



CHURCHES TOGETHER IN KENT

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From: Revd Michael Cooke, Secretary to Council, and County Ecumenical Officer for Kent

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

held 10:00 am, on Wednesday 23rd November 2005 at The Hermitage, West Malling, Kent

Present

Revd Robin Blount (Canterbury Diocese); Mr Michele Cascioli (Hon Treasurer);
Revd Alex Cheyney (Kent Baptist Association (KBA)); Revd Geoffrey Collins (URC);
Pauline Condon (Quaker, West Kent Meeting); Revd Melvyn Cooke (Methodist,
London SE District); Revd Michael Cooke (CEO, Minutes); Revd Malcolm Cooper
(Methodist London SE District); Revd Roger Cresswell (Methodist, London SE District);
Revd Tony Cross (KBA, and Chairman); Revd John Currie (Rochester Diocese);
Revd Jeremy Ive (Rochester); Canon Jean Kerr (Rochester Diocese); Capt Sarah Kind
(Salvation Army); Revd Guy Lawrence (KBA); Revd Ruth Matthews (KBA); Revd Jim
Perryman (Canterbury Diocese); Revd Fr Geoffrey Pointer (Catholic, Archdiocese of
Southwark); Revd Bryan Shirley (URC); Michael Staynes (Quaker, East Kent Meeting)

Visitor

Revd Alan Amos (Medway Chaplaincy) - present for Minute 4 below.

Apologies were received from:-

Major Anthony Cotterill (Salvation Army, SE Division);
Bishop John Hine (Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark);
Bishop Michael Nazi-Ali (Rochester Diocese);
Revd Nigel Uden (URC, Southern Province)

1. Opening Prayers

These were led by Tony Cross.

2. Membership, and Agenda for this Meeting

2.1. Current Membership

This had been distributed as a pink sheet. There were no amendments.

2.2. Further Agenda items

These were taken in the order 3, 5, 4, 6-end, but are recorded in the order they appeared on the Agenda paper.

3. Finance

3.1. Current Situation and any issues

Michele Cascioli indicated that we were on target for a break-even account for calendar 2005. There was approximately £400 in the current account, and £4,200 on deposit.

3.2. Annual subscriptions to Churches Together in Kent in 2007

The budget for 2006 had been set in November 2004, and we had agreed on a zero increase from 2005. This could not be sustained for a further year, given the expected increase in stipend (~5%), and corresponding increase in the pension contributions. A 5% increase for 2007 was therefore proposed and agreed – this equated to as £3,481 for each of Canterbury, Rochester and Southwark Dioceses, and £696 for each of KBA, Methodist, Salvation Army and URC. As currently happens, the contribution from the three very small Quaker Meetings would be by local agreement.

Action: All to inform denominational treasurers

4. Inter- and Multi-Faith issues within Kent

This was the major agenda item of the meeting, lasted 60 minutes, and was introduced by Canon Malcolm Cooper (Chairman of the North Kent Council for Interfaith Relations (NKCIFR)) and Canon Alan Amos (Chaplain to Medway NHS Trust).

Malcolm Cooper began by explaining that today's meeting was very timely in view of two recent questions put to him:

- (a) *From Mrs Kelly Seyfioglu (Gravesham Borough Council):* What has happened since the very helpful meeting in November 2002 between CTKent and NKCIFR held in Gravesend?
- (b) *From Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali:* What do the interfaith issues mean for the Christian Community?

Other imperatives for interfaith working continue to arise from the facts that

- (c) Culture and religious expression are so interwoven;
- (d) Chaplaincy work is increasingly a multifaith appointment (e.g. at Greenwich); and
- (e) The Guidelines for Pastoral Care (book produced under auspices of NKCIFR) needs to be reissued.

Some of the challenges the Christian Community needs to be aware of are:-

Approximately 10,000 people of Sikh culture (some culturally, some religious) live in the Gravesend area; more Sikhs are involved in the Gurdwara than Christians in the churches. Add then the minorities of Muslims and Hindus, a growing Bah'ai and a small Jewish community, and the multicultural element of society cannot be overlooked.

Malcolm was adamant that a syncretic approach to such multiculturalism is neither desired nor contemplated by the religious groups. Those who are activists in their communities have a high regard for other faiths, but want to keep their own distinctiveness.

