



March 2013

Electronic, ecumenical news from Churches Together in England  
**Click headings for more...**

## First a Reflection...

### [Back to Blighty – ecumenically speaking](#)

Clifford Owen, formerly County Ecumenical Secretary for Worcs, has recently returned to England after ten years.

## Now here's the news from around the world...

[Ecumenical Greetings for Pope Francis I](#) on his election

[WCC launches Faith and Order convergence text](#) The Church: Towards a Common Vision

[WCC consultation to analyze foreign involvement in Africa's development](#) at consultation in Arusha, Tanzania

[Churches advocate for the rights of stateless people](#) over 12 million around the world

[Wesley Ariarajah invites theological renewal](#) in his new book *Your God, My God, Our God*

[Working for climate justice is an ethical and spiritual imperative](#) side event on during session of the UN Human Rights Council

[Flash mob invades Geneva's Ecumenical Centre](#) condemning violence against women

## And here's the news from around the land...

[RE teachers lack training and support](#) concludes Parliamentary inquiry

[Church leaders in Kent sign Covenant](#) at CTK annual forum

[First National Ecumenical Gathering of Inter Faith Advisers](#) support for multi-faith volunteering

[Together in Service](#) support for multi-faith volunteering

[Lies about poverty:](#) shattering the myths

[Operation Noah backs call for decarbonisation target in Energy Bill](#) with Joint Public Issues Team

[Joining the Dots Celebration Tour launched in Parliament](#) for National Day of Prayer and Worship

[Birmingham Church Leaders encourage support for Refugees and Asylum seekers](#) letter from Bishop David Urquhart

[Grandpa Ted, the UK's First Christian Sitcom!](#) on TWR

[Working Together with Civic Authorities:](#) 20-21 March, Manchester

[Ammerdown Easter Retreat](#) 27 March to 1 April

[One Heart, One Voice:](#) Blackburn, 20 April

[Word of the Lord Conference:](#) Durham, 24-26 April

[Tony Campolo to speak at Christian Resources](#)

[Exhibition:](#) Sandown Park, 14-17 May

*[Back to top](#)*

For the current list of forthcoming events on the website, click [here](#).

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## Back to Blighty – ecumenically speaking

Ecumenism is a little bit like malaria: one you have been bitten by the mosquito it stays in the bloodstream! So having spent thirteen extremely fulfilling years in Hampshire building up an LEP, followed by thirteen happy years in Worcestershire as County Ecumenical Secretary, my move to Corfu in 2002 was promising to be an ecumenical bereavement. But I was not to be disappointed.

Apart from trying to make headway with what was originally the language of the New Testament, viz. Greek, I got to know quite closely the bishop and priests of Corfu's Roman Catholic Cathedral. I was treated by them as a brother in Christ and was invited to walk in their processions.

I also worked closely with the Greek Evangelical Church, very much a marginalised church in Greece. We did several ecumenical services with them, including joint Songs of Praise in two languages in a four star hotel. The Greek hotel waiters found this a little mind blowing in a country where the Greek Orthodox Church reigns supreme! But the Orthodox themselves were prepared to invite all non-Orthodox to participate into the Saint Spiridon processions, and other villages' sacred icon processions. These were memorable occasions because the Roman Catholic Bishop (Ioannis Spiteris) graciously invited me to walk with him and his priests behind the long line of Orthodox priests clad in their magnificent robes, with their own Archbishop behind them. The ecumenical message was powerful. Unlike in England, where it is difficult to stop the traffic 'for religion', in Corfu the streets were given over to these processions and thousands lined the routes. Perhaps that was to me the most significant factor in living in Corfu. One finds oneself in an Orthodox Christian culture, which is still very powerfully shaping in life. One realises just how secular we have become here in England.

In 2008 I moved to Ostende and Bruges for a four year post to retirement. Here again we had a new language to learn; the Dutch of Flanders. There were good ecumenical structures in place, especially centred on Brugge we had the West-Vlaanderen Studie en Werkgroep which met monthly for worship, supper and a talk. It was very much Roman Catholic dominated, but all Christian churches were invited. We had a lively Orthodox input and also the Belgian Protestant congregation were represented. The latter congregation shared the church building with us just off the Markt in Brugge. We didn't reach the stage of regular shared worship but it was coming! I was expected to read my homilie in Dutch to them on a couple of occasions (which isn't so difficult when it has first been properly translated) and take my part in ecumenical liturgy for the Week of Prayer in January.

I was also part of the small Belgian Anglican - RC Group that met in the French-speaking half of Belgium south of Brussels. Indeed it does seem that on the European mainland, the Anglicans have a special significance because they cross the Catholic-Protestant divide and people like to know how we do it!

So how do I feel after five months experiencing Churches Together in Huntingdon? Hopeful...but we can't slack off! The town (excluding Godmanchester) has four C of E, one RC, two independent new churches, a Methodist and a Baptist. We have had our Unity Week prayers, and the Women's World Day of Prayer. There are some pleasant ecumenical gestures around but I still feel that things seem much the same as when I left England in 2002. Churches are still looking for that ecumenical spark to ignite it all again with enthusiasm. I have my ideas about what that spark could be but that's another article for another day! [\*Back to top\*](#)

## Ecumenical Greetings for Pope Francis I

Following the election of the new Pope for the Roman Catholic Church on 13th March 2013, the following have published formal ecumenical greetings and prayers for the new Pontiff:

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishop Justin Welby, has offered his warmest welcome to the election of Cardinal Bergoglio as the successor to His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Archbishop Welby said, "We wish Pope Francis every blessing in the enormous responsibilities that he has assumed on behalf of Roman Catholics around the world.

"His election is also of great significance to Christians everywhere, not least among Anglicans. We have long since recognised - and often reaffirmed - that our churches hold a special place for one another. I look forward to meeting Pope Francis, and to walking and working together to build on the consistent legacy of our predecessors. May the love of Christ unite us, and intensify our service in a genuine and fruitful ecumenism that can be a blessing for the Body of Christ throughout the world. "Pope Francis is well known as a compassionate pastor of real stature who has served the poor in Latin America, and whose simplicity and holiness of life is remarkable. He is an evangelist, sharing the love of Christ which he himself knows. His choice of the name Francis suggests that he wants to call us all back to the transformation that St Francis knew and brought to the whole of Europe, fired by contemplation and closeness to God. "As I begin tomorrow a prayer pilgrimage toward my own inauguration as Archbishop in Canterbury next Thursday, Pope Francis will be much in my own prayers, as he will be throughout the coming months and years."

Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), has expressed ecumenical greetings and an assurance of continuing engagement with the Roman Catholic Church in the era of its new pontiff, Pope Francis I. He said the election of Francis I "is a turning point in the life of the Roman Catholic Church, but it also has an impact on people of other churches and faiths."

Commenting on the election of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Argentina, the first pope from the Global South, Tveit said, that through Francis I, "who has lived a simple lifestyle and reflects a passion for social justice and lifting up the poor, we reaffirm our commitment to seeking justice and peace. Ever since the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches have enjoyed constructive dialogue and cooperation on matters of faith, witness and the fundamental unity of the whole body of Christ. We have learned that we are pilgrims together in the one ecumenical movement, and we are particularly grateful for the way the Catholic Church works with us on the highly significant issues of unity, ecclesiology, mission and inter-religious dialogue. Now, in close collaboration with Pope Francis, we look forward to building on this positive relationship with the Catholic Church that has been nurtured so carefully in the past."

The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, but the instrument of the Joint Working Group has fostered close cooperation. Delegates and observers are exchanged at the time of major meetings, and the Catholic Church is formally represented in such WCC-administered bodies as the Faith and Order Commission and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.

In Latin America WCC member church leaders reflected positively on the election of Pope Francis. "We congratulate Francis I, the first Latin American to be elected pope. We are aware of Bergoglio's work in the Diocese of Buenos Aires and we recognize him as a person of particular sensitivity to social problems and for ecumenical dialogue," said Revd Nilton Giese, general secretary of the Latin America Council of Churches. "The Evangelical Church of the River Plate (Argentina) congratulates the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church by the recent election of a new pope who, for the first time in history, is from Latin America, said Revd Antonio Carlos Alfredo Duarte Voelker, president of the Evangelical Church of the River Plate. "We are also confident that his years of experience in the pastorate will help him to promote a new vision to those who suffer persecution and marginalization of any kind."

His Grace Bishop Angaelos, General Bishop of The Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom said: "I express my heartfelt joy shared with our Catholic brethren around the world on the appointment of Pope Francis. We pray God's joy and blessing upon our sister Catholic Church as it embraces its new father and shepherd, and we also pray for His Holiness as he commences this sacred ministry, strengthened and overshadowed by the grace of God. As Co-chair of the Catholic-Oriental Orthodox Regional Forum in the United Kingdom, I celebrate this day with my brother and Co-chair, His Grace Archbishop Kevin McDonald, members of our Forum, and our Catholic brethren across the United Kingdom."

Revd Jonathan Edwards, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, pledged his prayerful support. "We are delighted to hear of the appointment of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the new Pope," he said. "This is a moment of great challenge and opportunity for the Roman Catholic Church and we must pray that the new Pope will be filled with the Holy Spirit and offer a ministry that points people clearly to the Lord Jesus Christ. The challenges which face the Roman Catholic Church are truly immense and it will be vital that the Pope offers an example of holiness and of courage in the teeth of seemingly endless scandals and division. Although there is very much that divides us, we are committed to working with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ and we pray for God's richest blessing on the new Pope as he walks in the steps of Christ."

### **WCC launches Faith and Order convergence text**

In a World Council of Churches (WCC) governance meeting, ***The Church: Towards a Common Vision***, a convergence text of the Commission on Faith and Order, was officially presented by the WCC general secretary, Revd Dr Olav Fykse Tveit. The launch was at the WCC Executive Committee meeting on 6 March, which took place at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland.

"The Commission on Faith and Order presents to us a gift, a statement about the Church," stated Tveit in his foreword to *The Church*. "Work on ecclesiology relates to everything the Church is and what its mission implies in and for the world. It reflects the constitutional aims and self-identity of the WCC as a fellowship of churches who call each other to the goal of visible unity," he added. *The Church* identifies what Christians can say together about the Church in order to grow in communion, to struggle together for justice and peace, and to overcome together their past and present divisions.

After twenty years in the making, *The Church* was approved by the Standing Commission on Faith and Order at its 2012 meeting in Penang, Malaysia. It was later received by the WCC Central Committee and commended to the churches for study and formal response. It is the second convergence text to be approved in the long life of the

commission, the first being the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* which was celebrated at the WCC 6th Assembly in Vancouver (1982).

"The aims of *The Church* are twofold. The first is renewal," said Canon John Gibaut, the WCC director of Faith and Order. "Some reading this text may find themselves challenged to live more fully the ecclesial life; others may find in it aspects of ecclesial life which have been neglected or forgotten; others may find themselves strengthened and affirmed," he added. "The second objective is theological agreement on the term 'Church'. The responses to the document will reflect the level of convergence on ecclesiology amongst the churches. Such convergence will play a vital role in the mutual recognition between the churches as they call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship," noted Gibaut.

The document is currently being translated to German, Spanish, French, Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian. Co-operations for translations into additional languages are being explored. The English version has been [published online](#). [Back to top](#)

### WCC consultation to analyse foreign involvement in Africa's development

How can Africa attain economic liberation, social welfare, as well as ecological protection in partnership with the European Union (EU), United States (US) and China? An ecumenical gathering in Tanzania addressed this question by assessing investments in poverty eradication and development in the region. This consultation was organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Poverty, Wealth and Ecology programme, in partnership with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), from 27 February to 1 March in Arusha, Tanzania.

Economists, sociologists, ecologists and other experts from Africa, the EU, the US and China participated in the discussions. The EU-China-Africa Development Dialogue (ECADD) process will serve as the basis for their dialogue. The ECADD process emerged from the AACC General Assembly in Mozambique, 2008, focusing on the "political and economic liberation of Africa". "The consultation will assess if there are visible marks of poverty reduction following 50 years of EU and US involvement in Africa's development," said Dr Rogate Mshana, WCC's programme executive for Poverty, Wealth and Ecology. "In this significant dialogue, participants will analyze relations between China's strong presence in Africa and poverty reduction. It is in this context that the consultation will discuss the role churches need to play," he added.

