



June 2011

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Ten Years since Foot and Mouth

As I write this, I can't help but think back ten years to when there was little time for writing, when in fact there was little time for anything but taking phone calls and dealing with the appeals for help that those calls brought in. That summer of 2001 will long be remembered by anyone involved in agriculture or who just lived in the countryside as being the worst part of the nightmare that was brought on by the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease.

The Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) became a major support centre for those whose lives and businesses had been blighted by FMD and also for the many who were offering help. Within the first few days of the outbreak the ARC-Addington Fund (now the Addington Fund) had been established by the churches in response to the crisis and, with its base in the ARC, was averaging 5 - 600 calls each day in May and June from people seeking help or information or just wanting someone to talk to.

Farms that were unable to move and thus sell livestock found themselves with no income, dwindling supplies of animal feed, and increasing numbers of young stock as their herds and flocks continued to give birth. They rang in with desperate pleas for help to purchase much needed feed. Rural businesses that were cut off from their customer base were ringing for financial help so that they could just remain solvent until the crisis was passed. Rural clergy, agricultural chaplains and Farm Crisis Network volunteers would ring requesting information on the latest outbreaks or just wanting news of applications that they had submitted on behalf of local people. Newspapers, radio stations and television companies were calling in for updates as to how people were coping and for stories that would continue to encourage the widespread public support for the Farming Help charities.

And some just rang to check that those providing the help and support were being helped and supported themselves. Their concern, kindness and above all their prayers meant so much during those dark, hectic days. At those moments - when those staffing the phone lines or administering the grants were so exhausted that they felt too tired to pray or when their minds were so occupied and anxious that they couldn't put two words together in prayer - it meant so much to know that others were praying for them.

Ten years on, FMD is now a distant memory for most people. Whilst scars remain, most farms have returned to normal, visitors have returned to the countryside, businesses that then struggled are thriving and all seems well. Indeed, for most that is the case. The countryside continues to provide a wonderful environment in which to live, work, bring up children and enjoy retirement. Farming is still physically, emotionally and spiritually rewarding for most - even if the financial rewards aren't always great.

To leave it there, however, is to ignore what rural life can be and often is like for the rest. The Commission for Rural Communities has stated, for example, that over 900,000 adults and children continue to live on or under poverty line in rural England. These families and individuals are physically isolated from services that the rest of society takes for granted, are unable to access social, cultural and leisure facilities and have little to look forward to in terms of employment opportunities.

Whilst many farmers prosper, others continue to suffer deflated prices and continued problems with disease. The days of FMD are thankfully past but in their place there is the continued scourge of Bovine TB. Rarely does it hit the headlines, except when there is opposition to the calls for badgers as carriers of the disease to be culled and rarely is there mention of the thousands of dairy cows that have been slaughtered, pedigree lines that have been put under threat and livelihoods that have been jeopardised. Very rarely is there word of the stress and anxiety the disease is causing on the farms that are affected.

For those in the countryside who continue to suffer in these and many other ways, the church remains a source of hope and help - both practical and prayerful. For those churches, the Arthur Rank Centre remains the source of encouragement, support and expertise providing invaluable links with rural and farming organisations and government at a national level.

ARC Sunday is on June 26th when congregations are being asked to pray for rural communities and churches and the people who live and worship in them; to remember their needs, anxieties and problems before God and also to praise and thank him for all that is good and wonderful about the countryside and being able to experience it and enjoy it. Resources for worship are available on the ARC website (www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk). Prayers are also asked for the team at the ARC, for the work they do and the people they work with.

Those prayers meant so much back in the summer of 2001 and they are as needed and as appreciated in the summer of 2011. [Back to top](#)

Peace message closes convocation

Participants at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) released a message on Tuesday expressing their unified experience of a week-long exploration of a just peace and to navigate a path forward as they return to their homes and churches across the world. Attempting to take into account each other's contexts and histories, IEPC participants were unified in their aspiration that war should become illegal and that peace is central in all religious traditions. The message states: "With partners of other faiths, we have recognized that peace is a core value in all religions, and the promise of peace extends to all people regardless of their traditions and commitments. Through intensified inter-religious dialogue we seek common ground with all world religions."

The participants acknowledged that each church and each religion brings with it a different standpoint from which to begin walking toward a just peace. Some begin from a standpoint of personal conversion and morality. Others stress the need to focus on mutual support and correction within the body of Christ, while still others encourage churches' commitment to broad social movements and the public witness of the church. "Each approach has merit," the message, which was crafted by a seven-member message committee chaired by Bishop Ivan Abrahams of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, states, "they are not mutually exclusive. In fact they belong inseparably together. Even in our diversity we can speak with one voice."