Alongside the issue of racism is the word "faithism":- How do churches handle the issue of "faithism and secularism"? How do faith communities instil in the wider society a point of reference beyond themselves?

There needs to be much more discussion at Church leader level – Malcolm felt that faith leaders do not converse easily about inter-faith matters, or if they do, they do not naturally share their conversations with others. (NB They do after a tragedy such as the 7 July bombing in London – but why does such conversation only begin after such a disaster?)

In Questions on the above some distinctivenesses of Islamic Governance were identified (e.g. for many abhorrence of a monarchy)

Alan Amos developed the discussion about varieties of strands within Islam, as there are within the other faiths. There are divisions over polity and governance. He pointed to the need to develop a dialogue with Muslims.

Communication between the various inter-faith groups was not easy within Kent (e.g. with respect to travel) Is there scope for a Kent website where we can share inter-faith information relevant to Kent (NB not replicating what is already on national inter-faith sites) Interfaith dialogue is about recognising the integrity of each faith; and honesty about our own beliefs.

Within hospitals, inter-faith chaplaincy has to do with at least three different groups: (a) patients; (b) friends; and (c) employees. Members of each of these may have a varied faith, or none – and each is asking different questions of chaplaincy and about faith.

Some people speak of a ladder of faiths - Political correctness can lead to stripping everything out. Should paganism be one rung on the ladder?

What might CT Kent be doing within such an interfaith area? Suggestions were:-

- (1) Distribute Good Practice
- (2) Provide to the churches teaching materials which aim to encourage discussion, and which would counter tendencies in some places to devalue everything not 100% Christian.
- (3) Should there be an “Interfaith Kent” body as a link between local interfaith groups and the South East England Faith Forum (SEEFF)?
- (4) A website – would need to be moderated

Alan and Malcolm agreed to reflect further on the points made, and to report back.

Action: Alan Amos, and Malcolm Cooper

5. Issues from the Church Leaders' Meetings (most recent was on 13 Sept 2005)

5.1. Kent Industrial Mission

This is the major item on the next meeting of Church Leaders; Revd David Helms (Lead Partner within KIM, and Director of Workplace Ministry for Church and Society) will be presenting on behalf of the chaplaincy the business plan for 2006.

Action: KIM and Church Leaders

5.2. Ashford: Mission Co-ordinator

Revd Tony Cross read out a letter he had received from Simon Ellis (current Mission Co-ordinator), which drew attention to his proposal that Churches in Ashford should be forming a Covenanted Partnership. Michael Cooke indicated that he was in discussion with Simon about how this could be achieved, have the desired degree of commitment, yet without a heavy cumbersome Constitution (Churches Together in England's Type 2 LEP seems to offer just what is needed)

The Church Leaders were in discussion about if/how a Mission Co-ordinator post in Ashford should be continued – recognising the background of the massive increase in housing foreseen in the Ashford area.

Action: Church Leaders

5.3. Prayer across Kent in 2006

Bishop Graham Cray was progressing this.

Action: Bishop Graham

5.4. Collation, Induction, Installing, Licensing, and/or Welcoming of ministers to posts with an ecumenical role

Michael Cooke drew attention to this Working Guidelines Paper ("working", because there will always be further amendments needed). The latest version has incorporated a couple of suggestions from Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali. Please would members ensure that these Guidelines reach those people (Superintendents, Archdeacons, ministers, etc) involved in such appointments! A copy is available on our website.

Action: All

6. Other National and Regional News/Issues, including Churches Together in England (CTE)

Revd Michael Cooke (County Ecumenical Officer, and Anglican) and Revd Melvyn Cooke (Superintendent Minister in Medway, and a Methodist) had been nominated by the Church Leaders to be CT Kent's representatives to CTE's Forum (12 - 14 May 2006).

Michael Cooke drew the meeting's attention to Pilgrim Post, CTE's bi-monthly publication which helps us to keep abreast of wider ecumenical issues and events.

7. LEPs and Informal Local Partnerships

7.1. Latest situation(s) on LEPs

Two current issues were specifically mentioned:

- (a) Burham and Wouldham LEP (Anglican/Methodist) - there is an issue over whether it should remain an LEP;
- (b) The two URC/Methodist LEPs in Thanet (Margate (Union Church), and Ramsgate (Hardres Street):- there had recently been an extended Staffing Consultative Group meeting involving these two LEPs, the Methodist Circuit and the local URC Cluster, with a view to providing advice to the denominations on future staffing.

