



CHURCHES TOGETHER IN KENT

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

Minutes of a Meeting of Full Council

held at 9:30 am, on Wednesday 12 March 2008

at St Justus Church, The Fairway, Rochester, Kent ME1 2LT

Members of Council present:-

Revd Peter Clark (URC); Revd Geoffrey Collins (URC); Revd Michael Cooke (County Ecumenical Officer, and Secretary); Major Anthony Cotterill (Salvation Army); Revd John Currie (Rochester Diocese); Revd Peter Hills (Methodist South-East District); Bishop John Hine (Southwark Archdiocese); Revd Jeremy Ive (Rochester Diocese); Canon Jean Kerr (Rochester Diocese); Major Sarah Kind (Salvation Army); Fr Wilfrid McGreal O Carm (Southwark Archdiocese); Revd Peter Neatham (Methodist South-East District); Revd Pauline Sparks (URC); Revd Bryan Shirley (URC); Michael Staynes (Religious Society of Friends); Revd Nigel Uden (URC, and Chairman).

Others present:

Revd Richard Alford (CT Medway); Capt Bernard Allen (CT Broadstairs); Revd David Helms (Kent Workplace Mission); Revd Paul Johnson (CT Whitstable, also New Life); Pauline Lamb (CT Herne Bay); The Ven Peter Lock (Rochester Diocese, and standing in for Bishop Brian Castle); Revd Fr David Smith (Russian Orthodox Church, Tunbridge Wells); Rodney Stone (CT Dover).

Apologies were received from:-

Bishop Brian Castle (Rochester Diocese); Revd Alex Cheyney (South Eastern Baptist Association); Revd Malcolm Cooper (Methodist, South-East District); Bishop Graham Cray (Canterbury Diocese); Revd John Hellyer (Methodist South-East District); Pastor Paul Johnson (New Life, Whitstable); Revd Guy Laurence (South Eastern Baptist Association); Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali (Rochester Diocese); Revd Norman Tharby (South Eastern Baptist Association); Bishop Stephen Venner (Canterbury Diocese)

Executive Summary

Apart from attending to minimal but necessary Council business (e.g. approve Minutes of the previous meeting (See Minute 3)), the main purposes of the Meeting were

- (a) To share **Current Good Ecumenical Practice** (see Minute 4), and
- (b) To outline important strands in the **Future for ecumenical co-ordination/cooperation** of the churches in Kent (see Minute 5)

To these ends, invitations had been issued to all local Christians/Churches Together Groups in greater Kent, and to leaders of other church denominations not yet affiliated to CTKent.

Some clear conclusions were summarised by the Chairman (see Minute 6), including

- (a) Bexley and Bromley should be part of Churches Together in South London.
- (b) CTKent should provide an important Forum for Theology between the churches.
- (c) The county-wide body should have a more relational structure
- (d) There will be a Report to the Church Leaders, with a recommendation for a small but "snappy" Working Party to oversee the needed changes.

1. Opening Worship

The Chairman led prayers based on Matthew 17, and on the theme of Jesus' Transfiguration as the mark for our future.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were noted (as above) – in particular the absence of 2 bishops through long known commitments, and of two other bishops taking part in House of Commons / Lords business. We also remembered Revd John Hellyer recovering in hospital following an operation.

3. Minutes of the previous Meeting held 14 March 2007

These were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

4. Current Good Ecumenical Practice

4.1. The background to Churches Together in Kent (CTKent)

At the Chairman's request, Michael Cooke gave a presentation of the who/what/why/how of Churches Together in Kent as currently constituted, and drew attention to some of the cross-county roles presently undertaken by CTKent which cannot be handled purely at a local level. His paper is appended to these Minutes.

4.2. Good (and some bad) Ecumenical News happening locally

John Currie:

- (a) **Some LEPs are struggling** (e.g. in Walderslade, where the Methodist Circuit now has only 2 ministers, and where Recognised & Regarded Status for non-Methodist ministers is no longer possible).
- (b) **CT in Walderslade** is going well because of practical matters undertaken which facilitate the community, e.g. (1) a Youth Worker was employed ~2 years ago, and (2) the fortnight-long Festival (60 events)

Pauline Sparks drew attention to 3 new initiatives in **Petts Wood:-**

- (a) Ecumenical choir;
- (b) Weekend Visit of National Director of Spore (chaplains in sport);
- (c) Hope08 – numerous events throughout the year

Richard Alford (CT in Medway) drew attention to good news in **Medway:-**

- (a) quarterly prayer meetings;
- (b) Pentecost Sunday;
- (c) monthly ministers' meetings;
- (d) minimal central bureaucracy, with most events being led by ad-hoc groups;
- (e) one issue is the divide between the very evangelical churches and some others.

