

NEWSLETTER No8

Summer 2016

CHURCHES TOGETHER
IN CHESHIRE



Welcome!

Welcome to this, the latest of the newsletters from Churches Together in Cheshire. As before I seek to include both news items and notices of ecumenical activities and events that are taking place within Cheshire, and also information relating more widely to the ecumenical scene across the country. .

In this newsletter we note some of the events of recent months and look ahead to significant events of the next three months. Please see the items in this newsletter relating to these matters.

You will find my contact details at the end of this Newsletter, and if you wish any future edition to include reports of what has been happening in your neck of the woods, or to advertise any forthcoming event I would be pleased to hear from you

Andrew Taylor

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 2017

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, as ever to be celebrated across the octave 18-25th January, will in 2017 focus on the passage 2. Corinthians 5. 14-20, with its theme: “Reconciliation – the Love of Christ Compels Us”.

Prompted by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the theme and the materials have been selected by the churches of Germany.



In the introduction to the material they write:

“In 1517 Martin Luther raised concerns about what he saw as abuses in the church of his time by making public his 95 theses. 2017 is the 500th anniversary of this key event in the reformation movements that marked the life of the Western Church over several centuries. This event has been a controversial theme in the history of inter-church relations in Germany, not least in the last few years. The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has been building up to this anniversary since 2008 by focusing each year on one particular aspect of the Reformation, for example: the Reformation and Politics, or the Reformation and Education. The EKD also invited its ecumenical partners at various levels to help commemorate the events of 1517.

After extensive, and sometimes difficult, discussions the churches in Germany agreed that the way to commemorate ecumenically this Reformation event should be with a *Christusfest* – a celebration of Jesus Christ. If the emphasis were to be on Jesus Christ and his work of reconciliation as the centre of Christian

faith, the all the ecumenical partners of the EKD (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist, Mennonite and others) could participate in the anniversary festivities.

Given the fact that the history of the Reformation was marked by painful divisions, this is a very remarkable achievement.....so after centuries of mutual condemnations and vilification, in 2017 Lutheran and Catholic Christians will for the first time commemorate together the beginning of the Reformation. From this agreement and the wider ecumenical context emerges the strong theme of the 2017 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: "Reconciliation – the Love of Christ Compels us".

Easter Witness

Peter Speirs writes:

It is about six years since I was appointed as Chester Quaker Meeting's representative on 'Churches Together in Chester City Centre'. The group had led a fairly sedate existence; it organised united services at Christmas and at Easter, and it provided local support for and acted as an information exchange between member churches. I have always felt warmly welcomed by the group, and last year, unexpectedly, found myself accepting their nomination as chairman.

During the previous year, the group had accepted five new member churches, taking the total to sixteen, and widening our scope both doctrinally and geographically. We have remained united in those things we share, whilst accepting our differences in practice. In July, we held an open meeting, considering our purpose, wondering how we could make ourselves better known in Chester.

In September a suggestion was made by the Cathedral representative for a dramatised 'Way of the Cross' for Good Friday, in place of the 'Walk of Witness' which had been our tradition. The Walk had become poorly supported, and was sustained largely by the active participation of the Salvation Army. We decided to live adventurously, and explore the possibility of some street theatre, reminding the people of Chester of the meaning of Good Friday.

Churches Together had no experience of producing theatre, but we knew someone who had. Chester has a tradition of presenting its cycle of Mystery Plays every five years. It was two years before the next production, so we approached the Mystery Plays Board to propose a joint venture - Churches Together wanted to make a public statement of faith, and the Mystery Plays would gain valuable publicity and momentum leading towards their next production. After a series of informal meetings during the autumn, involving the Cathedral, an artistic director, and a manager, I and the chairman of the Mystery Plays were able to go to our respective bodies early in January with a firm proposal, including a budget, an outline script, and an itinerary through the centre of Chester. Despite some doubts within each body, we found ourselves in business.



We had only ten weeks before Easter, but hard work and a series of wonderful acts of generosity provided us with the funds (£5,500, raised from individuals, from churches, and from the Mystery Plays Company), spaces for rehearsal and storage (three central churches), and props and costumes (various sources). We invited groups from three primary schools to take part (80 children), we borrowed a donkey for Christ's entry in Jerusalem (at Chester's Eastgate), we involved the Town Crier and three of the Roman Soldiers (with their splendid costumes) who usually provide educational tours of Chester, we involved a small mobile orchestra and a sixteen piece samba band. And we found a cast of about ninety, divided probably 2:1 between Mystery Players and church members.

The result was quite astonishing. We expected perhaps 500 (depending on the weather), mainly church congregations, and some casual city-goers. We planned for up to 1,000, with appropriate stewards and traffic management. In fact, with a cold but clear sunny morning, we had a huge turnout - city officials estimated over 3,000. The narrow streets were packed solid; our designated acting areas almost disappeared - as did some small children, though their waving palm leaves indicated their locations! The crowd entered into the action, wavering between support for Jesus, and loyalty to Pilate and the Priests. The Last Supper, the betrayal, and Gethsemane all held the audience. Movement was almost impossible by the time of the Trial and scourging on the Town Hall steps, and we only just managed to negotiate our way to the Crucifixion at the West Door of the Cathedral. The silence during that last scene was scarcely believable; we realised that many would not see, nor hear, but they were there, rather as it might have been in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. We opened the huge West Door just enough to create the impression of the tomb, with a

bright light inside, our only concession to the hope that followed. Meanwhile, the children (now dressed in white) sang 'Not in that poor lowly stable, with the oxen standing by, shall we see Him; but in Heaven, set at God's right hand on high; When like stars His children crown'd, All in white, shall stand around.' And slowly, the actors dispersed, melting into the crowd.