Abrahams said he trusts that IEPC participants will find their voices in the message. "In many ways, this convocation is a milestone in the march toward just peace," he said. "The words 'reaping' and 'harvesting' have been intrinsic to the life of this convocation. This message is to ourselves, to our churches and related organizations, and to the world that is bruised and broken and that God so loves."

The message also acknowledged that the church has often obstructed the path toward just peace. "We realize that Christians have often been complicit in systems of violence, injustice, militarism, racism, casteism, intolerance and discrimination. We ask God to forgive our sins, and to transform us as agents of righteousness and advocates of Just Peace." The message continued to address the four themes of the convocation: peace in the community, peace with the earth, peace in the marketplace, and peace among the peoples, allowing for specific emphasis on each theme and how they complement to the ethical and theological approach to the pursuit of Just Peace.

The IEPC message captures only part of a truly historic event, said the Revd Dr Walter Altmann, moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee, as he received the IEPC message on behalf of the WCC. "You take with you much more than a text; you take with you a profound ecumenical experience," he said. "The complexity of the issues we have addressed will certainly require further work, reflection and action." The ending of WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence is also a new beginning, he added. "As we return, each of us becomes a living message for the IEPC," he said.

More than 60 of some 1,000 IEPC participants commented on a draft message, and their input was taken into account as the final message was crafted. Moderating the comments was Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, vice-moderator of the WCC Central Committee. "This final text belongs to you, and to us, and to all of us," he said, "and this will be spread out around the world by the closing of this convocation." The IEPC participants responded to a reading of their final message with a standing ovation. The general secretary of the WCC, Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, expressed his pride to the IEPC participants who challenged themselves and each other to reach new levels of understanding and determination. "We are called to be one in our witness," he said. "We also see that the way to just peace has united us. This is a gift for all of us and we shall use it well. This week has brought many signs of your commitment. Sometimes we need to struggle. Sometimes we need to feel it isn't that easy." The participation of some 95 youth in the IEPC was also acknowledged during the closing of the event. Sanna Eriksson, representing the Church of Sweden, spoke on behalf of the young IEPC participants who planned activities and had highly visible participation throughout the convocation. "We rejoice that young people participated in this meeting in a wide variety of roles," she said. "We thank those churches and organizations who sent young people as their representatives." The IEPC message also expressed profound gratefulness to its hosts in Jamaica and the entire Caribbean region. Revd Gary Harriott, general secretary of the Jamaica Council of Churches, said that the entire Caribbean region was both proud and excited to host the IEPC in Jamaica. "It was far more than planning an event, as some very important relationships were established, which we hope will remain intact even after IEPC," he said.

The final message may be complete but the work of the IEPC is only beginning, said Prof. Dr Fernando Enns, who was moderator of the preparatory committee for the IEPC. "We are only beginning to grasp the possibilities we have when we really respect one another. The church shall not speak to the marginalized; the church is where the marginalized are." IEPC participants should celebrate their experience, he said, but should not rest satisfied. "Our journey must continue," he said. "You and I, we shall hold each other accountable. The church is either accepting the call to just peace or it is not the church at all."

[IEPC website](#) [IEPC photo galleries](#) [IEPC videos](#)

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ARCIC III holds first meeting in Bose, Italy

The Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission has completed the first meeting of its new phase (ARCIC III) at the Monastery of Bose in northern Italy (May 17-27, 2011). The Commission, chaired by the Most Reverend David Moxon (Anglican Archbishop of the New Zealand Dioceses) and the Most Reverend Bernard Longley (Roman Catholic Archbishop of Birmingham) comprises eighteen theologians from a wide range of backgrounds across the world. In response to the Programme set forth by Pope Benedict and Archbishop Rowan Williams in their 2006 Common Declaration, discussions have focussed on the interrelated issues: the Church as Communion, local and universal, and how in communion the local and universal Church come to discern right ethical teaching. The Programme also required the Commission to re-examine how the "commitment to the common goal of the restoration of complete communion in faith and sacramental life" is to be understood and pursued today, and to present the work of ARCIC II in its entirety with appropriate commentaries to assist its reception.

