



County Ecumenical Officers Report May 2016

### **Come Holy Spirit - Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken**

For 2015/16 it has been a very different year to the last in my Ecumenical role. I see churches working together in mission and friendship - relationships are getting stronger. One church leader said recently. "I see good relationships evolving with other churches but we need an important ingredient.. Food and its shared ! " I see Unity.

Working with two large towns where the landscape is changing rapidly not only in buildings but in people, I have seen great community work to help the lonely, poor and the down trodden. I see the local council invited to share with church leaders the cut backs they are making, and how this will impact on the vulnerable. I see churches leaders are gathering, listening and preparing.

My church visits show there is an outward-looking community-focused emphasis meeting the needs of village and town life.

**Role :** Networking and support is a large part of my role. I meet Church leaders, Area Deans and Bishops. I meet church groups and LEP's new and current, and attend the University chaplaincy meetings.

I have attended Council of Faith meetings, met the Police Cohesion officers and due to meet shortly the Christian Police Association officer. I have attended Mahabbah prayer meetings and a Syrian Refuge event and Peace walks to name but a few.

I meet with other county ecumenical officers and we share what is working. These meetings are very helpful for us all as we have no field officers.

### **Churches Together England (CTE) Forum 2015**



#### **Churches listening and sharing together**

In this photograph taken at the CTE Forum shows representation from the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal churches.

I attend Churches Together England (CTE) consultation once a year and attended my first Forum last year. This is organised every three years. The Forum was informative and engaging. It was good to hear expansion from sixteen to now forty four churches joining. I spoke to one lady I met who has attended over a period of thirty five years. She said it was wonderful to see so many churches working together. CTE have a new leaflet it now shown on our website. It is helpful to understand more of their support and work for Unity. I am grateful to them for their support and knowledge. I also attended the Go For Growth day seminar and The Gathering Network day sharing what is the value in Unity.

**Some Events I attended-** One of them was of the very well organised Walk of Witness event on Good Friday. I felt very moved with not only the planning to attend four different churches but to be taken through a Muslim community area to their

mosque where we were welcomed with peace candles. It was covered by the media and social media sending out a message of peace. The Walk of Witness organised with different churches working together I feel will grow inviting more churches to be part of this important event in the church calendar. .. To witness more churches and people being part of this day is a joy.

I am attending a Pentecostal service this Sunday, part of a ten day programme of prayer called Blaze. I have been invited to light a candle representing the six catholic churches for my town. The evening is devoted to prayer for church leaders "The shepherds"

Village life is thriving with many wonderful community projects . One village covered Good Friday with children carrying the cross through the streets - what a vision.

Churches Together Groups are also organising fun church days for all ages!

It was mentioned that strategic planning needs to be addressed to support villages with new housing developments. Looking at village growth and "where is our church ?"

Unity is mission shaped and many church groups are working well together in friendship . One person said we just get on with it !

**Change** My role as a facilitator is now shaping, helping to support and guide, preparing for key church events throughout the year. It was as a result of feed back to me in January where difficulties had arisen in late planning for Christian Unity week . It was requested to look at contacting churches who may wish to be involved and plan for a one/two year period where possible. I did however have an enlightening week with what was planned , attending four different church services, Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal and The Society of Friends, embracing different traditions.

From other feedback there is now meetings booked into 2017 with church leaders to look at how best to communicate and get other churches involved even if it is one large Unity gathering a year. A quiz perhaps . Yes fun, food and building friendships with other churches.!

**Growth** - The seventh day Adventist recently expressed they wished to join a church group I contacted CTE for advice .The group did have concerns and with the help of CTE these have now been alleviated. This new church is welcomed to the next meeting.

**Feedback** / feel I need to feedback in this report that there seems to be a lost vision of ecumenism in some areas, or perhaps it has been misunderstood or dare I say lost in translation. Several leaders indicated they would like to know more information on the role of CTE, Bedfordshire Ecumenical Committee (BEC) and the Ecumenical officers role. The BEC chair is booked to attend an Executive Church group leaders meeting in September along with the Area Deans. The bigger picture in ecumenism will be shared.

**Change** :To support Bedfordshire churches further I seeked agreement from the committee three things to be looked actioned:

One: a letter to be sent out to all Churches Together groups outlining the BEC role, the ecumenical officers role, purpose of the annual forum and membership. I am pleased to say the letter will be going out shortly.

Two: prepare a database of all churches in Bedfordshire. I pleased to say I am working with a student from the University of Bedfordshire. The work is in its final stages . At the moments it shows Bedford with 149 churches and Luton with 184 churches alot !.

Three: revamp the current Churches Together Bedfordshire website and have a webmaster. I am pleased to say Alan Dansey who is a member of BEC is our web master and has done a great job. Please do take a look at the site. At Easter it received over 12,500 hits. There will be a new section called the "Unspoken Angels" this is where churches can provide good news stories e.g people helping their community. Our thanks to Alan for his work. Anyone wishing to have information shown on the site or feedback on ideas please email to me at ct.beds@gmail.com.

It must be said growth in churches uniting is and will happen. There is no time for "them and us" no time in Gods plans to have division.

I seek help and support from colleagues in how do we engage and communicate to all churches, to invite them to be part of a bigger ecumenical picture. I feel confident through prayer and new and existing friendships , plans will be in place and made strong for the future. I look forward to 2016/17.

I would like to finish with the Rule of St Benedict " I came across when I was on a retreat at Turvey Abbey recently.

**"Where ever we may be we are in the service of the same Lord and doing battle for the same King"**

Anita Nancollas