Along with the WCC and AACC, other institutions involved in the event include Building Eastern Africa Community Network (BEACON), Helsinki Process on Globalization and Democracy, Ecumenical Justice Network of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The participants of the consultation will develop a statement on investment in Africa by the EU, US and China and its impact on poverty eradication. [Back to top](#)

### Churches advocate for the rights of stateless people

A World Council of Churches (WCC) consultation has urged protection for the rights of over 12 million stateless people around the world, encouraging governments to ensure their basic human right to citizenship, adequate access to health care, education and employment. Organized by the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), the consultation, titled "Towards an ecumenical advocacy on the rights of stateless people", was held from 27 February to 1 March in Washington, D.C., United States. The consultation was hosted by the American Baptist Churches USA.

The discussions engaged more than 50 international participants representing churches, ecumenical organizations, faith groups, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and government departments. "Prevention and reduction of statelessness is primarily the responsibility of the states, in appropriate cooperation with the international community," said Mark Manly, head of the stateless peoples division of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. He added that discrimination towards the stateless people should not be admissible under international law.

Nicole Shepardson, policy team leader at the Office of Policy and Planning of the US Department of State, spoke about the US government's response to statelessness. "The US administration seeks to use diplomacy to mobilize other governments to prevent and resolve situations of statelessness. The US diplomats engage directly with governments to advocate for the prevention and reduction of statelessness," she said. Shepardson said there are varied instruments used by the US administration, such as bilateral human rights dialogues, field missions and monitoring, and multilateral diplomacy to address the issue of statelessness. "Churches can help create awareness and educate their members," she said. "They can also play an important role in fostering the sense of 'belonging' that the stateless persons lack in their communities and in advocating solutions with their governments."

Revd Aundreia Alexander, national coordinator for immigration and refugee resettlement with the American Baptist Home Mission Societies of American Baptist Churches, USA, said that stateless women and children are more vulnerable to violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, domestic abuse and unreported rape. "When women lack legal citizenship, reporting violence leads to even further victimization," said Alexander. "This is why stateless women often lack protection from the law." Alexander urged churches to take visible actions supporting women in such situations. She stressed that faith communities should serve as a "liberating presence and sanctuary for stateless people".

Case studies were shared at the sessions regarding stateless people of Haitian descent in the Caribbean, the Rohingyas in Myanmar and Bangladesh, the Roma in Europe, as well as Sudanese in Sudan and South Sudan. "There has been an exponential growth in human migration and statelessness due to political, ecological, military and religious conditions," said Revd Dr Roy Medley, general secretary of the American Baptist Church in the USA. Due to these reasons, he said, throughout the world more people are forced to live without the benefits of citizenship. The consultation follows meetings organized by the CCIA on the rights stateless people in Bangladesh, 2011, and presentation of a study on statelessness at the CCIA meeting in the People's Republic of China, 2012. [Back to top](#)

### Wesley Ariarajah invites theological renewal

Theologian S. Wesley Ariarajah elaborated on central assertions of his new book *Your God, My God, Our God* in a conversation facilitated by Dr Clare Amos, World Council of Churches (WCC) programme executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, on 27 February in the Ecumenical Centre, Geneva. The book published by the WCC asks, he said, "How does theology come to terms with the fact that our neighbours pray and believe differently from us?"

Ariarajah is professor of ecumenical theology at Drew University, United States. A former director of the inter-religious dialogue programme and deputy general secretary of the WCC, he has authored several prior works, including *The Bible and People of Other Faiths* and *Not without My Neighbour*, both from WCC Publications. For Ariarajah, an authentic contemporary faith must search for new concepts to articulate its central mysteries. The distinctiveness of his book, he said, lies in its "comprehensive attempt to rethink the Christian faith," taking the whole interlocking constellation of Christian doctrines together.

The probing discussion centred on doctrinal and theological formulations of Trinity, Christ, sin and salvation, as well as the putative "non-negotiables" of the Christian theological tradition in its encounter with religious plurality today. "You cannot conceptualize the faith for all times," asserted Ariarajah, but instead must be willing to re-conceive the faith in ways that answer one's contemporary context. Today's reality strikingly includes religious plurality, he argued, as well as traditional doctrinal language's opacity to many Christians themselves. Ariarajah's book is available from Gazelle Book Services ([www.gazellebookservices.co.uk](http://www.gazellebookservices.co.uk)) in Europe and the UK, as well as online retailers. [Back to top](#)

### Working for climate justice is an ethical and spiritual imperative

Climate change is causing massive violations of human rights. This point was made at a side event on "human rights and climate change" during the 22nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. Organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) programme for climate justice and care for creation, in collaboration with other Christian organizations, interfaith networks and civil society groups, the side event was held on Tuesday, 26 February.

Rémy Pagani, mayor of Geneva, was one of the main speakers. He asked participants to "commit themselves for human rights, justice and peace as well as towards struggles for the preservation of the planet." He cited the example of Geneva as a leading host city for dialogues on human rights and climate justice. "We need concrete actions to address climate change and bring this cause to the human rights agenda, stressing that we cannot wait any longer," said Dr Mariyam Shakeela, minister of environment and energy, and acting minister of gender, family and human rights in the Maldives. Shakeela spoke about the vulnerability of the Maldives to the adverse effects of climate change. She pointed out the principles of the 1992 UN Rio Declaration, explaining the concept of common but different responsibilities and equity. "We urgently need to create an international mechanism on human rights and climate change," she added.

The permanent representative of Bolivia to the UN in Geneva, Angélica C. Navarro Llanos, addressed the consequences of climate change. "Climate change is affecting peoples, mother earth and the economy," she said. "In Bolivia it has meant an increase in floods and other weather hazards, making it one of the top ten countries affected by disasters." Navarro Llanos said that climate change is causing massive human rights violations. Therefore, in Bolivia, she added, the Human Rights Council (HRC) should ensure better collection of data on impacts of climate change, give a stronger voice to victims of climate change, raise awareness and promote international action based on international law within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

International human rights law, she said, reinforces the commitments of the UNFCCC. The HRC should promote rights-based alternatives in climate change action to forest protection, providing an alternative to the market-based green economy. The event was attended by more than seventy participants. It addressed the relations between climate change and economic models, the water crisis and the need for a Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change.