In addressing these issues, the Commission has devoted time to introducing its new members to the history and achievements of ARCIC, and has benefited from the shared experience of those who were members of previous phases. Members have worked both in plenary sessions and in small groups, developing plans to address the tasks that derive from its mandate. Over the coming years, the Commission will examine how the abiding goal of the dialogues is currently perceived and understood, and how that goal will inform the entire dialogue process.

In considering the method that ARCIC III will use, the Commission was particularly helped by the approach of 'receptive ecumenism', which seeks to make ecumenical progress by learning from our partner, rather than simply asking our partner to learn from us. Receptive ecumenism is more about self-examination and inner conversion than convincing the other; Anglicans and Roman Catholics can help each other grow in faith, life and witness to Christ if they are open to being transformed by God's grace mediated through each other. ARCIC is committed to modelling the receptive ecumenism it advocates. It intends to find ways to consult with the members of its churches at many levels as its work matures.

ARCIC III will present all the documents of ARCIC II, together with elucidations based upon responses already received, for reception by the relevant authorities of both communions, and for study at all levels of the churches' life.

ARCIC III has decided that it will address the two principal topics together in a single document. It has drawn up a plan for its work that views the Church above all in the light of its rootedness in Christ through the Paschal Mystery. This focus on Jesus Christ, human and divine, gives the Commission a creative way to view the relationship between the local and universal in communion. The Commission will seek to develop a theological understanding of the human person, human society, and the new life of grace in Christ. This will provide a basis from which to explore how right ethical teaching is determined at universal and local levels. ARCIC will base this study firmly in scripture, tradition and reason, and draw on the previous work of the Commission. It will analyze some particular questions to elucidate how our two Communion approach moral decision making, and how areas of tension for Anglicans and Roman Catholics might be resolved by learning from the other. ARCIC III does this conscious of the fact that what unites us is greater than what divides us.

The work of the Commission members has been enriched by sharing in the liturgical and spiritual life of the sisters and brothers of the Monastery of Bose, whose ecumenical mission and constant prayer have provided a supportive context for ARCIC. They were encouraged by visits from the bishop of the local diocese and by the bishop responsible for ecumenism for the northern Italian dioceses. The Commission will now organize papers and continue its work along the lines it has proposed, in preparation for its next meeting in 2012. [Back to top](#)

European Churches concerned about widening gap between rich and poor

Patriarch Daniel of Romania said that Churches have to strengthen Civil Society in Crisis Times as the CALL Network met at the Romanian Patriarchate in Bucharest.

"We are very concerned that the economic crisis will create more gaps between the rich and the poor people in Europe. The churches have to raise their voice against greed and the unjust benefits of speculation," explained His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel from the Romanian Orthodox Church in a message to the CALL Network in Bucharest. Bishop Ciprian, who welcomed the Conference on behalf of the Patriarch, warned against attempts to limit the responsibility of the churches towards society to spiritual questions. The responsibility of the churches for spirituality and solidarity cannot be separated from each other.

Bishop Vicar Dr. Daniel Zikeli from the Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession in Romania pointed out the joint responsibility of church and state for well-being in society. "According to the Lutheran understanding, church and state have different roles, but a joint responsibility to care for the people in a society."

State Secretary Valentin Mocanu from the Romanian Government stressed the close partnership between the churches and the state in the field of social assistance. "The strength of the churches is the direct connection with society. This allows us to reach the target groups in a much better way." Prof. Dr. Radu Preda from the University in Clus urged the churches to develop a "social theology": "The churches must develop a prophetic practice based on their values and principles."

During the CALL Network's second Assembly in Bucharest on 11-13 May, members discussed the increasing and more widespread problems of precarious work; the need for an economically, socially and ecologically sustainable economy; work/life balance, including Sunday protection; and the role of religion in the workplace in Europe. They also expressed a specific concern about growing tendencies in EU Member States to break the principle of solidarity within the European Union, for example by a differentiated approach to financial assistance for Member States. They believe that Europe will only overcome the ongoing economic crisis if it looks for joint solutions, sharing the burdens in accordance with a vision for closer cooperation among the peoples of Europe leading towards greater empowerment for individuals and an expansion of social economies. [Back to top](#)

Challenge injustice and violence to find unity

Wealth and property shape a "false reading" of human value, World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit said in a Bible study at the German Protestant Kirchentag which met in Dresden 1-5 June.