Of course, we did get applause. We got five pages in the local paper. We appeared on BBC regional news at midday and in the evening. We have countless messages and photographs through social media. We received a Community Arts award for our 'audacious and bold' presentation. For all that, it remained an act of faith, a public statement of the meaning of Good Friday. Churches Together had done nothing like this before, but now we have a precedent. Do we follow it? Both Churches Together and the Mystery Plays Company have more decisions to make.

Ed: I am aware of other excellent examples of Passion Plays and Easter Witnesses in towns around Cheshire. I would be delighted next year to receive an account and/or pictures from your event to include in the Newsletter.

Salt of the Earth



Network events planned in 2016 are:

Thursday, 7th July

“How can I improve my workplace relationships?”

Speaker: Charles Hipsley (London Institute of Contemporary Christianity)
Venue: United Utilities, Haweswater House, Lingley Mere Business Park, Great Sankey, Warrington WA5 3LP
Time: 10am - 1pm

Thursday 17th November

“Are Faith and Science in Conflict”

Speakers: John Weaver
Venue: Solvay Interlox, Baronet Works, Baronet Road, Warrington, Cheshire WA4 6HA
Time: 11am - 1pm

For more information visit the website:
www.saltoftheearthnetwork.net.

Education Sunday: 11th September

Following consultation across the denominations and with other relevant bodies, Education Sunday has moved to the beginning of the academic year and will

be celebrated on the second Sunday in September. This year that date is 11 September.

A range of resources, from a liturgy of affirmation and commissioning, to ideas for all-age worship and sermon/homily notes will be available through the Churches Together in England website very soon.

To mark the move, Education Sunday will have a fresh new look and plenty of new ideas.

We hope you will join us in celebrating the calling of all those who serve in education.

Prayer and Prisons Week

Revd Bob Wilson, the Free Churches Faith Advisor to the Prison Service writes about praying for Prisons Week in October:

“Prisons Week this year is being held from 9th – 15th October and I would like to encourage as many as possible in the church to pray for all those affected by imprisonment.

There are currently around 85,000 men, women and children in our prisons with many, many more affected by the crime and hurt that these people represent. It was recently estimated for example that 200,000 children were affected by having a parent in prison.

As we grow in faith and realise just how much God loves each one of us, just how great is his mercy in forgiving, nurturing and encouraging us; then we find that we ourselves become more able to show mercy to others and to ask God to show yet more towards us.

We know we could always do better and although God calls us to perfection, only God is perfect. In this Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis, 'Lord, have mercy' is the shared, common prayer for Prisons Week, putting us all on holy ground and an equal footing as we draw closer to Jesus, the 'face of the Father's mercy'. Please do consider how you as a church may be able to engage in prisons week this year.



You could order prayer leaflets / posters for your church, with prayers for each day of the week from www.prisonsworld.org

You could possibly invite a local prison chaplain to visit your congregation to share their experience of prayer at work.

You could hold a special service to raise awareness of all those affected by imprisonment.

Whatever you do, let me encourage you to pray. Prayer changes lives, and we can all cry out, for ourselves and for all those affected by prison, Lord, have mercy.

Web page links:

www.prisonsworld.org

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/465238/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Prayer_and_Prison.aspx



Raising Awareness of Modern Slavery

An Ecumenical Initiative for churches in Cheshire

Churches Together in Cheshire, the Diocese of Chester and the Cheshire Anti-Slavery Network are working together to raise awareness of Modern Slavery. All churches of any denomination or tradition are invited to use a Sunday near to Anti-Slavery Day on 18th October to:

- introduce issues relating to the crime of Modern Slavery
- Help people spot the signs of human trafficking
- Know signposts to specialist support
- Use available resources to mark Anti-Slavery Day within their church community

It is hoped that as many churches from around the county will respond to this invitation. Will yours?

Did you know:

Government figures suggest there are 13,000 enslaved and trafficked people in this country.

Identified potential victims are from 97 different countries

Over a fifth were children at the point of exploitation

By country of origin UK nationals are the third largest group of those exploited

Examples of Modern Day Slavery:

- ▶ Trafficking and Modern Slavery is highly linked and associated with other forms of Organised Crime.
- ▶ Sexual Exploitation and Forced Prostitution
- ▶ Forced and bonded Labour
- ▶ Forced Begging

- ▶ Forced Criminality including drug related crime
- ▶ Sham Marriage
- ▶ Domestic Servitude
- ▶ Removal of Organs
- ▶ Child Slavery

For further information see:

Diocesan website or www.cheshire-churches-together.org.uk

Agricultural Chaplaincy

Keith Ineson, the Agricultural Chaplain, who founded the Chaplaincy will be retiring in September. A service to mark Keith's retirement, to celebrate the work of the Chaplaincy over the past 16 years and to induct the new Chaplaincy team will be held on Friday, 2nd September at St. Mary's Church Acton at 7.30 pm.

The service will be followed by refreshments. All are welcome.

Next Edition

The next issue of the Newsletter will be in September. If you have any items you would like to be included please send them in by 31st August, 2016.

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