



"Come Holy Spirit bind us together with cords that cannot be broken"

County Ecumenical Officer's update January 2017



Greek Orthodox Church.

I attended the Focolare Centre over two days to discuss and give feedback for the Bishop's conference on Unity. It was about Catholics in dialogue and unity at diocesan and county level. I met with around 30 people. We covered the timeline of the story of the Reformation and its echoes today and what can we learn from the Reformation. We reflected on the Five Ecumenical Imperatives outlined in "From Conflict to Communion" Lutheran Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. I met with the Bishop of St Albans and Ecumenical colleagues to share what is happening in their denominations.

I met with a Police Cohesion team member and was asked to sign a hording to show Domestic Violence must be stopped.

Christmas was full of joyful carol services attending the Anglican, Catholic, Moravian church and the Police Force Choir Service. One in particular that was different was at the Gospel Pentecostal church. They had hymns sung in several languages embracing Christians from different cultures. There was another successful Flashmob gathering in Luton followed by the launch of the Christmas Prayer tree for the town. A great crowd gathered.

Christians from different traditions singing carols in their native language and preparing for Christmas.



The new meetings with All Bedford Churches Together (ABCT) is going well. I am helping to introduce a monthly prayer meeting for Church Leaders in Bedford. I am meeting with Simon Mugangwa from Hope Church who said he would like to help out. There was also discussions around commemorating the Reformation 500th anniversary I am planning a further meeting in February with church leaders and have contacted Chris Damp Bunyan Meeting and FR P Messam Elstow Abbey's new vicar.

I met with the Luton Churches Together Executive and was asked to be part of a group to look at planning a service for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. I am also asked to meet the organiser for the Pentecostal service to see how we engage inviting other churches to be part of day. I met with the area Deans in Luton to support the planning of the commemoration service. We had a think tank session!

A few notes to share:

- Timeline/ History of the church in Luton/Grassroots - map of churches in Luton/show when did different denominational churches start in Luton
- Historian to look at the Luton Churches. Churches to send in photographs of their churches inside and out.
- Streets names after Saints and why ?
- How has the church serviced Luton Town. display posters? Reference charities set up e.g NOAH, Azalea and Youthscape.
- Service - what type of service who will be involved other churches ? Use symbols . e.g candles/ doors/nails
- Involving all ages of the community. Interview the oldest Christian in Luton show as a YouTube film? Involve the youth contacting the Catholic and Church of England schools for ideas
- Showing the strength of church work and future of the church in Unity
- The next meeting is Monday 6th March at The Holy Ghost Church.

I met for the first time with one of the Greek Orthodox Churches. They have a listed building they have been renovating. It was an Anglican church. They are keen to support Unity and would like details of the Forum and will speak to their Bishop to see if he would like to attend in May. They are considering joining Churches Together Luton .

The chair of Churches Together Luton will look into the subscription for 2017 to see if this is sufficient. It stands at £300. The database has been sent to Churches Together Luton and St Paul's Bedford. Both have kindly donated £25 each to BEC.

I met with an Evangelisation Team and supported them to organise a prayer group meeting inviting all Christians to come and pray. We discussed the power of music and to use different traditions hymns. I met one of the members of the Proclaim Evangelisation Group for Bedford. They are planning a stand for 2018 at the River Festival. The focus is on "Out Reach"

Christian Unity week - Crossing Barriers was spent mostly in Bedford with the sharing of prayers with the Anglican, Catholic, Polish church, Methodist and Quakers. The St Andrew service showed off the sound of the newly refurbished organ. It was the first time The Sacred Heart and St Cuthbert church held a service and it was very well organised with the focus on Unity. They have a monthly prayer group meeting that prays for Unity. Everyone was invited to light a candle and people from other churches were invited to come forward to the altar. A symbol of Unity . It was a very special service no doubt they will be part of the 2018 timetable.

I attended for the first time the Caddington CT service about 45 people attended from the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic and Methodist church. The Luton Area Deans held a seminar a reflection on Christian Spirituality Today:

- How can we be rooted in prayer,
- alert to God at work in the world, and
- guided by the Spirit as we follow the way of Jesus in our everyday lives

Sacred Heart & St Cuthbert Church.

The new organs at St Andrews.



At the Quakers Unity service in mindful silence with the spirit there was an opportunity to share in this time. Someone shared a concern, they felt Christian churches may not always show how welcoming they are and that more welcome was received from a moderate Muslim group. On reflection my thoughts are who is these Unity services reaching ? Who is taking the time to attend other denomination churches? This will be raised at the ABCT meeting.

It is always wonderful to hear of church history, one person shared how one denomination church helped finance £500 to help build a Pentecostal church that started out praying in people's houses!, Another said their church has one of the oldest bells that used to toll to call the faithful to church. Another said our church site goes back to the 8th century. Another shared how her grandparents helped with funds for a church built in 1897, and how her parents involvement with another church build in 1967. I am sure we will hear a lot more history in the planning of service for the Reformation anniversary for Bedford and Luton and the surrounding villages.

It is helpful to attend the church leaders monthly prayers meetings in Luton. This also gives a chance to network. We did receive a polite complaint the website needs updating and they have been advised with the changes and this will be done shortly.

Bedfordshire Churches Together Annual Forum is on Tuesday 9th May 2017 I contacted Chris Curtis the CEO of Youthscape Luton www.youthscape.co.uk He kindly agreed to be our speaker. He does have a very busy diary so we are lucky!, Youthscape is a national youth work organisation working for the good of young people of all faiths and none. We have one church booked to display their work on the evening and looking at a few more who could help out. The Forum I feel needs to show focus and vision in how churches are working together in Unity. Leaders and lay people need a purpose to attend the Forum as they are busy people. We need to show growth and strength in our churches. It would be good to see more churches attending each year. For 2018 we are hoping to have Bishop Angaelos from the Coptic Orthodox church to speak <http://www.bishopangaelos.org/>

Churches Together England (CTE) - Please find attached papers from CTE:

- A letter from Justin Welby
- Five Imperatives
- Reflection

I feel a lot of progress and changes have been made since coming to the post. To continually promote the vision of Ecumenism throughout Bedfordshire at times has been a challenge a lot of time is needed to build relationships and network. Churches are very busy and sometimes are not able see the bigger picture, that we are all as one with Christ . I ask BEC colleagues at the meeting on 24th January to reflect and give time to look at the CEDO role and its focus for the future for Bedfordshire. Unity is important this it's Gods brief to us ! Thank you.

Anita Nancollas