"Property and possessions have purpose in as much as they help us to live as the people God called us to be and no more," Tveit said. He was speaking on the Bible text - "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). This was also the motto for this year's Kirchentag, which gathered over 120,000 participants. "This is a text for societies, for alliances that think that the more wealth, the more weapons and more security that they possess, the less anxiety they have," said Tveit. "Letting our fear about security narrow our perspective means that we are not available to be participants in God's mission in the world. And this has far-reaching implications for justice, peace, equality, unity."

Tveit arrived at the Kirchentag after attending the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) held in 17-25 May in Kingston, Jamaica. The event, which was sponsored by the WCC, the Caribbean Conference of Churches and the Jamaica Council of Churches, was the culmination of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence, launched in Berlin in 2001. In Jamaica, the some 1000 participants had listened to the "often painful stories of those who experience oppression and violence and injustice," Tveit recalled.

At an earlier Kirchentag event on the IEPC, Tveit underlined the need for justice and peace to be at the centre of the search for Christian unity. "If this is not at the heart of the ecumenical movement and if this is not at the heart of the churches we cannot give a credible witness to the world," he said.

In the Bible study Tveit said "we cannot speak about this passage from Matthew only in a spiritual way, for we know that sustainability and survival is an urgent reality for far too many in our world. Wealth and property and the power that comes with them are things which divide people and communities and offer a false reading of human value. This is instead a universal message calling on us to reject materialism as a measure of value or security". Tveit said that really to be in community and to express visible unity within the church "means that we must successfully challenge injustice, violence, greed, arrogance, corruption and all other threats to fullness of life for each person." [Back to top](#)

Ecumenical steps towards the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula

Realizing a peaceful reunification of Korea would not only be a gift for the Korean people but also for the people of Asia and the world as a whole. For the church, both in and outside Korea, realizing a unified Korea will also mean the church being unified in their efforts. With this background the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCK) organized a workshop for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) being held in Kingston, Jamaica 17-25 May. The workshop was held Thursday, 19 May. Titled "War or Peace? – Ecumenical Cooperation on the Korean peninsula" the workshop was intended to raise awareness about the need for a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula and the role the church has played in this process.

"The NCK has been cooperating closely with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) to contribute to the peaceful reunification in the Korean peninsula since the 1984 Tozanso consultation in particular," said the moderator of the workshop, Dr Samuel Lee, vice-chairperson of the NCK Committee of Reconciliation and Reunification.

The 1984 Tozanso consultation, which was held in Japan, was an ecumenical consultation initiating lines of communication between Christians in North and South Korea. Another step in the ecumenical journey for peaceful

reunification in Korea took place last year when a declaration from the South Korean churches was adopted. The declaration called for the peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula and came at the point of the 100th anniversary of the annexation of Korea by Japan, the 60th anniversary of the Korean War, and the 10th anniversary of the 15 June 2000 declaration of the Inter-Korean Summit, according to Lee. The declaration also recognized earlier efforts from the Korean churches, such as the 1988 Declaration of Korean Christian Churches on the National Reunification and Peace, nearly two decades of cooperation with the Korea Christian Federation of the North and various weeks of prayer for reunification and peace.

The WCC has remained involved with the issue for several decades including the visit of two general secretaries to North Korea, first the Revd Dr Konrad Raiser in 1999 and then the Revd Dr Samuel Kobia in 2009. Bishop Dr Martin Schindehütte, of the Evangelical Church in Germany, said, "According to our experience, peaceful reunification in Korea is possible. We would like to share our experience with Korean churches and we are willing to cooperate with the Korean churches." The two Germany's formally reunited in 1990. "We are also ready to cooperate with Korean churches for the peaceful reunification in Korea" added Vakhtang V. Kipshidze, Russian Orthodox Church.

During the meeting, Revd Hiroko Ueda, acting general secretary of the National Christian Council of Japan, said: "As with the 1984 Tozanso consultation in Japan, Japanese churches wish to contribute towards the reunification in Korea. I think it is our obligation, since we occupied Korea in the past." Participants in the workshop thus recommended that WCC should contribute continuously to the establishment of peace on the Korean peninsula. They expressed the wish that the 2013 WCC Assembly scheduled to be held in Busan, Korea, should be a historical turning point for achieving the peaceful reunification of Korea. [Back to top](#)

Protestant Churches in Europe Speak on Assisted Death

The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, CPCE, has published *A time to live and a time to die*, an aid to orientation on questions at the end of life, and the parallel internet page www.atimetolive.eu "A time to live and a time to die" offers an aid to orientation on medically assisted death and aid to suicide. The study is the fruit of an intensive process of consultation between the 105 CPCE churches in 30 countries on the basis of a text by the CPCE special group on ethics. With the document now presented the protestant churches in Europe contribute their position to the discussions about a worthy approach to the end of life.

