this battered statue symbolised Christ's sharing in our sufferings, the statue having been "re-crucified".

Over the years since that visit to Caen I have on numerous occasions thought about that statue, it is a powerful reminder that in all our sufferings God shares with us. The image is one which speaks beyond the suffering of the citizens of Caen, beyond those who suffered in seeking to liberate it and those who suffered in resisting the invasion.

Suffering comes in many ways, it is part of our humanity to experience physical, mental and emotional suffering. In our pain we often have a sense of isolation, a feeling that no one understands yet the history of the Church is filled with those who have found that in all our sufferings there is One Who not only understands but shares in them.

Yet this knowledge should be more than a solace: it should be a guard against thoughtlessly or wilfully hurting our fellow human beings.

We live in a world which is divided in so many ways, such as through racial, social, geographic, economic, political, and religious differences. Yet it is not those divisions in themselves that separate humanity, it is our attitudes, words and actions. It is a sad indictment of our human nature that we allow such differences to be the source of conflict which inevitably leads to suffering. We cannot avoid conflict on our own, as the saying goes 'for war, one side is enough; for peace you need two', however, we can strive to prevent discord and set an example of Christ like living.

Eric Southwick is a non-stipendiary minister at Stanley Street Independent Methodist Church, Seaham, County Durham.



Photo credit for the Caen cross: Patty Guimont.

CTE Presidents' statement after the Manchester attack

Tuesday 23 May 2017

The six Presidents of Churches Together in England have issued this agreed statement about the Manchester attack:

'Our thoughts and prayers are with all those bereaved and injured by the cruel, senseless terrorist attack in Manchester. May God grant them strength and courage. Our faith teaches us that even the worst of evils can never defeat love, so we pray that the people of Manchester, of all faiths and none, will discover a renewed unity as they respond to this atrocity with compassion, dignity and hope.'



[Information about the six CTE Presidents](#)

[Statements from church leaders collated by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland](#)

[Statement from Inter Faith Network \(download from CTE News page\)](#)

['Looking after One Another' from the Inter Faith Network \(download from CTE News page\)](#)



photos © Jenny Bond

The Hope Charter A growing initiative ahead of the forthcoming election



The Presidents of Churches Together in the Merseyside Region are pleased to outline and invite you to be part of a growing initiative around the [Hope Charter](#). The charter has its origins in a church-led initiative in Merseyside that was a response to the increasing funding crisis that our City Region is experiencing. Irrespective of our view on funding cuts for local authorities, many citizens do not realise that these disproportionately affect areas of significant social need. Given that one of the largest expenditure items for Local Authorities is social care, the impact on the vulnerable is obvious.

The Hope Charter began as an initiative to highlight this reality, with no expectation that it would coincide with an election campaign. In the light of current reality, we have amended our plans somewhat, and are suggesting that parliamentary candidates are invited to sign the Charter to indicate their support.

[The full text of the Charter is available from our website](#), but in summary it recognises the importance of social care, the need for a proper and fair funding arrangement for social care, and better recognition of the value of care workers through realistic remuneration and working conditions.

As a potential partner in this initiative, we are inviting you not only to sign the Charter, but to also make representation to your local candidates to invite them to sign. Our website will keep a record of all parliamentary candidates who have done this, so that voters are able to make informed decisions on this basis.

We have [provided a sample letter](#) that you can send to your local candidates, however in so doing we would ask that you send this to EVERY registered candidate in your local constituency.

Please join us in making sure that the provision of social care not only remains a key issue during the election campaign, but in seeking a significant contingent of MP's in

the next Parliament, who can be held account for their commitment to take meaningful action to address this important issue.

Most Revd. Malcolm McMahon OP
Rt Revd Paul Bayes
Revd Phil Jump
Major Drew McCombe
Revd Jacky Embrey
Revd Sheryl Anderson

Presidents of Churches Together in the Merseyside Region

Abundant Life message re General Election



From the Joint Public Issues Team who write:

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”

Leaders of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church have called for Christians to be guided by their faith in discerning what sort of society they wish the new government to create and have issued the following statement.

As we prepare for the General Election, we recognise that Christians across our nations will prayerfully vote for a variety of parties and candidates in good conscience. We celebrate the fact that Christian people are inspired by their faith to debate passionately – and to disagree well - on how the United Kingdom should be governed at this present moment.