The discussions were moderated by Dr Guillermo Kerber, WCC programme executive on Care for Creation and Climate Justice. In his concluding remarks, Kerber emphasized the need for visible action to protect the most vulnerable groups and all victims of climate change. He called action for climate justice an "ethical and spiritual imperative". From this perspective, he said, the WCC, other faith-based organizations and a broad coalition of non-governmental organizations are calling on the HRC to establish a Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change.

Other organizations which supported the event include the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, Franciscans International, the International Institute for Peace, Justice and Human Rights, International-Lawyers.org, North-South XXI, the International Youth and Student Movement for the UN, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Southern Diaspora Research and Development Centre and the Geneva Interfaith Forum on Climate Change, Environment and Human Rights. [\*Back to top\*](#)

### Flash mob invades Geneva's Ecumenical Centre

A flash mob erupted in the cafeteria of the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. At 12:30 people scattered throughout the lunch crowd suddenly left their tables and broke into dance. Twenty dancers, wearing bright pink and purple, performed to a song condemning violence against women. The lyrics of *Break the Chain* written by Tena Clark and Tim Heintz called attention to the fact that one billion of the world's three billion women and girls will be raped or attacked in their lifetime. The song ends with a stirring call for people to rise up and stop the violence.

Similar dance events were being held in countries from Australia to Lebanon as part of the One Billion Rising campaign created by V-Day, a global activist movement that promotes creative events to increase awareness about violence against women and to re-energize anti-violence organizations. The event at the Ecumenical Centre, which is home to global church organizations and nongovernmental organizations, was organized by the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

Dora Arce-Valentín who heads WCRC's Gender Justice Programme explains that the intent was to raise awareness of the urgent need for men and women to work together to change attitudes that contribute to rape, abuse and assault of women and girls. "Unleashing a flash mob in the cafeteria creates excitement and catches attention," says the Cuban pastor. "It's a great way to raise awareness of this urgent and dramatic situation." Flash mobs erupt with no warning in public places. Performers emerge suddenly from a crowd to sing or dance then disappear as soon as the performance ends.

Aiko Sumichan, a youth intern from Indonesia, gathered dancers from among organizations including the World YWCA, World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, COHRED and World Student Christian Federation. "Taking over the cafeteria and filling it with the sounds of protest and power is a wonderful way of giving momentum to the movement to stop the violence," Sumichan says. "And besides it was a lot of fun. People tell me there's never been anything like this here before."

WCRC has a history of supporting the rights of women and girls. Plans in the coming year include a campaign to encourage its member churches to participate in the Orange Campaign that asks people to wear orange on the 25th of each month as a reminder of the need to keep working to prevent violence against women. A flyer printed on orange paper distributed by the flash mob at the Ecumenical Centre offers a biblical reading, questions for reflection and a prayer. "We will be producing more resources such as these for churches in future," Arce-Valentín promises. "Churches can help stop the violence. WCRC wants to be sure our members are motivated and empowered to do that." [\*Back to top\*](#)

### RE teachers lack training and support

A report by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Religious Education (RE) has found that RE lessons are frequently taught by teachers with no qualifications in the subject. Furthermore the responsibility to educate young people on the different beliefs and values held in society is often given to teaching assistants, who receive little support, training or guidance.

A three month long inquiry by the APPG into the supply of and support for RE teachers in schools, including a review of evidence from over 400 sources, found:

- Over fifty per cent of those teaching RE in secondary schools have no qualification or relevant expertise in the subject

- In more than half of the 300 primary schools participating in the inquiry, some or all of the pupils were taught RE by someone other than their class teacher
- A quarter of all primary schools that responded said the lesson was given by a teaching assistant
- Primary and primary trainee teachers lack confidence and expertise in teaching RE, especially in diverse and multi-cultural classrooms
- Support for RE teachers at a local level has been dramatically reduced by local authority funding cuts and the academies programme
- Bursaries for RE trainees have been removed and there has been a radical reduction in applicant numbers for 2013/14
- Because of this lack of training and support many of those teaching RE are unable to meet the Department for Education's Teaching Standards, selling young people short in their schools.

Commenting on the findings, chair of the APPG on RE, Stephen Lloyd MP said: "There are a large number of excellent RE teachers across the country who are doing a first class job preparing children for the challenges life throws at them, and helping them make sense of the wide range of beliefs and cultures around us. But a range of policies, most notably those relating to the EBacc, academies and GCSE short courses, have served to lower RE's status on the curriculum. As many children as possible should be encouraged to study GCSE Religious Studies – and it is essential that they are taught by experienced and trained professionals at primary and secondary level. It is illogical to think that we can dilute the professionalism and expertise needed to teach RE well and still have a generation of young people that understand and are sensitive to the growing levels of religious and non-religious diversity in our society."

The inquiry found that the situation has been compounded by insufficient professional development opportunities for subject leaders, specialist teachers and those who take on the responsibility for teaching RE. Evidence also revealed a wide variation in the amount and quality of initial teacher training for RE with many trainee teachers stating they had little effective preparation to teach the subject. The report *RE: the truth unmasked*, which will be delivered to the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove on March 18th, includes clear recommendations for primary and secondary schools, teacher training providers, local authorities, Ofsted, those providing professional development for teachers, and the Department for Education. [Back to top](#)

## Church leaders in Kent sign Covenant

Churches Together in Kent met for its annual Forum on Saturday 23rd February 2013 at Kent College, Pembury. During the event, Church leaders signed a covenant, committing them to work together and encourage others to do the same to further the life, mission, work and worship of the churches and congregations in their care. It is the first time such an agreement has been signed and it will be renewed each year at the annual Forum.

The theme of the Forum was the *Family: God's family and our family*. The Rt Rev John Hine, the Roman Catholic Bishop for Kent and Auxiliary Bishop for the Diocese of Southwark, gave an insightful Bible study which asserted the holiness of daily family life; due to the care and sacrifice that takes place within families every day. Although family life can be chaotic and frenetic, it is 'through the cracks of even the most broken situation that the light of God's love can come in.'

Emma Kevan, Christian Aid Regional Coordinator for Kent, reflected on the global family and how the support of people here, can make a huge difference to those thousands of miles away. She highlighted the major multi-agency campaign launched earlier this year, 'Enough Food for Everyone IF', which is seeking to bring an end to global hunger.