"It is a strength of European Protestantism that it takes differences seriously and lets them come to expression", said CPCE President Thomas Wipf about the brochure appearing today in which the protestant churches throughout Europe speak together on the theme for the first time. "This document takes up urgent questions and encourages the churches to address the theme more intensively in their own context." The 104 page brochure discusses fundamental questions of dying in the social, clinical and juridical context. It asks from theological and ethical perspective: What is human life? Where does our moral responsibility lie? How sensitive are we to the wishes of the patient? Here the aid to orientation takes up such central questions of medical ethics as the termination of life-extending measures, palliative care, assisted dying and suicide assistance.

The CPCE churches support the protection of the human rights of the dying and terminally ill. These include the right to life up to the end and the right to refuse treatment. At the same time the churches oppose setting the principle of autonomy against solidarity, empathy and care for the sick and dying. The CPCE churches oppose a theological ethical justification for assisted dying and assistance for suicide. At the same time they realize the change in social attitudes to particular forms of assisted death and assisted suicide. The study emphasizes the necessity to improve the accompanying social, medical and caring conditions for a worthy life and dying. These include the extension and development of hospices and the advancement of palliative care in theory and practice. Church action is oriented towards care for human beings. The aid to orientation calls us to seek the protection of life and to work for worthy conditions of living and dying in clinics and hospices.

As a further aid to orientation, CPCE is also publishing the internet site www.atimetolive.eu There, alongside the publication itself, texts from various lands and contexts introduce the theme. Website visitors are invited to comment and to join actively in the discussion. [Back to top](#)

ARC Sunday

Sunday 26th June 2011 is a day in the year when the Arthur Rank Centre leads the Christian community in sharing and praying for the people who live, work and worship in the countryside. ARC, the national church's rural resources centre, is inviting congregations to look out from their own lives and concerns to the bigger issues that surround us in the countryside. It has made special worship materials available on its website arthurrankcentre.org.uk to mark the day.

Director of the Centre Revd Dr Gordon Gatward said: 'We want to encourage Christians to reach out to the wider rural community in prayer and in action on Sunday 26th June, particularly to those who are suffering hardship or distress, and remember that the Arthur Rank Centre is here to help in that task.'

In particular the ARC is concerned for some 900,000 households who are living on or below the poverty threshold in rural England, and those who feel isolated and alone in places where demographic change, the lack of affordable housing and the withdrawal of services are all taking their toll on communities. In farming many are going through difficult times. For some, things are improving but for others problems of increased transport costs, lack of broadband access, lack of finance and the continued scourge of Bovine TB continue to cause hardship and distress. The ARC aims to support and help these people and their families.

Specially written readings and prayers for ARC Sunday, 26th June 2011, can be [downloaded from the ARC website](#) now, or please call 02476 853060 for a pack. [Back to top](#)

Where your heart is...

For five days the streets, churches, conference centres and arts venues of Dresden were full of people wearing bright green (fairly-traded) cotton scarves, with the motto "da wird auch dein Herz sein" (...there will your heart be also). 120,000 Christians (20% of them Catholic) had gathered to experience a huge variety of talks, performances, acts of worship, celebrations and encounters. The bulky programme sent to all those who registered contained over 2000 different options. Navigating the programme required determination and a reasonable knowledge of German. Thankfully, the Kirchentag is well equipped to help international guests and an abbreviated version of the programme was produced in English, highlighting events which were in English or had English translation available. The International Visitors' Centre provided a wonderful service, offering a place for visitors to rest as well as opportunities to make contact with (mostly young) people who were prepared to act as personal interpreters and go along to events that were otherwise in German.

The opening outdoor service, in three different venues, the main one attracting 60,000 people, was followed by an "evening of encounters", where local churches set up stalls all around the city, offering refreshment, entertainment and conversation. At the end of the evening participants lined both banks of the River Elbe and lit candles, while the river itself became a "sea of lights", with candles being swept down the river, while a specially-commissioned piece of music echoed round the city centre.

The delights of hearing world-renowned speakers, listening to music or experiencing performances were sometimes tempered by the frustrations of finding that venues were full up. At the same time, it would be fantastic if we saw signs on our streets saying "church full"! The experience of sharing communion with 120,000 people at the closing service creates a lasting impression too.

