

SHIRE & SOKE COUNCIL MEETING
20th January 2010 2.00 p.m. Toller URC, Gold Street, KETTERING

PRESENT: John Anderson, Paul Arnold, Teresa Brown, Betty Chalmers, Richard Cook, Cliff Faulkner, Lynn Fowkes, Séan Healy, Pat Johnson, Jean Levell, John Levell, Eleanor Patrick, Roger Paul, Andy Sipple, Peter Strong, Bob Purser, Tom Thurman, Maureen Timms, David Tinkler, Peter Wilson, Glayne Worgan, Helen Wordsworth (and Helen Murphy as Minuting Secretary)

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Lynn Fowkes (Chair) welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Toller URC for acting as host for the meeting. Apologies were accepted from Adrian Coupe, John Warrington, Jo Weedon, Ted Hale and Phil Snelson.

2. WEEK OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

She reminded all of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which this year had been put together mainly by the Scots, in the centenary year of the seminal Edinburgh conference on world mission in the 20th century. In view of this, with much to celebrate, the theme of the meeting, surrounded by worship, was 'witness through awareness'. The meeting began with a call to worship, leading to a musical reflection on Psalm 23, a reading and prayers.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (6th October 2009) MATTERS ARISING (if not already on Agenda)

The minutes were accepted and signed by Lynn Fowkes. There were no matters arising.

4. EXEC NEWS

Updates were given by John Anderson, Methodist DEO for Shire and Soke, as follows:

- Lynn Fowkes would be staying on as Chair until the AGM in May, when a C of E representative would take over
- Jonathan Baker from Peterborough Cathedral had tendered his resignation, so a replacement from Peterborough would be needed.
- The review of Westgate (a Methodist/URC LEP) was nearly finished and would be presented in February.
- A review of the South Northampton Partnership of Churches would be next.

5. TREASURER'S REPORT

Copies of the up-to-date financial report (to January 2010) were distributed and studied, showing the original projection for 2009 and the actual, with the 2010 projection as precisely agreed. It was noted that contributions from local churches for 2010 would remain at the same amount (£15 per church) and that contributions to the CONC would continue. The balance for the current year was on track. Lynn Fowkes thanked Peter Wilson for his financial report.

6. COUNTY ECUMENICAL OFFICER'S REPORT

Teresa Brown reported on various activities she had attended or been involved in, since the last meeting, as follows:

- The induction of Revd Charlie Keenan, the new Baptist/URC minister at Little Stanion, a new development in Corby.

- Churches Together in Central Peterborough hired a city-centre shop (naming it 'Love Came Down at Christmas) where passers-by were invited in to a life-size nativity scene, and to "get in the picture" – to great success.
- Members should be aware that as Shire & Soke served the areas of Northamptonshire and Peterborough, both parts needed to be able to get good value from the association.
- New information leaflets were available from Churches Together in England, in which continued support through changes in charity law were mentioned. The Shire and Soke Exec were currently working with two churches affected by these changes, involving a new model Constitution for Single Congregation LEPs, and which in time all LEPs would need to abide by, in accordance with new charity law regulations.
- The CTE web site www.cte.org.uk was available as a useful resource with many informative links.
- On New Year's Eve, Teresa had joined a congregation of over 600 from many different churches in Peterborough Cathedral, looking back at the past year, reflecting on what the churches had done together and, after walking forward to the high altar, looking forward to and praying for the year ahead.
- Teresa had taken part in a New Year Leadership Prayer Walk in Northampton in the snow, all gathering together for prayer, after starting from various different points in the town. This had arisen out of Hope 08 and had been continued each year by the Hope Northampton team.