Rodney Stone (Christians Together in Dover):

- (a) Christians Together in Dover are a registered charity, which helps in providing £5million Third-party cover for some events;
- (b) Dover itself has some great advantages (e.g. celebrating Easter at the Castle overlooking the Channel);
- (c) much work also with asylum seekers and in social deprivation;
- (d) Buckland Estate (Crosslands);
- (e) there is a Quarterly Newsletter edited by Revd Michael Hinton (c.f. 100 Minute Bible);
- (f) the bad news is in trying to get folk to attend a meeting.

Jeremy Ive: There are at least two specific roles for a “county” body – viz:

- (a) Providing a systematic way for supporting LEPs; and
- (b) Support and encouragement of local Churches Together groups;

- (c) There seemed currently to be **two failings in CTKent**:
 - (1) the role of CTKent's Council has been too diverse;
 - (2) Reporting of CTiK's Council to Church Leaders is not direct enough

Fr Wilfrid McGreal: There is good news in **Faversham**:-

- (a) The Community Church and the Gospel Church are part of the witness;
- (b) With Faversham being host to a lot of people from Eastern Europe, a good leaflet has been produced showing where churches are in the town;
- (c) The churches work together well on big events (cited the Hop Festival, when over £1200 was raised for charity);
- (d) carols in the market square when over 1,000 people were present, and each minister "led" one carol;
- (e) Catholics share a church building with the Methodists; obligations and privileges of paying a rent;
- (f) Christians have done a lot to ensure Faversham is a Fairtrade town - one example of practical links with the community;
- (g) Three closing thoughts
 - (1) Not too many meetings! (2) Do things together;
 - (3) Websites are important

Jean Kerr:

- (a) Locally there are several good things happening ecumenically within Rochester diocese, viz:-
 - (1) Ecumenical Mission-Shaped Church course to be delivered in September will draw on folk from Salvation Army, Methodist, Baptist as well as Canterbury and Rochester dioceses.
 - (2) A Vision Day across the county (high hopes for good outcomes)

Bernard Allen (CT in Broadstairs):-

- (a) A good regular Programme of events under the banner of Churches Together in Broadstairs and St Peter's, e.g. 200-300 people at Bandstand on sea front;
- (b) Inter-church Bible Sunday (100 people talking part);
- (c) Chaplain to the local Asda store.

Geoffrey Collins:-

- (a) Being involved with the wider church, we are a resource for one another;
- (b) In **Whitstable**, the recent Lent series is involving visiting 5 different churches
- (c) the **New Life Church**, which had been meeting in a school, now meets in the URC building.

Fr David Smith (Russian Orthodox):

- (a) Thanked everyone for the invitation to be present;
- (b) spoke of how most Orthodox congregations in Kent are indebted to Anglican churches for places to meet (the exception is Margate which has its own church building)

Peter Hills (CT in Sevenoaks and District):-

- (a) ~40 churches over a wide area in and around Sevenoaks town;
- (b) good inclusion of churches of all traditions;
- (c) good subgroups (e.g. the Northwest Fellowship of Churches)

Michael Staynes spoke of the contribution of the **Society of Friends**:-

- (a) They may be a rather peripheral body, but perhaps one of the most ecumenical: there are refugees from other more established churches.
- (b) What are people rejecting when they reject a more structured church?
- (c) Quaker practice is that informal networks are better than more formal ones. It is better to work together than talk together.
- (d) Cited the example of how setting up a refuge for people with mental difficulties drew churches together in no other way - and yet how when the project was taken over by KCC the churches' common focus was lost.

5. The Future for Ecumenical Coordination/Cooperation

David Helms

- (a) spoke of how **Workplace Mission** drew in lots of people we would not expect in new ways beyond the usual denominational structures.
- (b) This prompts the question:- Are structures “prime time”, with the “best yet to follow”?
- (c) The key issues are environmental, economic and/or interfaith

Peter Lock noted:-

- (a) In churches, doing things together seems so much more productive than worshipping together (when all the problems can surface)
- (b) In formal partnerships (e.g. LEPs), is bureaucracy overburdening? How do we release our ministry people?
- (c) Thinking of *Partnership*, what can we learn from how the Trinity works in partnership?
- (d) The London Boroughs of Bexley and Bromley belong in CT South London.