The Forum closed with a rousing ecumenical worship held in Pembury Old Church, led by Lieut-Colonel Peter Moran, the Salvation Army's South-East Divisional Commander, and the Tunbridge Wells Salvation Army band. Rev Canon Harvey Richardson, County Ecumenical Officer for Kent, who steps down from his post this year said: "It was wonderful to be able to meet together as Christians across the denominations, to worship, to learn, to discuss and to share news with each other about the grassroots ecumenical projects and events taking place across the county. It was especially meaningful to witness, at the closing act of worship, the signing of the Covenant by all the Church leaders in Kent." [Back to top](#)

## First National Ecumenical Gathering of Inter Faith Advisers

***Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious world***, the first ecumenical meeting of denominational inter faith advisers from around the country, was held on February 11-12 at High Leigh Conference Centre in Hertfordshire. A total of 90 people participated. Professor Paul Weller from the University of Derby gave an excellent introduction, rooting us in the theology of dialogue and illustrating it with themes from his own Baptist tradition, which gives particular emphasis to freedom of religion in a context of witness and Gospel life. Dr Harriet Crabtree, Director of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, gave an overview of how inter faith relations have developed and are working today which

lead in to a varied set of case studies and stories of what is happening locally across the churches in different parts of the country.

The question "Where are we now, and where will we be in 10 years' time?" was put to inter faith practitioners from the Council of Christians and Jews and the Christian Muslim Forum, as well as specialists analysing the 2011 statistics and people working in the East End of London, among Christians and Muslims, in response to the banking crisis. Everyone would have wanted to attend all four workshops on Israel-Palestine, Exemplar Reasoning, Civic engagement in the north of England and the fascinating story of the Olympic Chaplaincy.

There was time for denominational meetings and a chance to meet people from the same region to foster local collaboration and exchange. We were privileged to hear too from Revd Jonathan Edwards, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, whose words during our worship encouraged everyone to have confidence in God and joy in our work. There was great joy and hope expressed at the end of the gathering as we asked "What are we praying for in multi faith settings?" and we then prayed for one another as we returned to our own places. It is likely that this sort of gathering will be repeated in future as it proved enriching for all, a true celebration of Christian witness and opportunities for collaboration.

A number of the talks and PowerPoint presentations are available on the CTE website through [this link](#). [Back to top](#)

## Together in Service

A major new programme to celebrate, promote and link the huge variety of social action undertaken by the nation's faith communities has been launched by Faith and Communities Minister Baroness Warsi. '*Together in Service*' is a three-year programme celebrating social action projects, and can be based around each of the faith communities' religious festivals or dedicated volunteering days. It is designed to motivate and inspire new work, especially around multi-faith volunteering projects between religions.

The initiative will be based around an on-going monthly calendar of faith-based volunteering. Up to one week every month will be focused on the volunteering that the featured faith undertakes by itself, for example the Christian-led Street Pastors or food banks. The programme will then feature multi-faith projects, where the lead faith has joined up with other religions to deliver voluntary work. The programme will be supported by a 'fellowship' of active volunteers who can provide training, information and wider support to new and existing organisations. This can inspire them to deliver multi-faith volunteering projects, while building on the enthusiasm generated as part of last year's A Year of Service.

A *Together in Service* fund of up to £300,000 over three years is available in the form of small grants for multi-faith projects. Up to £1,000 will be on offer to help get local projects off the ground in areas where there may be a lack of confidence or knowledge in undertaking volunteering work in a multi-faith way. Baroness Warsi announced *Together in Service* at the launch of the 2012 National Church and Social Action Survey, which found that volunteering in churches has increased by 36 per cent in just two years, showing that the appetite for social action is on the increase.

At the event, Baroness Warsi said: "Our faith groups make a huge contribution to society with an army of dedicated volunteers who commit their time and enthusiasm throughout the year. The research from Jubilee Plus shows that this work is more valuable now than ever - from holding mother and toddler groups to arts clubs and caring for the elderly - the contribution of all faiths to the greater good cannot be underestimated. That's why I'm thrilled to announce *Together in Service* today to build on this excellent work. I'm proud that we live in a society where faith-based community action is at the forefront of our communities, showing that people who do God, do good."

Communities Minister Don Foster said: "Together in Service is a fantastic way of celebrating existing social action projects and to inspire and encourage new and exciting multi-faith volunteering across the country. The hard work, commitment and dedication of our faith groups plays a vital role in our communities. It makes them a stronger and more supportive place to live and shows that social action is at the forefront of community life. I look forward to seeing some exciting multi-faith *Together in Service* volunteering projects over the forthcoming months." [Back to top](#)

## Lies about poverty:

13 million people – including 3.6 million children – live in poverty in the UK today. A major new report shows how evidence and statistics have been misused, misrepresented and manipulated to create myths that blame and stigmatise the most vulnerable in society.

The report, entitled *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*, is published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, Methodist and United Reformed Churches. It confronts the most common myths told about people who are in poverty or in receipt of benefits, and highlights some of the most abused statistics. The Churches, which together represent more than 1 million people across Britain, say that statistics have been manipulated and misused by politicians and the media to support a comfortable but dangerous story: that the

poor somehow deserve their poverty, and therefore deserve the cuts which they increasingly face. The Churches hope that the report will empower Christians and others to challenge myths and lies about poverty wherever they find them.

The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty includes stories like that of Neil, who was a long-distance lorry driver until ill health meant he had to give up work. He's in danger of losing his home because of the Government's planned benefit reforms. "I was a proud man, I always worked, but I can no longer afford that luxury. Benefit changes reduce my ability to eat properly. I can't afford to keep the fridge on all the time, and I can't afford to heat my home all the time," he said. "I feel like my children and my friends no longer look up to me because I have nothing. I feel like a failure. I don't feel like a person anymore."

