



Anita Nancollas, County Ecumenical Development Officer's Report, May 2017.



This report gives an overview of the last twelve months of what Bedfordshire Churches Together shared and their activities along with papers on :

- Churches Together England (CTE) new 2017 leaflet .
- CTE review paper 2015
- Archbishop Welby's letter " Thy Kingdom Come"
- The new book mark "Let us Pray"
- Appendix A: Shared church activity that is not possible to cover all in this report.

#### **Church Leaders - What are they doing and saying?**

I would like to begin by sharing what Pope Francis and Archbishop Welby are doing and saying. Pope Francis said in Christian Unity week in January "Christian Unity can't happen if we linger on problems of the past "

When Pope Francis recently met with Archbishop Welby in Rome. Archbishop Welby said, "there are wonderful opportunities in ecumenism in these times, and we must always strive to be obedient to Jesus' desire that his Church 'may be one'"



**Ecumenical relationships exist between different kinds of Christian churches that are striving for greater unity with each other.**

The Bedfordshire I have seen in the past year that there has been one of great change not only in that of leadership in many churches but greater emphasis and focus on church mission and unity. The church is seen in

many areas to be the hub of Christian activity serving the community, serving humanity. Churches shared they meet to discuss plans for the year ahead helping each other and building friendships in preparation for their united work. Whilst there are projects to help support the vulnerable there is also great fun activities for everyone to join in of all ages.

It is always a joy to see churches growing together in strength and unity. Attending services for Christian Unity week, World Women's Day of Prayer, Walk of Witness on Good Friday, Pentecost and Christmas services to name but a few. Churches in some areas have seen numbers expand because of new housing. One church leader said, "the existing church in our village is now full and overflowing with activity". However, there are still big discussions around how our churches engage reaching more people to witness the Love of God.

Receptive Ecumenism - what I mean by this is churches simply leaning from each other - is still shared in conversations and in one Churches Together meeting one person said our responsibility is to ask "not what do the other traditions first need to learn from us but what do we need to learn from them"? We can all use our different skills, strengths and experiences. Churches need each other!

At one of the Christian Unity week services I attended they prayed "for that which unites the churches is stronger than that which divides us but there are still areas of difference in which churches remain self-absorbed or construct new walls" In another service one church said "we have weekly prayer meetings to pray for church Unity and this have been ongoing for nine years".

Another group shared how they all work together to help the homeless and help try give them back their dignity and respect. Open The Book is strong in schools with the bible stories being acted out to young people. Messy church is strong too. Just recently I heard at a meeting a new charity called HUGS which was set up to provide mentors who help young people who are struggling perhaps with their self esteem, helping them with job applications and so on.

In the year of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation it was interesting to hear several churches in Bedford and Luton covering the history of their church going back between 300 and 500 years in some areas. One lady shared photographs of her grandparents and parents being part of helping to build two churches in the town over the last 150 years.

Many Unity services are taking place throughout the county with churches focusing on their timetables for 2017. For lent, the Bunyan Centre in Bedford organised five sessions the theme "The Power of the Cross" a journey through Lent with John Bunyan. It was a privilege to be part of helping and attending these services. At another church groups meeting they said that over Lent they were gathering people to watch the film "Chocolat" This is the story of a mother and daughter who arrive in a small French town and open up a chocolate shop just before Lent! They were asked to look at its content and ask "What is it to be a good Christian?" For those who have seen the film I hope you agree it is very thought provoking as well as showing the wonderful way to make chocolate!

Some of the churches I met shared how the landscape of their churches is shifting at a rapid rate sharing their concerns that numbers are dwindling compared to those churches having large numbers in their congregation with not enough leaders. Churches shared how they have worked on how they can best use their space with different activities. One church shared recently they are making new partnerships where one of the new churches who needs space to pray can use their church.



## Meetings

The next section covers meetings with Churches Together Luton Executive, Ecumenical Partners, Churches Together England and Bedfordshire Ecumenical Committee.