Rodney Stone (Dover)

- (a) felt that if 50 years ago mission and evangelism might be found as items 4 or 5 on a church's agenda, today they are likely to be items 9 or 10.
- (b) Our agenda are too much about administration (e.g. Child Protection, Insurance; Finance; ...)
- (c) CTKent (or its successor) must be in business to energise people to address outreach

Bernard Allen (Broadstairs):

Don't think of 3R's, but 3M's:- Mission, ministry and money (in that order)

Jean Kerr:

- (a) Denominational Leaders getting together is where things that matter happen.
- (b) How do the Churches interact with inter-faith groups?
- (c) There is need for trust: that one local group can take on a project on behalf of others

Richard Alford (Medway):-

- (a) Should the pattern for CT Kent be like CT Medway where the central body doesn't do much, but encourages ad-hoc groups?

Paul Johnson (Whitstable):

- (a) Newer churches move relationally and with flexibility; they won't want to be involved in structures with committees!
- (b) CTKent should play to its strengths, rather than try to “cover all bases”;
- (c) There seems to be little engagement with theology: mission comes from what we believe. To spend more time on theology would be challenging, even exciting!

John Currie:

- (a) there's got to be a spiritual dimension
- (b) Any change of CTKent needs to take account of the fact that currently LEPs are constitutionally bound to CTKent.

Fr Wilfrid McGreal:

- (a) How can the churches together show both the church of Peter (institution) and the church of John (love)?
- (b) the churches exist in part to show that life is more than happiness, but blessing (c.f. *makarios*).

Geoffrey Collins:

- (a) In CTKent's early days, meetings used to be morning, lunch and afternoon, with time for together to discuss theology. Should this pattern be restored?

Pauline Sparks:

- (a) **Bexley and Bromley** should be within Churches Together in South London;
- (b) As for **CTKent**:
 - (1) We need to meet regularly as a visible reminder and expression of our unity;
 - (2) The Churches Forum needs to be real, to embrace greater diversity: theology needs to be discussed
 - (3) We should share our stories and spirituality - to be enjoyed across the different church traditions
 - (4) Resources for Mission should be shared: we need to meet to discuss what more can be shared.

Jeremy Ive:

- (a) Mission is predominantly local; but
- (b) Since co-operation can and does go wrong, there needs to be that collective central wisdom of the churches made available locally;
- (c) Theology needs to be central

Peter Neatham:-

- (a) In a way similar to Methodism's wrestling with the appropriate size and grouping of Circuits (and what is optimal should involve other denominations), so other churches' groupings should be worked out not alone but together with partner churches;
- (b) Circuits support and encourage the local churches which is where mission is undertaken: is this the model for CTKent supporting local partnerships?
- (c) All major denominations are facing a shortage of ordained ministers - but collectively there are plenty of them: how do we more effectively organise and share our ministerial resources? How can one minister serve in the name of Christ to the whole local community?
- (d) CTKent should enable a gathering of representatives from LEPS to share good practice.

6. Summary by the Chairman

Nigel Uden drew attention to some important common themes:-

- (a) **Bexley and Bromley**: There needs to be a conversation with Churches Together in South London
- (b) We need a separate **Working Party to handle issues of LEPS**
- (c) In creating a suitable instrument for the future, there is a clear need for the emphasis to be upon **networking of churches**, which ought to have the following strands:- relational, theological, defining a common motivation and mission

The **next step** would seem to be that, with the availability of the Minutes of this meeting, Nigel Uden (chairman), Anthony Cotterill (vice-chairman) and Michael Cooke (County Ecumenical Officer) will report back to the other church leaders; we can envisage a small working party (2 church leaders plus two others - volunteers?) to define a new body and/or structure/and/or title with wider representation of the churches in Kent.

7. Any Other Business

None - but (note added after the meeting): The Date of the Next Meeting of Council is Wednesday 19 November 2008 (10am), at The Hermitage, West Malling

8. Closing Prayers

Anthony Cotterill led these, with particular prayers for Archbishop Kevin McDonald (recovering from an operation), and for Guy Laurence (following his car accident earlier in the day). The meeting closed at 12:05 pm.