The report is being sent to every UK MP and Member of the Scottish Parliament in Britain and people are being encouraged to write to their parliamentary representative asking how they will be using the information to better inform policy-making. "It would be comfortable for many if we lived in a society where poverty only visited families that were lazy or made bad decisions," said Paul Morrison, Public Issues Policy Adviser and author of the report. "That is the story these myths lead us to believe; but that's not the Britain we live in today. It's convenient to believe that benefits are too generous. It's convenient to believe that claimants are on the fiddle or even more absurdly caused our economic troubles. But it's just not true. The very least the most vulnerable in our society deserve is to be spoken of truthfully and with respect, and that is what we should demand from our politicians and newspapers. Anything less is to be complicit in a great injustice."

In their work the Churches have been inspired by the words of the Biblical prophet Isaiah: "Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands at a distance; for truth stumbles in the public square, and uprightness cannot enter." Isaiah 59:14 (NRSV)

The four major British Churches have also criticised the Government's proposals for a new way of measuring child poverty in the UK, accusing the Government's consultation on the proposals of being 'confused' and 'surprisingly badly evidenced'. "Child poverty is an unacceptable injustice," said Paul Morrison, Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church. "While we applaud the Government's commitment to eradicating child poverty in the UK, the proposed new measure is fatally flawed. It is a confusion of targets, measures and, most disturbingly, the Government's beliefs about what causes poverty, backed by very little solid evidence."

The proposed new 'multi-dimensional' poverty measure, aims to take a variety of measures that the Government believes are linked with poverty and use these to create a single number to represent UK child poverty. Surprisingly, most of the measures combined in the proposals are more commonly found in those living outside of poverty than those inside. Particularly concerning is the fact that, despite the majority of families in poverty coming from working families, the Government wants to focus on worklessness as a measure of poverty.

"Excluding or diminishing the experience of low-paid families from any future measure of poverty would be a serious failing," added Stephen Keyworth, Faith and Society Leader for the Baptist Union of Great Britain. "Such people work tough jobs, often with unsocial hours. We agree that is vital to measure things such as unemployment and disability. These things can help us understand British society and the place of poverty within it. However, these factors combined make for a very bad measure of child poverty. Only robust, well-evidenced indicators of poverty should be used to measure child poverty."

"Poverty is not just an issue facing the poor – it's a societal problem and one that shames us all," added Marie Trubic, United Reformed Church spokesperson on public issues. "As Christians we believe that we all have a duty to take responsibility for the injustices that have become embedded in the society we have built. We should not simply accept the status quo and blame the poor for their circumstances. Instead, we must find new ways to build a fairer future for all."

[Back to top](#)

## **Operation Noah backs call for decarbonisation target in Energy Bill**

Many NGOs, faith groups and organisations have issued a joint statement calling on the Government to commit the UK to a near carbon free power sector by 2030. The Energy Bill is currently going through parliament and an amendment, to include a decarbonisation target during the report stage in early March, was put forward by Tim Yeo MP and Barry Gardner MP. This amendment is backed by many MPs as well as businesses. A decarbonisation target would help to ensure longer-term investment in low-carbon electricity generation, create many more green jobs and help the UK to meet its commitments set out in the Climate Change Act to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

The groups behind this amendment to the Bill, say that they are "united in the belief that a low-carbon power sector is essential to secure the future wellbeing of our economy", arguing that the Energy Bill "represents a major opportunity to put the UK firmly on track to becoming a world leading low-carbon economy, boost employment and show genuine leadership in the fight against dangerous climate change."

Operation Noah, a Christian charity working on climate change, has already written to the Government concerning the Energy Bill, and is now adding its name in support of this amendment. Dr Isabel Carter, Chair of Operation Noah, comments: "Just as the UK led the development of the industrial revolution, so we have a historical and ethical rationale to lead the way forward into a carbon free power sector by 2030." We are calling on Christians to write to their MPs to support this amendment. Now is a crucial time to reform UK energy policy to ensure a low-carbon and sustainable future.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain, Church of Scotland, Methodist Church, Quakers and United Reformed Church joined other major organisations in calling on the Government to make Britain a low-carbon economy.

They said:

"The Energy Bill represents a major opportunity to put the UK firmly on track to becoming a world leading low-carbon economy, boost employment and show genuine leadership in the fight against dangerous climate change. Our organisations jointly call on Members of Parliament to seize this unique opportunity to commit the UK in the Energy Bill to have a near carbon free power sector by 2030, in line with the recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change. We represent different parts of society but are united in the belief that a low-carbon power sector is essential to secure the future wellbeing of our economy, our environment and future generations."

"We can't keep burning gas and coal as if climate change doesn't exist," said Steve Hucklesby, Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church. "By acting decisively now, the Government can set a clear course for generating cleaner energy and ensure a more sustainable future for us all."

[Back to top](#)

### Joining the Dots Celebration Tour launched in Parliament

In largest reception room in Parliament over 150 church leaders, organisation reps and prayer leaders gathered to celebrate Wembley 2012 and hear exciting news regarding the National Day of Prayer and Worship.

The reception, hosted jointly by Gary Streeter MP, Stephen Timms MP and David Burrowes MP, all from *Christians in Parliament* saw leaders from a number of streams and networks across the country coming together to unite to take the vision of the National Day of Prayer and Worship forward into a new season. The celebration really saw the best of the church at prayer! During the event, there was a welcome from Stephen Timms MP, a message of encouragement as we looked to the future from Jonathan Oleyede, organiser of the National Day, an act of commission led by Gary Streeter MP and a mandate for prayer from David Burrows MP.

Moving forward, the National Day of Prayer and Worship will be visiting towns and cities across the country, in partnership with the Neighbourhood Prayer Network, Urban Saints and many others to encourage unity through prayer. This new model taking place under the banner of *Joining The Dots* is about linking up people, churches, networks and initiatives together.

The National Day of Prayer and Worship would love to come to your town or city in 2013 and the early part of 2014 to encourage and support you. Whether you have an established prayer network in your region, small or large congregation or perhaps want a fresh prayerful perspective on the nation, they would love to meet you. The team is also looking to meet with key leaders around the country to see how they can support unity programs and kingdom initiatives. Please contact Kim Dopson, Executive Administrator for further details via [kim@gdoplondon.com](mailto:kim@gdoplondon.com) Help join the dots across this family of nations.

[Back to top](#)

### Birmingham Church Leaders encourage support for Refugees and Asylum seekers

Senior Church Leaders in Birmingham are alerting the Christian community to the serious plight of refugees and asylum seekers in our area, commending especially the work amongst asylum seekers done by Restore and other Christian charities. These charities ask for your interest and support for their work at this time.