While much of the debate around the election is rightly focused on individual policies, it is also our duty to ask what sort of society we would wish our government to build. As Christians we have to embrace the reality that our vision will never be achieved by humankind alone, and to look beyond our human time-frames to the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is this future hope that gives meaning and direction to present struggles.

Jesus offers us abundant life, life in all its fullness, and we are called to reflect this eternal promise on earth as it is in heaven. If we believe that all people are made in the image of God, we must surely pray, work and vote for a society in which all people are enabled to flourish and live life in all its fullness in the here and now too.

This is a society in which everyone has enough food, resources, shelter and opportunity to succeed, and where people are not left behind or damaged by poverty and inequality. This is a society where our common humanity is valued and respected, where people can find refuge, and where everyone can contribute towards the common good. This is a society that acts to protect God’s creation, and seeks to be a peaceful influence in the world, promoting human rights, religious freedom and economic justice for all.

So we invite you to pray for everyone standing for office and for all voters. We pray that Christians across our nations entering the polling booth on 8 June do so as followers of Jesus Christ, seeking to take part in creating a society which reflects God's kingdom of goodness and of justice. A society that encourages life in all its fullness.

Signatories:

Revd Lynn Green, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Rt Rev Dr Derek Browning, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

Revd Dr Roger L Walton, President of the Methodist Conference

Ms Rachel Lampard MBE, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

Revd Kevin Watson, General Assembly Moderator of the United Reformed Church

1st June 2017

Friendship Trumps Theology for Church-Seeking Students New Resource from Student Christian Movement



SCM - a Body in Association of Churches Together in England - reports:

Students prioritise friendship and community over theology or denomination when finding a church at university, according to a new resource published by the Student Christian Movement (SCM). Finding a safe environment that offers security and familiarity is a key concern for students moving to university, with churches often providing that steadying influence in a time of great change.

The findings are part of research published in a new resource for churches, called 'Welcoming Students to Your Church'. It is a 44-page booklet packed with case studies from students and church ministers, top tips and advice on a range of issues, and practical ideas for building a vibrant student ministry that's welcoming and relevant.

Hilary Topp, SCM's National Coordinator, said: "Knowing where to start in building a vibrant student ministry can often be daunting – with other priorities often getting in the way. Too often, student ministry is considered a millstone around the neck of local churches, when instead it should be a springboard to exciting expressions of worship, outreach and community. We hope this guide can inspire more church leaders and volunteers to pour more energy and resources into making this possible."

According to Revd Jenny Morgans, a Deacon at North Lambeth Parish, students are keen to re-create a sense of family as soon as possible when they move to university – by meeting new people and making friends. Within a church context, the feeling of being part of a community was often prioritised over the need to agree theologically with a particular teaching or enjoy a particular activity.

For more information, visit www.movement.org.uk

Pope Tawadros received by the Queen and Archbishop of Canterbury



On his first pastoral visit, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, 118th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, has been visiting Coptic Orthodox parishes and meeting with communities across the United Kingdom.

Pope Tawadros has also consecrated churches, presided over Liturgies and Vespers services with ecumenical guests, and addressed hundreds of young people at a Coptic youth gathering.

During his visit, Pope Tawadros II was received by Her Majesty The Queen at Windsor Castle on 9 May. This historic audience with Her Majesty was also attended by His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom, and the Rt Rev David Conner, Dean of Windsor.

In the days following, Pope Tawadros was the Guest of Honour at a lunch in the Palace of Westminster, hosted by The Rt Revd the Lord Bishop of Coventry, Dr Christopher Cocksworth, who said, "...we feel deeply united with you and your people in sufferings that you experience, and we pray for you very much. I know that connection extends beyond those who would call themselves Christians, to a solidarity of humanity with you and your people and a huge respect for, to quote another virtue from the Bible, the 'patient endurance' that you always express when these difficulties occur and your words of peace."

On Friday 12 May, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II was received by The Most Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, at a historic meeting in Lambeth Palace. During the visit, Pope Tawadros met privately with the Archbishop, later joining the rest of the Coptic delegation and ecumenical guests, when addresses were delivered. His Holiness signed the official guestbook with the words 'Love Never Ends', and presented a Coptic icon of the 'Flight to Egypt' of the Holy Family to Archbishop Justin.