The German Kirchentag is at the same time inspiring, exciting and overwhelming. There is really nothing like it and it leaves participants buzzing with ideas. The next opportunity to participate (and it can't be recommended highly enough) comes in from 1-5 May, 2013 in Hamburg. You can find out more at www.kirchentag.org.uk, or at www.kirchentag.de (in German). [Back to top](#)

Church Leaders denounce nuclear weapons system plans

Church leaders have denounced the Government's decision yesterday to spend at least £3 billion on a nuclear weapons system. The Government has delayed a final vote on buying a replacement for the Trident weapons system until 2016, but Defence Secretary Liam Fox announced his approval for the initial £3 billion phase of production. Leaders from The Methodist Church, The Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church said the Government's backing of a new nuclear weapons system was "unaffordable, immoral and strategically unwise".

Paul Morrison, policy adviser for The Methodist Church, said: "The Government's decision means that we are committed to £3 billion of expenditure whether Parliament chooses to purchase the new Trident system in five years time or not. This comes at a time when communities are suffering from the impact of local government spending cuts. Youth services, SureStart Centres, Back-to-Work Clubs have all had their funding cut because we have been told that we can no longer afford to sustain them. "The £3 billion the Government has committed could pay the entire budget for every SureStart Centre in the country for the next two years; £3 billion would stop every council cut this year, and the first ten months of next year. Instead, that money is being used to purchase an option of whether to buy weapons of mass destruction." According to government figures, a new nuclear weapons system would cost £25 billion in production costs and at least £4 billion a year to maintain. If Parliament votes against a Trident replacement, the £3 billion expenditure yesterday would be added to the country's deficit without anything to show for it.

Simon Loveitt, United Reformed Church spokesperson on public issues, said: "The Government's decision is to commit us to a massive piece of spending from which there is no going back – and yet they tell us their primary focus is to bring down the deficit. This is not what people voted for."

Graham Sparkes, Head of Faith and Unity at the Baptist Union of Great Britain, said: "If we buy these weapons the annual cost is predicted to be more than £4 billion for every year we have them. The total cuts across Government this year amount to £6.2 billion. With £4 billion each year we could double university funding, but if we buy these nuclear weapons, we will cast a shadow over the next generation." [Back to top](#)

Sacred Spaces in Leicester

A conference for faith based organisations and teachers is being held on Thursday 16th June from 9.00 to 4.00pm at the Jain Centre, Leicester. This free conference offering faith-based organisations and education practitioners the opportunity to explore how learning outside the classroom experiences in sacred spaces can support teaching and learning in RE. This event is organised by the Sacred Spaces Partnership Group of the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC) network and is funded by the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom www.lotc.org.uk [Back to top](#)

Quakers welcome rights for army recruits

The government move to grant the right of discharge to under eighteen year old recruits to the armed forces is being warmly welcomed by Quakers, who have long campaigned for the rights of young recruits.

"We warmly welcome the commitment of the Ministry of Defence to granting a right of discharge to under eighteens in the armed forces," says Michael Bartlet, Parliamentary Liaison Secretary for Quakers in Britain. "This is a practical policy that Quakers, compelled by our commitment to equality and peace, have been pressing for in the context of the current Armed Forces Bill. It represents a significant step towards implementing the spirit of the Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict."

The Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill on Thursday received a formal response to the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill Special Report, HC 779. The Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, The Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP wrote: "Following a review of discharge policy I am pleased to announce that, for those under the age of eighteen, the ability to be discharged will in future be a right up to the age of eighteen, subject to an appropriate period of consideration or cooling off. My officials are currently finalising the policy details and these will be brought forward shortly in secondary legislation."

Quakers have long campaigned for an end to the use of child soldiers, both globally and in Britain. [Back to top](#)

Churches urged to pray for toddler groups

An alliance of Christian denominations and agencies called on churches to take part in the first ever prayer day for toddler groups on 5 June 2011. 1277 encouraged Christians to pray for those that attend and help out at their church toddler group and to celebrate the valuable work they are doing. They also suggested churches seek ways to better resource and incorporate toddler groups into their life and mission. Sunday 5 June was chosen as it was the last day of National Family Week.

Organisations part of 1277, named after the average number of days between a child's birth and the start of formal education, include the Church of England, the Catholic Church in England and Wales, The Methodist Church, The United Reformed Church, Baptist Union of Great Britain, Scripture Union, Mother's Union, Care for the Family and the Salvation Army. The vision of the alliance is to enable 'universal access to distinctive, excellent, safe, Christian toddler groups which are demonstrating God's love at the heart of their communities'.