Rt Revd David Urquhart, Anglican Bishop of Birmingham and one of the Presidents of Churches Together in Birmingham, wrote "Many of those seeking asylum have taken great risks in leaving their native country to travel to a place where they can seek sanctuary, frequently leaving behind family, or indeed losing family as a result of war, torture or displacement. Their lives can be thrown into complete turmoil at very short notice as they are forced to seek sanctuary, eventually finding themselves in our country asking for the protection of the British Government.

To be forced to flee one's own country through intolerable circumstances means embarking on a daunting journey, to an unknown destination, often suffering more shocking experiences on the way. Many asylum seekers arrive in this country with little or no English, which makes them feel very isolated and afraid. Many have no support at all and are open to exploitation by criminals.

The experience of the people helped by Birmingham Churches Together is so very often of very frightened, traumatised, hungry and desperate people who are completely bewildered by a very complex set of legal rules and regulations, which specify that they cannot work, that they must live where they are told, and that they must report regularly to a Home Office centre. This situation can continue, literally, for years before coming to a conclusion.

In all of this, one of the most difficult things for an asylum seeker is to find someone who can be trusted to act selflessly as a true friend. I would like to draw to your attention the ecumenical work that is being undertaken across the Birmingham area that is reaching out with a hand of friendship to these unfortunate people." [Back to top](#)

### **Grandpa Ted, the UK's First Christian Sitcom!**

'Grandpa Ted' is a fresh and original sitcom which brings encouragement and inspiration to its audience in a thought-provoking but often light-hearted and entertaining way. There is a distinct shortage of Christian material that provides an uplifting alternative to the other forms of radio and TV comedy that many Christians would rather avoid. This sitcom plugs the gap by helping us to laugh at Grandpa Ted and his friends and more importantly at ourselves in a fun and wholesome setting that will amuse and not offend. The series follows the life of Grandpa Ted, a likeable old gent who simply wants to enjoy a quiet life. This very rarely becomes a reality however due to the crazy schemes and frustrating interruptions of his fellow house group members – not to mention the problems he causes for himself! Join our easily confused hero as he tries his best to live out God's principles while he gets mistaken for an eminent doctor, goes fishing in a post box, has to find a missing tortoise and even accidentally foils a bank robbery! Find out why Grandpa Ted ends up like Paul and Silas in prison, hear how forgiveness is always the way forward even if it hurts and discover, at long last, what God Rocks really are!

Meet the ever-meddling Mrs Bigglesthwaite, the tired but wise Albert, the sensitive and shy Jane, the elusive Bill, the pedantic Mr Perkins and his easily distracted wife and Jason, the house group leader who never quite seems to keep their meetings under control. Then there is also the local police Sergeant who always manages to turn up just when Grandpa Ted and the others are having their most embarrassing moments from getting stuck in wheelie bins to crashing a car through his own garden wall! This pioneering series will begin airing on Saturday 6th April at 11am (repeated at 11pm.) on Premier Radio or alternatively download the episode after it is broadcast to listen to whenever you like from [www.twr.org.uk/ondemand](http://www.twr.org.uk/ondemand). The first of the 13 half hour episodes is available as a preview upon request and interviews with the writer and director in addition to various cast members can be arranged. For more information contact Phil Walker on 0161 923 0275 or email [pwalker@twr.org.uk](mailto:pwalker@twr.org.uk) [Back to top](#)

### **Working Together with Civic Authorities:**

A consultation looking at how the Church can engage with civic authorities will be on 20-21 March 2013 at The Life Centre, Manchester, 235 Washway Road, Sale, M33 4B

Our understanding of God's mission in this world seems to be ever increasing and expanding. Not only do we understand the need for personal renewal but also for the social, spiritual and cultural transformation of our towns and cities. We are called like Israel in exile to seek the peace and prosperity of the places God has called us to live and serve in. If God has a vision and hope for education, social services, health, business, regeneration, public safety and the environment what is the role of the Church in partnering with public, private and other third sector organisations?

We are witnessing a fundamental shift in how civic society is seeing the role of the Church; from sometimes a hostile and suspicious outlook, the door is now open wide to churches and Christian organisations as we are increasingly being viewed as an important partner in the delivery of services, and appreciated for the large voluntary force we can mobilise, the buildings and staff we have, the local services we provide and the cost-effective way we do ministry. This open door is made even more possible when churches are working together as one group in an area. A number of unity movements are finding some very fruitful partnerships being developed with councils, police forces, health authorities, probation services, housing trusts and local strategic partnerships. Strong relationships are being formed with leaders of councils, city-wide mayors, chief superintendents and chief executives. With the current financial crisis and the resulting cuts to services and benefit changes, a strong group of churches who are working in unity for the sake of mission become a very attractive partner with which to build bridges.

This consultation will begin to look at the opportunities that are being made available to us. We will hear from experienced practitioners and you will be able to tell your story to add to the learning.

- You will be able to hear from, and ask questions of, some senior civic leaders as to the do's and don't's of engaging with statutory authorities.

- We will be looking at the development of the Church in a local area as a public leader in the civic square. How do we become a voice for good in the media and the political realm?
- The consultation will also aim to highlight some of the possible dangers of civic engagement such as the silencing of the prophetic voice, or being distracted from our distinctive calling.
- We will be praying for one another as we seek to encourage each other in the work of God to see the spiritual, social and cultural transformation of our cities and towns.
- We will aim to compile and publish a list of guidelines for the UK Church to help the process of engagement over the next few years.

To book your place please email [admin@wegather.co.uk](mailto:admin@wegather.co.uk) and ask for a booking form or see [here](#).

[Back to top](#)

### Ammerdown Easter Retreat

Led by Sr. Germaine O'Neill IBVM and Bill Thomson, the aim of the Ammerdown ecumenical Easter retreat is to help guide participants to achieve a more fruitful and deeper understanding of the Resurrection, looking at what the Resurrection means for both the cosmos/universe as a whole and for ourselves as individuals within that cosmos/universe. The great German theologian, Karl Rahner, refers to the risen Christ as the hidden presence that gives meaning and direction to all things in the universe. We will look and see to what extent this is truly happening within ourselves, and how we can strengthen it in our daily lives.