During his address, Pope Tawadros II thanked the Archbishop for his hospitality and said: "We are grateful to God for the co-operation, dialogue, and Christian love between our two Churches. We are hopeful and pray for more and more Christian unity globally and we believe it is possible through the love of God, and through the ecumenical blood of all Christian martyrs."

Following the meeting at Lambeth Palace, the two Church leaders and their delegations, attended Evensong at Westminster Abbey at the invitation of the Dean of Westminster Rev Dr John Hall, walking side by side during the procession, and praying together at the shrine of St Edward the Confessor.

Evensong was followed by a general meeting led by His Holiness the Pope, with members of the Coptic community, in St Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey. The Pope gave a sermon and presented gifts to members of the community. Before the meeting, Pope Tawadros was officially welcomed by the Dean of Westminster who spoke of his solidarity with the plight of Christians in the Middle East and in Egypt, and spoke of unity, saying:

"The cause of unity between Christians is something which is dear to us and immensely precious. It is wonderful that in this 21st Century, relations between all the Churches, develop so strongly and warmly together, and Your role, Your Holiness, in convening leaders of the Churches including Pope Francis and others has been an example to all of us."

Photo supplied by Coptic Church UK. Further photographs are available via www.CopticMediaUK.com and www.Flickr.com/CopticMedia

Read more about the visit:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/498278/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Pope_Tawadros_received.aspx

Thy Kingdom Come Anglican Pentecostal Prayer Meeting

Organised by the Anglican-Pentecostal Steering Group, a prayer meeting was held at New Testament Church of God - Brixton Community Church - at the start of *Thy Kingdom Come* on Thursday 25th May 2017.



Jointly hosted by the Pastor of the church, Bishop Eric Brown, the Pentecostal President of Churches Together in England, and Bishop Keith Sinclair, the Archbishop of Canterbury's lead Bishop for Anglican-Pentecostal Relations, local and national church leaders and representatives, met together for 2 hours of prayer in both traditions.

The joint prayer event was planned to demonstrate how both traditions pray. The time was spent in different styles, including Anglican Common Prayer and Pentecostal Extempore Prayer, aided by a worship band from Elim Pentecostal Church led by Dave Newton, Principal of Regents College for the Elim Church.

The Anglican-Pentecostal Steering Group planned the prayer meeting at the start of the national and international *Thy Kingdom Come* ten days of prayer for evangelisation. The organisation and intent reflected on the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury in a letter to Church Leaders about *Thy Kingdom Come*:

'I am mindful of the deep desire within all our churches to reach out into the love of Jesus, to serve the people among whom we live and work and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus in word and deed. There is a dynamic link between prayer, our unity in Christ and God's mission ... Above all I hope that together we may call our people to pray as one



people in Christ. There is no prescription about how we should pray. I would like to encourage people to pray in ways that are authentic to them and rooted in their situations'.

[Information about Thy Kingdom Come](#)

The Great Get Together

Faith Leaders unite to support celebration for Jo Cox MP



Leaders of the UK's main faith groups have all thrown their weight behind a huge 'Get Together' in memory of the murdered MP Jo Cox. Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and other faith groups are joining together to celebrate what we hold in common over the weekend of 16-18 June.

Tens of thousands of streets parties, BBQs, picnics and iftars are being held in all corners of the country. Brendan Cox, Jo's widower, said he wanted the first anniversary of her murder to be marked by a joyous occasion that helped bring communities together. He said this would be more relevant than ever after polling day in the General Election, and welcomed the fact that so many people of all faiths and none would be taking part.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, said the events would be a fitting tribute to "her commitment to the inclusion and flourishing of all people in society".

The Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, said he looked forward to taking part in what will be an "invaluable opportunity for community engagement on an unprecedented scale."

Jehangir Malik, Chief Executive of Muslim Aid, said: "The Great Get Together is a wonderful way to bring communities together this summer - I look forward to being involved."

Rev Canon Aled Edwards, Chief Executive of Churches Together in Wales, said: "The Great Get Together is a fitting tribute to Jo, who we remember did so much for refugees and others in need in our society."