In the UK there are an estimated 27,000 church based toddler groups which, through an army of committed volunteers, provide support and care to over 50% of the nations preschoolers and their carers. They are supported by volunteer toddler group leaders making it by far the largest provider of support and care for young families.

Head of Mission for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Revd Ian Bunce said, "We encourage churches to commission and pray for toddler group volunteers seeking ways to build on the excellent mission that is being done through toddler groups and."

"For many of those who attend toddler groups this is the only contact they have with Christianity and faith," said Alison Dayer, Under Fives Consultant at Scripture Union. "For some, toddler groups are an oasis of welcome and support that is sadly missing in many parts of our society. It really is mission on the frontline." [Back to top](#)

Ladies Breakfast

On Saturday 4th June Italian Way opened its doors early for a private breakfast party of ladies hungry for coffee, pastry and an inspirational time hosted by Talitha Ishi-Smith of Gods greenhouse (www.godsgreenhouse.co.uk). A fantastic time was had by all as ladies from all walks of life packed in and enjoyed the relaxed environment and chit-chat. There were real life stories from local ladies about all things beauty including themes on the joys of ever changing bodies, menopause, shifting baby fat and heart wrenching stories about overcoming eating disorders. Our true identity in Jesus was central to each theme.

Beyond all the buzz was a time of peace, pampering and hand massages by The Retreat Hair and Beauty Salon. Birgit Whelan from Revelation TV, London talked about beauty and body image. Chanel & Mac trained make-up artist Charlotte Alice Scott amazed all with her tips and a demo on how the modern day woman could look great in just 10 minutes. Over much laughter the interdenominational group of ladies agreed that really what mattered was inner beauty although healthy living and make-up helped one feel simply radiant and beautiful inside and out! Healing tears and laughter flowed as Jesus touched many hearts and lives! The unity was tangible! Many relationships were restored. [Back to top](#)

Bossey student visits Milton Keynes

Revd Monday Evans Onyemara, a Methodist minister from Nigeria who is currently studying at the Graduate School of the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, made a visit to Milton Keynes over Easter. It was planned that a second Bossey student, Ms JoAnne Lam from Canada, would also make the visit but unfortunately she had emergency surgery from which she is now recovering. She hopes to visit Milton Keynes on a future occasion.

Evans stayed at The Well at Willen and visited various ecumenical partnerships in Milton Keynes including the Christian Foundation at Wolverton, chaplaincies to the prison and young offenders secure training centre, and the Church of Christ the Cornerstone. At an open meeting at The Well, Evans described his own ecumenical journey and hopes for the future. His present studies focus on Christian-Muslim relations and his proposal for doctoral studies has been accepted by the University of Geneva.

Milton Keynes has a wide range of ecumenical partnerships, both established and newly-started, and it is hoped that this relation with Bossey can be developed in the future. Revd Chris Batten, a Methodist minister in Milton Keynes who visited Bossey during a recent sabbatical, has made this initiative, building on his experience as a founding staff member of the Open University. The UK Friends of Bossey will meet on Wednesday November 9th 2011 from 12 noon to 2 pm at the offices of Churches Together in England, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH. [Back to top](#)

Update on Westminster Soup Runs

A meeting took place on 3rd June to explore the issue of soup run activity in the Westminster Cathedral area of Victoria where the City of Westminster is proposing a byelaw to prevent the operation of soup runs. The meeting included representatives from the soup runs, local voluntary agencies working with the homeless, local businesses and the police. This followed a roundtable discussion called by the council on 21st May to seek solutions to the problems caused by the volume of soup runs coming into this part of Victoria. The group that met is operating independently of the council and will be presenting proposals to council representatives at a meeting in July.

There was a shared view from those at the meeting that soup runs play an important role in helping destitute people and should be part of the co-ordinated activity seeking to help everyone sleeping rough in London to come in off the street. There was also a shared acknowledgement that there has been a negative impact on the quality of life of people living in the vicinity of the Westminster Cathedral piazza because of the number of soup runs operating in this tight residential area over many years and that local businesses have also been adversely affected. All at the meeting were committed to finding a solution that involved voluntary regulation rather than recourse to a byelaw.