The retreat, making use of Ignatian spirituality, will offer ample opportunity for reflection and discussion, together with time for meditation and prayer. Music will also play an integral part (particularly singing). The retreat will include a Eucharistic celebration with Bishop Crispin Hollis on Sunday morning, which everyone will be welcome to participate in.

The retreat will be jointly led by Sr Germaine O'Neill IBVM and Bill Thomson. Sr Germaine O'Neill is a Loreto Sister who spent 37 years as a missionary in Kenya. Since coming back to the UK in 2000, she has been involved in retreat work, spiritual guidance and individual counselling. She has already led several retreats at Ammerdown and has been showered with praise by those who have benefited from her input. Bill Thomson graduated with qualifications in Philosophy and Theology, and has a teaching diploma in Religious Education. He was an adviser in Religious Education to schools and lectured in Religious Education in teacher training college, as well as having several years' experience in pastoral work. For further information, see [here](#).

[Back to top](#)

### One Heart, One Voice:

One Heart, One Voice is a multi-choice workshop day designed to encourage and equip local church musicians who want to offer their best in worship. It offers a choice of interesting and practical workshops on topics across the range of church music led by experienced national and local presenters. The keynote speaker will be John Bell, the renowned composer and broadcaster from the Iona Community who will be opening up the power of the church's song to challenge and change the cultural status quo.

The Venue is St. Wilfrid's Academy, Duckworth St., Blackburn, BB2 2JR, and Blackburn Cathedral, BB1 5AA. You can Google the map online with the postcode, or follow the school [link](#): COST: £15 for the day. Under 18's £10. Under 5's free. Parties of 9 or more will be granted 1 free place. A special Family Ticket for 2 adults and up to 2 children (under 18) is available at £40 for those whose children take part in the children and youth streams. CHILDREN and YOUNG PEOPLE: Two separate, self-contained streams have been specifically organised for Children age 7-11 and Young People age 12-18 to occupy the whole day. Under 18's may attend other workshops but must be accompanied by a responsible adult at all times. FORMAT: The day offers a choice of up to six different workshops in each of the two seventy five minute slots through the day, representing a wide variety of church music and worship styles. Each workshop is a one-off and will be repeated in the second session. The day will end with a combined act of worship in the cathedral, which is a 15 minute walk away from the academy. INSTRUMENTS: There's a chance to bring an acoustic instrument and play in our closing worship. During the Preparation time in the afternoon, Ruth Watton will be rehearsing instrumentalists separately from the singers. If you'd like to play you need to be competent and be able to pick things up quickly. \*Please fill in your details on the form. LUNCH: You will need to bring a packed lunch. Drinks will be available during lunchtime for a small donation. BOOKSTALL: A range of books and other music resources will be available during the day, along with displays from various church music organisations.

Further details and a booking form can be found [here](#).

[Back to top](#)

### Word of the Lord Conference:

Bishop Kieran Conry, Bishop of Arundel and Brighton and Chair of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales writes:

'I am writing to let you know about the forthcoming 'Word of the Lord' Conference, which has as its focus celebrating the gift of the Scriptures at the heart of the Church in England and Wales. In this Year of Faith, this unique gathering in Durham will provide an opportunity for Catholics to gather from around the country to reflect prayerfully on how we as a community are engaging with the Bible. It will also offer a space to explore questions about how we can use the Bible more effectively in service of the Church's mission.

The conference aims to bring together individuals from across the Catholic community to share resources and ideas, to grow in understanding, and to identify ideas for new ways in which we can celebrate the gift of Scripture in the life of the Church in our countries. As such, the 'Word of the Lord' Conference will focus on three themes recently highlighted in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*:

- 'The Word of the Lord' – Catholic Biblical Theology and how we understand the role and significance of the Scriptures in our lives
- 'The Word in the Church' – how the Scriptures are celebrated, understood and lived out in the life and worship of the Catholic community
- 'The Word for the World' – exploring how we share the gift of the Scriptures with others outside the Catholic community, through works of evangelisation, service, witness and dialogue.

The conference is an initiative of the Scripture Working Group (chaired by Fr Adrian Graffy), which is an instrument of the Bishops' Conference Department for Evangelisation and is being organised in partnership with Bible Society and the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University. Alongside members of the Working Group, we are delighted to be welcoming some excellent guest speakers, including:

- Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP – former Master of the Order of Preachers, well-known author and international speaker.
- Michelle Moran – member of the Pontifical Council for Laity and observer to the Synod on the Word; President of International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services
- Dom Henry Wansbrough – General Editor of the New Jerusalem Bible, former member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and well-known author

The conference, however, won't simply be focused on listening to input – your contribution will be highly valued, and we will be facilitating time for group discussions as well as workshops and liturgical celebrations. [Here](#) you will find further information about the event, as well as a preliminary booking form to reserve your place. There is only limited availability at the conference, so I do urge you to book early in order to guarantee your attendance (and a reduced conference fee).'

[Back to top](#)

### **Tony Campolo to speak at Christian Resources Exhibition:**

Building on the success of two regional shows in Manchester and Bristol, CRE is now moving on to its flagship event of the year – a must-attend event in the Christian calendar! All the team are working hard to ensure that CRE International will be more successful than ever – below is just a selection of the new initiatives confirmed to attract even more visitors to Sandown. Steve Goddard, head of CRE's PR team, adds: "This year visitors will have two thousand more reasons to come to Sandown Park. For the first time ever at our exhibition, churches can come and be granted – on the spot – a £2,000 micro-grant to start a community transformation project, courtesy of the Cinnamon Network. From food banks to job clubs, night shelters to money advice, dozens of churches have already benefitted – Cinnamon will show visitors how to follow their lead and they will be granting applications at the exhibition.

Revd Dr Anthony Campolo is foremost among a range of special guest speakers. Author of more than 35 books and former advisor to President Bill Clinton, Tony Campolo is a founder of the Red Letter movement with its emphasis on Christian social justice. It will be the legendary professor's fourth visit to CRE and we expect another packed seminar room. A new feature film club will be launched by the Damaris Trust, providing new ways for church groups to engage with popular culture." For more information about these events and much, much more, please follow [this link](#)

[Back to top](#)