Rt Revd Richard Atkinson and Jatinder Singh Birdi, Co-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK, said: "This is a very special occasion: one where people of different faiths can come together in a spirit of friendship and unity."

On Wednesday 3rd May faith leaders came together and pledged to organise Great Get Togethers in every community of the UK. Plans are being finalised for people to visit each other's place of worship and hold joint events to demonstrate Jo Cox's belief that:

"...we are far more united and have far more in common than that which divides us".

Wednesday's meeting was hosted by Near Neighbours, the Church Urban Fund's social cohesion programme, which is organising events with other religions in a number of inner city areas.

The British Humanists, Hindu Council UK, Church of Scotland, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Muslim Council of Britain, Catholic Bishops Conference and other groups have pledged their support.

You can find out how to take part at www.greatgettogether.org

Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Landévennec 2017

On Sunday 7 May, twenty-nine pilgrims from different Christian traditions living in Cornwall and the South-West gathered at the Ferryport in Plymouth for an



overnight crossing to Roscoff. Every two or three years since 1989 there has been an ecumenical pilgrimage led by a group of church leaders to the Benedictine Abbey of St Guénolé at Landévennec in Brittany. This year the party included the Bishop of Truro, Tim Thornton, the Bishop of Plymouth, Mark O' Toole, Methodist Chairman, Steve Wild, Salvation Army Majors Jean and Ian Harris and Lesley Chandler, a member of the Society of Friends. The pilgrimage was organised by the St Guénolé Working Group on behalf of Churches Together in Cornwall.

Early on Monday morning, the group was collected by a Breton coach and driven for about an hour across rich agricultural countryside to the Crozon peninsula where the Abbey is located in a sheltered inlet from the sea. While the present buildings date from the 1950s and 1960s, the site has been occupied by a monastic community, off and on, since the fifth century when the first monastery was founded by St Guénolé and a group of eleven followers.

After a welcome and settling into the guest accommodation, the pilgrim group started to find their bearings. Entranced by the tranquillity and natural beauty of the place, we engaged with the routine of prayer that structures the daily life of the monks. The services in the cavernous modern church are in French but that proved to be a minimal barrier: we could not fail to be impressed by the exquisite chanting of the psalms, accompanied by either gentle zither notes or organ chords, and by the dignity of a liturgy that is ancient in structure yet modern in nuance.

Tuesday was designated as a time of Silent Retreat. Some managed to attend Vigils at 5.20 although most began their day with Lauds at 8.00 am. Mass was celebrated at 11.15 and was followed by the main meal of the day. The brief office of None took place at 2.00 pm. The evening office of Vespers at 6.15 pm was followed by supper and the day ended with Compline at 8.30 pm.

During the day there were two Retreat Addresses in English by members of the community. Abbot Jean-Michel spoke about the parable of the Prodigal Son. He prefers

to call it the parable of the Mercy of God because the father does not judge his wayward son, he does not humiliate him or call for repentance, he is simply overjoyed at the son's return. Brother Francois-Xavier shared with us his insights about a painting by the priest and artist, Sieger Köder. The painting depicts Christ washing the feet of Peter at the Last Supper. He suggested that, whereas differing beliefs about the significance of Holy Communion lead to dissention among Christian traditions, there are no such divisions about the washing of feet.

To read more visit:

[http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/498266/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Pilgrimage_to_Land%A9vennec.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/498266/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Pilgrimage_to_Land%20A9vennec.aspx)

Post-doctoral Research Associate

Ecclesial Learning about Women and the English Churches through Receptive Ecumenism



The Centre for Catholic Studies (CCS) within the Durham University's Department of Theology and Religion, in partnership with the National Board of Catholic Women and the Caulfield Foundation, invites applications for a two-year post-doctoral Research Associate in 'Ecclesial Learning about Women and the English Churches through Receptive Ecumenism'.

This is an opportunity for a first-rank early career, post-doctoral researcher. The appointee will have energy and proven gifts as a scholar and will be a full member of our internationally regarded research centre, situated within the UK's research-leading Department of Theology and Religion (RAE 2008 & REF 2014). Application for the post [must be via the on-line application form](#).

Closing date for applications: mid-day on Thursday 8 June 2017

Churches Together in England in 2016

CTE has just published its [review of 2016](#), in advance of the publication of the 2016 Report and Accounts for the Charity Commission.