There was an impressive commitment to action to ensure that changes can be introduced quickly. The group will be developing an action plan with the aim of ending within a short time frame the distribution of soup and other hand-outs in the vicinity of Westminster Cathedral. A range of alternative options will be made available to enhance the role of soup runs in recognition of their critical role in helping homeless and vulnerable people. This was a wholly constructive meeting and members of the group are confident that a voluntary, self-regulating solution to the soup run issue can be found that will make the introduction of a byelaw unnecessary. [Back to top](#)

Matters of Wealth and Debt

Matters of Wealth and Debt is a conference being organised by the United Reformed Church in Saffron Walden on Saturday 25 June that will look at the theological and socio-political aspects of the current economic situation. It is hoped that all those who come will go away convinced of the part they can play in making society fairer. There will be key note presentations on Wealth and Debt and the Bible, and Wealth and Debt and the Big Society, and a number of workshops. For further details, and to register an interest in attending, please contact Sue Drane at the Eastern Synod Office: eastern.admin@urc.org.uk [Back to top](#)

mission shaped ministry in the North East

mission shaped ministry North East is heading further north, providing venues in Berwick and Gateshead with a shared venue on two Saturdays and a weekend at Otterburn Hall. The Berwick venue will deliver msm on Saturdays only whilst Gateshead will meet on Wednesday evenings and some Saturdays.

The Church of England, Methodist, Baptist and Free Churches are delighted to make msm available locally. We believe it will be a significant resource for building the Kingdom of God in this area. Individuals are most welcome, but we particularly hope that small groups from a church or fresh expression will come as this will deepen the impact of the course. Course leaders and teachers include Stephen and Elaine Lindridge, Keith Osborn, David Currie, Andrew Roberts & Roy Searle.

Course timetable and venue: Berwick upon Tweed: Saturday 17/09/11, Saturday 01/10/11, Saturday 12/11/11

Gateshead: Wednesday 14/09/11, Saturday 24/09/11, Wednesday 05/10/11, Wednesday 19/10/11, Wednesday 02/11/11, Wednesday 23/11/11

Single Saturdays (09.30-16.00) are at Walkergate Methodist Church, Berwick, TD15 1XD. Wednesdays (19.00-21.00) are at St Mark's Methodist Church, Durham Rd, Gateshead, NE8 4AA. Shared Saturdays (09.30-16.00) and the weekend are at Otterburn Hall, NE19 1HE Cost: £300 per person, which covers all materials, refreshments and the weekend away.

Contact Helen Symonds, Course Administrator helen.symonds@freshexpressions.org.uk ☎07828 802692 [Back to top](#)

All Together in One Place for Pentecost

In different parts of the country Christians from different Churches joined together to celebrate and share their faith. Here are a few of them:

In **Birmingham** 200 gathered under their umbrellas in Centenary Square where a time of prayer and worship was organised and promoted by Birmingham Churches Together and the Council of Black Led Churches.

Churches Together in **Dorset** gathered at Sherborne Abbey to celebrate the Year of the Bible with Bible readings in NT Greek, the Authorised Version and modern English and an address by Baptist Regional Minister Revd Grenville Overton.

This year the Pentecost preacher for **Cornwall** Churches Together was the Bishop of Truro, Rt Revd Tim Thornton. They had planned to gather at Gwennap Pit near Redruth, a natural amphitheatre made by collapsed mine workings where John Wesley used to preach to the Cornish tin miners, but due to the rain the service had to be held in Redruth Methodist Church, lively with the White River youth singers and band plus hearty singing from 600 plus Christians.

At **Burnham-on-Sea**, Somerset, the annual Churches Together Pentecost Service was led by the Burnham Community Church Worship Group.

In **Barnstaple**, North Devon, Pentecost Sunday was the climax of a Festival made up of two weeks of events across the whole town ranging from coffee morning to concerts.

In **Sudbury**, Suffolk, the preacher at Pentecost Praise was Revd Mark Melliush of St Paul's Church, Ealing. Mark, and his wife Lindsey, are New Wine London and South East Regional Directors. [Back to top](#)

The Newman Walking Pilgrimage

Saturday 13th August to Sunday 28th August 2011. The 37th Diocese of Arundel and Brighton Ecumenical Walking Pilgrimage this year will be from London to Birmingham via Oxford and Warwick. The 2011 Pilgrimage explores the Christian's journey of faith, reflecting on the life of Blessed John Henry Newman and visiting sites associated with his life. For more information and an application form see www.thepilgrims.org.uk. [Back to top](#)