### **Churches Together Luton Executive**

- I attend the church leaders monthly prayer meetings.
- Support and facilitate at the Luton Churches Together Executive meetings who host various visitors : Cllr. Hazel Simmons leader of the council who shared issues and concerns as well as the growth and positive change in the town. Met with Sally Rowe Director of Children & Learning hearing about school placements , new school build and fostering services. Mandy Godfree from the Christian Police Association. Chief Superintendent Dave Boyle and Inspector Hob Hoque who talked about " Faith in Action"
- Church Leaders from the town church clusters have attended and shared the work they do in their areas with other churches.
- I am on the planning group for the Reformation service to be held on 8th October 2017 at St Marys a 900 year old church. The focus is to commemorate the history, to look at how the churches served the town through the ages and the church here and now and in the future.
- Helping with the support and planning for the town wide Pentecostal service 2017. The service last year had over 50 churches and 300 people attending.
- Support the planning for Mission 2018
- Helped the executive put together reason "why join Churches Together" It is a guide to help and support churches and attract new churches to be part of working together.
- Luton is responding to Archbishop Welby's challenge to all to pledge to pray by inviting the church to step up and pray for ten days before Pentecost Archbishop Welby has been calling the Christian community to pray for people to know Jesus. Watch his challenge to us here: [Archbishop's Call to Pray](#). I have proposed and designed a book mark calling us to pray more . This will be handed out at the Pentecostal service in June. My thanks to Grassroots for their help with the book mark.
- Liaising with the Pray for Luton team and working with the evangelisation team at Our Lady's church to prepare a prayer service in July.
- Attend the Luton Council of Faith meetings with other ecumenical partners.
- Joe Pienaar the new Area Dean for the Anglican church spoke at the Luton Churches Together AGM in April . His vision to help churches have more confidence and focus and work together. He shared his personal journey and is planning a town wide Mission 2018 with the help of cluster group of Churches in the town.
- I attended the prayer evening at the charity Azalea [www.azalea.org.uk](http://www.azalea.org.uk) helping men and women walk free from sexual exploitation. I had a tour of their new building. They will be celebrating ten years in June.



### **Churches Together England (CTE) & Ecumenical Meetings**

- Attended two consultation with CTE in England covering The Five Ecumenical Imperatives and the Reformation.
- Attended the Focalare Centre with the Catholic ecumenical partners sharing how we support each other.
- Attended meetings with Bishop Peter, Bishop Richard and Bishop Alan with rural and area deans. One leader showed statistics highlighting the problem of homeless in Bedford and Luton and asked what can churches do to help?

- Attended Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire ecumenical partners meetings to share.
- Attended regional County Ecumenical officers meetings to share and learn new ideas.
- Attended the Ecumenical Commission Executive.
- Attended the Bedford Ecumenical Educational Chaplaincy Committee meetings (BEECC)
- Attended two meetings for two new Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP) in Thurleigh and Luton.

### **Bedfordshire Ecumenical Committee (BEC)**

I meet with BEC four times a year. I feed back to the members what church leaders and Churches Together groups are sharing and how best we can support. We will be looking at a strategy for 2017/2018. Over the past year several changes have been made one is a new membership letter sent out to Church groups explaining the purpose of BEC, the ecumenical officers role and change to membership fees. We are currently updating our ecumenical partners and church groups list.

Our website has improved and shows news and what is going on in Bedfordshire. The objective is to show share how active our churches are in Bedfordshire. If you wish to send information and good news stories please email our web manager [alan@biggleswadchurch.org](mailto:alan@biggleswadchurch.org). The website is [www.together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/bedfordshire](http://www.together.ourchurchweb.org.uk/bedfordshire)

### **Summary**

I am forever growing in my learning of different traditions. The joy of seeing activities of churches together in action showing Gods light shining out to the community. To continually promote the vision of Ecumenism throughout Bedfordshire at times can be a challenge. A lot of time is needed to build relationships and network. I will present to the BEC members at the next meeting in July to reflect and to give time to look at ecumenical focus for the future for Bedfordshire. We have a brief questionnaire at the Forum this evening I would be grateful if you could take time to complete to help us understand how we can help and support ecumenism for the future.

Unity is important this is Gods brief to us to be as one !

**I will end with a prayer :**

**May Christ light grow bigger in our hearts and minds and our churches as a beaming light of Love, compassion and healing for humanity Amen**

## Appendix A

### What churches have shared in their work :

- Creating a Peace garden from unused large church spaces.
- Creating allotments for use for unemployed young people to use as their Manual Handling qualifications.
- Chaplaincy training
- Christian cafe
- Choirs merging from different churches for their Unity services.
- Counselling services.
- HUGS - Mentoring for children and young people
- Elders monthly lunch gatherings
- Messy church days for mums and toddlers
- Bible study/ Open the book.
- Film study for Lent interpret the film content of " Chocolat"
- Bedford prison visits
- Hospital visits
- Praying around our churches
- Care Home visits
- Music school for young people
- Pray for your town churches taking turn to host the evening.
- Holiday club.
- Prayer Trees
- Homeless project in action
- Street pastors
- Food banks collection points at churches.
- Azalea charity prayer meetings.
- Prayer on the streets and healing
- Monthly church leaders prayer meetings.
- Allotment in church garden and teaching children to cook who do not have enough food.
- Music concert with different cultures performing.
- Youth officer training.
- Peace Walks
- New Years Eve midnight serve praying for the on coming year.
- Youth get together for a game of bowling.
- Walk of Witness procession including children carrying the cross.
- Carnival themes.
- Swapping pulpits
- River festival
- Ecumenical lent course
- Sunrise Service Easter morning
- Praying for specific police officers
- Carol service hymns sung in different languages.
- Newletters and magazines

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