7. UPDATES ON LOCAL ECUMENICAL MATTERS

- The recent launch of the Street Pastor scheme in Corby was going very well.
- Information and booking forms were available from Camille Cummings of Hope UK for some free two-day training courses on working with families and young people, concerning drug education to prevent addiction. This would be free in Northants but no Drug Educator Scheme had yet been established in Peterborough.
- Notice was given of the forthcoming exhibition of Art from Zimbabwe, including many crafts, to run from 24th February to 6th March at the Toller church.
- Bob Purser gave an update on various developments in the area now beginning to move slowly forward again, with the availability of government money coming through, leading to an increase in house building. Appointments had been made at Mawsley, Upton, Little Stanion and the Wootton development (at Preston Hedges School). Two big planning decisions locally would have significant effect: Kettering East (5,000 houses) and Weldon Park (1,000 houses). In the north of the county, core strategy planning would be involving rural communities and the A6 towns, while in the west, the draft core strategy was still awaited. Two events would be taking place next month at Northampton University: one on the various faiths in the town and the other on the role of community development.

8. GUEST SPEAKER: The Revd Dr Roger Paul

Mission-Shaped and Ecumenical – Witnessing to Christ Today

Dr Roger Paul (the National Advisor for Unity in Mission) reminded all of the background to the modern ecumenical movement in the Edinburgh Mission Conference in 1910, which recognised that working together would be more effective, in order to evangelise the wider world without overlapping. There was also a recognition that existing European divisions should not be exported – the gospel of reconciliation was the aim. Although we had come a long way since then, he said, there were still many present-day challenges to face at a local level. Parallel with increasing violence, particularly in town centres, there was now a vast and inarticulate spiritual hunger, making mission interactive, and which could only be achieved by working together. The theme of the centenary conference in Edinburgh in July would be 'Witnessing to Christ today'. He referred to Luke's gospel and Acts with their 'great

commission', based on a common witness via a common baptism and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

The gap between the aims of ecumenism and the imperative of mission, he maintained, resulted in much interest in 'relational' ecumenism but rather less in 'structural'. He emphasised the prior importance of networks and relationships, from which the organisational element would follow. Learning from each other via these networks, through diversity leading to enrichment of relationship, needed energy, commitment and resources – but should be part of a local mission strategy, with opportunities equally for the laity.

He referred to the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sachs's definition of relationship: (a) *face to face* (i.e. with the focus on each other) and (b) *side by side* (i.e. walking and doing together, with a focus on the common task) and the interchange between the two. In all this, discernment of God's will was vital. By listening (using 'double listening' i.e. listening to the context, the overview, and listening to each other), we are listening to God. But how to move on from discernment to action? He gave some basic principles on which to work, based on: clarity of objectives, a shared sense of purpose and ownership of goals, using the right people to speak, effective meetings, monitoring of progress, equal partnership between all participants. Structures – following rather than leading – should be a means to an end, not the end itself.

He referred to a new commentary on Acts being prepared by Loveday Alexander (from Sheffield) which notes, among other things, the series of chance events/encounters, with no apparent co-ordinated central mission driving it. However, a second most important feature is that out of this disconnectedness, a network of relationships was established, through the process of discerning the Holy Spirit at work, and connecting it with the Apostolic faith.

He concluded that our mission may well be like this, but as ecumenists it was our task to do the 'joining up'.

9. DISCUSSION AND SHARED PRAYER

After dividing into small groups for discussion on questions (see Appendix on page 4), all came together again for singing and prayer for the blessing of the Holy Spirit, with intercessions and concluding with the sign of peace shared among everyone.

10. LOOKING AHEAD: Pentecost 2010 and Vision Day

The Pentecost 2010 event would be taking place in Abingdon Park, Northampton from midday until 6.00pm (with Graham Kendrick booked). Several Churches Together groups in the county would be organising coaches. Two Vision Days were planned for (i) 8th May in St Andrew's Methodist Church in Northampton and (ii) 2nd October at a venue to be arranged in Peterborough. Both on a Saturday morning and ending with lunch, these would replace the usual Shire & Soke weekday Council meetings, as an experiment for the current year.

11. AOB

As there was no further business, the meeting concluded with all saying the Prayer of Commitment.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Saturday, 8th May, in Northampton (see above) – details on time tba.

Signed.....Date.....

APPENDIX

Questions for Discussion: 20.01.10

- Give examples of ecumenical mission in your own neighbourhood/community.
- How do Churches discern what mission they are called to do together?
- What are the difficulties encountered in doing mission together?
- What are the benefits of ecumenical mission?
- How important is the process of discerning the fruits of mission?
- How can you go about testing and reviewing what has been together?