In discussion three points were made:-

- (1) There is a desire within LEPs to "get on with the job of being church locally", rather than take time to solve issues which seem imposed from above.
- (2) Since Kent's church leaders have declined to share oversight (unlike in many other areas in England), there is no effective ecumenical oversight; no ecumenical ownership of our LEPs.
- (3) The profile of the nominated contact people should be raised.

The Ecumenical Officers will take these issues to their next discussion. (At their regular 4-monthly meeting they discuss LEPs which were undergoing particularly interesting or challenging changes.)

Action: Ecumenical Officers

7.2. Matters from other partnerships and Churches Together Groups

None were mentioned.

8. Other Ecumenical Work, including

8.1. Wellspring 2005 (18 June 2005, at Aylesford Priory)

This event had been highly valued by those who participated, but for whatever reasons (And a report had identified possible causes) far fewer people came than to the Wellspring

in 1995. As a result there had been a trading loss of just over £10,000. The Church Leaders had agreed to underwrite a minor loss – and were now in discussion about this larger-than-expected loss.

Action: Church Leaders

8.2. County Show (“Ownership” of Churches’ stand)

The current format had worked as well as in the past – but some churches were asking whether the purpose and practice of the Churches Tent should be reviewed in the light of the evolution of the Show itself, and a possibility that the current Rural Chaplain’s role would change on the retirement of the current chaplain.

8.3. Training for church involvement in Critical Incident Response

Jane Winter was congratulated for her work in arranging this highly regarded programme. Michael would write to thank her. 66 chaplains were now trained; there were not yet chaplains from other faiths.

Action: Michael

8.4. Emerging Church Event

Tony Cross reported on the proposed 1-day consultation proposed for June 24th. The theme there would be “How do we ‘do’ church in 21st Century?” Invitations would be extended to all clergy and lay leaders. Two speakers were expected: Stuart Murray-Williams (Anabaptist background) and Stephen Croft (Anglican). Members were asked to note and publicise the event.

Action: All

9. Communications

9.1. CT Kent’s Ecumenical Directory (Updates to, and format of)

Michael Cooke drew attention to the latest version (November 2005) on the website, and offered to provide hard copies for anyone who needed this. NB the most current information is always on the web!

9.2. Notifying Ecumenical Events across Kent

CT Kent’s page of “Events of Ecumenical Interest” relied on information being sent in. Members were asked to keep Michael informed.

Action: All

10. Denominational News

10.1. Happenings or plans affecting the denominations in Kent

Baptists continue to seek a way of restructuring – without much obvious progress.

URC are nationally removing one layer of governance (from present 4 (General Assembly, Provincial Synod, District Council, and Church Meeting). How this will be done depends on the local Province

Methodist

(a) The current four London Districts cease in August 2006, and will be replaced by three Districts: one London District, and one District to the North of London, and a new South East District (which is what affects Kent, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire). For this new South East District there is now a Full Time Chair-designate (to be confirmed at Conference in July 2006), and the plan is for 3 Part-Time Assistants – there is to be a Consultation/Information-Sharing Day on 21 January 2006 at Redhill.

(b) Three categories of ministers associated with circuits were described

- (1) Recognised and Regarded – these ministers can be stationed at the direction of Conference
- (2) Authorised ministers – these may have some pastoral responsibility;
- (3) Associate ministers – there are ministers authorised to perform certain roles within the church, but will not have pastoral responsibility.

It is therefore likely that non-Methodist ministers who help in a Methodist circuit would be under categories (2) or (3).

11. To approve the Minutes of the previous Meeting of the Council held on 16th March 2005

These Minutes had already been distributed (they are as usual also available on www.ctkent.org.uk), and were unanimously agreed as a correct record, and were signed by the Chairman.

12. Matters Arising from Minutes of 16th March 2005

No important items were identified not already covered as part of the above Minutes.

13. Any Other Business

Including Date(s) of Meetings in 2007 (we should set at least one!)

Dates in 2006 are already agreed as 15 March, and we also confirmed 22 November. The Church Leaders would consult for 'best dates' in 2007 at their forthcoming meeting on 20th December.

Action Church Leaders

14. Closing Prayers were led by Revd Tony Cross