The year started with sorrow as many colleagues gathered for the funeral of John Bradley. John spent much of his ministry working for Christian unity and it was deeply moving and profoundly encouraging to see the strength of the relationships built up over the years. It affirmed the importance of relationships, one of CTE's strategic priorities at the heart of our work.

The annual review pays tribute to the many ways in which relationships are fostered and highlights local relationships which are the heartbeat of English ecumenism. Our Enabling Group (the members' meeting) flourishes on the relationships forged between the churches which rejoice in their diversity and in their underlying unity in a shared discipleship in Jesus Christ.



Action for mission, another strategic priority, is illustrated in diverse ways, including our focus on Pentecostal and Multicultural Relations. Of particular note in 2016 were two projects, one to combat modern slavery and human trafficking and one to recognise the contribution of Black African and Caribbean service personnel to World War One. Both of these will come to fruition in 2017. Evangelisation and mission are also key and of particular note has been *Thy Kingdom Come*, a venture to which our Presidents have wholeheartedly committed.

Our third, but equally important, priority is theological reflection, which is woven into all we do. Of particular note was the first ever National Pentecostal Symposium and we hope that the papers presented there will find a publisher, to allow a wider and popular engagement with Pentecostal theology and spirituality.

The review of 2016 also looks at various governance issues, not least the unexpected decision of the Church of England to reduce its funding to CTE by £80K. In response, CTE's Directors initiated a review from the *Theos Think Tank* which is due to report in the autumn of 2017.

The review ends on an upbeat note, committing CTE to seek all avenues for using our expertise in mission, education, theology and multicultural issue to the benefit of its members.

[Download the 2016 Review](#)

1 June 2017

Movement Day 2017

Churches Together in England is one of the many partners of 'Movement Day 2017' to be held in London 6th/7th October at Westminster Central Hall. All national, intermediate, and local networks of Churches Together are invited to attend this sharing of 'unity movements for transformation of our villages towns and cities' along with 600 delegates already booked.



MOVEMENT_DAY_UK_

Here Roger Sutton introduces Movement Day and where delegate groups are coming from in a video message:



Click picture or page link:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/291417/Home/Resources/Evangelisation/Movement_Day_2017/Movement_Day_2017.aspx

Jim Currin, staff member at CTE for Evangelisation, Mission and Media, has been involved in the planning for Movement Day 2017 with Roger Sutton and says:

We want to do more than co-badge this conference. I estimate that there are hundreds of Churches Together groups passionate about their local communities and serving them with pastoral care, youth and children's work, luncheon clubs, foodbanks, street pastors, debt advice and in a hundred more ways. As we have been praying for 'Thy Kingdom Come' we look for the coming kingdom in our communities and that means mission as transformation.

We are doing this already often alongside other unity groups linked through the Gather networks or new groups of churches working together that are focussed locally without wider networks. Movement Day is a great opportunity for us all to come together as an expression of unity among unity movements, to pray, learn, contribute and work together for the good of the communities we serve in Jesus' name.

Information about Movement Day 2017 and link for booking delegation groups: <http://movementday.uk/>

[Communication Notes PDF](#)

[Contact Jim Currin re Movement Day 2017](#)

And finally ...

Centre for Theology and Justice launched

In a culmination of various collaborations between Christian Aid, Church Action on Poverty, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Luther King House in Manchester, the 'Centre for Theology and Justice' was launched at Luther King House in Manchester on 10th May 2017.

To find out more visit: <https://ctbi.org.uk/centre-for-theology-and-justice-launched/>

Christian Aid ask Party Leaders about the World's poor

Christian Aid, an Agency of Churches Together in England, invited all the national political party leaders to write about their policy for the world's poor. In a Press Release headed *Why Britain Must Not Turn Its Back On The World's Poor*, and to mark 60 years of Christian Aid Week the leaders of the major UK-wide political parties Theresa May, Jeremy Corbyn and Tim Farron have written articles in the Church Times outlining their views on Britain's role in the world covering issues including the aid budget, the refugee crisis and helping to eradicate global poverty.

Link to the Church Times: www.churchtimes.co.uk.

Read the replies from the CTE News page:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/498270/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Why_Britain_Must.aspx

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