

Churches Together in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (CTHI)

To: Churches Together (and equivalent) groups in CTHI's area.

1st Dec 2009

Towards a 'new' CTHI

Recent changes in Churches Together in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

I am pleased to report that CTHI has prayerfully undergone an extensive review. We have asked whether CTHI should continue and, if so, in what form. We are grateful to all who have helped us in what has been a complex review process over several years. We would like to say 'thank you' if you are one of those who has assisted us. This process has raised a wide range of questions and considerable reflection on how to answer them. Our findings are summarised in the rest of my paper.

The Bible makes it clear that God's intention is that his Church should be one. I would like to commend a small booklet on unity produced by Churches Together in England and The Bible Society. It is entitled '*One Light: One World*' and I am told that you can download it from www.churches-together.net and then find 'Resources' and then 'Publications' - or you can request a printed copy from Churches Together in England. This booklet would form an excellent basis for a short, locally-organised course - I would be happy to assist.

1. What is CTHI's goal for the next few years?

We believe that CTHI should be 'mission focussed' and, to this end, the 'new' Churches Together in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight plans to encourage and support, inspire and inform local ecumenical relationships and mission initiatives.

2. How is CTHI intending to achieve this goal?

by

- (i) Establishing a new Forum;
- (ii) Continuing to work in partnership with local Churches Together groups.

a) The new Forum

CTHI has decided to set up a new Forum which, it is hoped, will become a significant means of involving the wider participation of the Churches Together groups across the area. Forums would be called when CTHI's Ecumenical Development Group and CTHI's Church Leaders' Gathering, in consultation with Church Together groups in our area, identify a need.

b) A continuation of working in partnerships when invited by a Churches Together group

Since 1998, whenever a particular Churches Together group in our area has approached CTHI to work together on an issue facing that CT group, we have consistently accepted such an invitation - and I'm pleased to report that we have been able to respond to the many invitations we have received. Where all participants have sought God's will for a particular situation and we have worked in partnership, the outcome has been valuable. My experience of such partnerships has been very positive and I am sure we will want to continue this approach into our 'new' CTHI. We intend (subject to resources) to continue to accept all such invitations so that all participants in each and every partnership gains a fuller understanding of what is involved in -

- participating in God's mission to the world;
- co-ordinating a mission response to, for example, new-build schemes and the many other needs of our communities;
- sharing the best practice in local ecumenism and what we can learn from national and global ecumenism.

3. How has CTHI worked in partnership in the past decade or so?

Since 1998, CTHI has:

- supported all those Churches Together Groups who have requested help from us with a review of their ecumenical priorities;

- celebrated, encouraged and helped to compile written covenants for the growing patchwork of covenantal relationships in our area and their outworking in mission locally;
- continued to pray together and identify helpful prayer resources which could be used by us and other groups;
- encouraged good ecumenical practice and explored ways of sharing such experiences more widely;
- attempted to build new partnerships both within our denominations and dioceses and tried to find effective ways of including the New Churches;
- provided discussion papers and articles on a ecumenical topic of a Churches Together group's choosing and then assisted them with the running of a study day or short evening course;
- offered advice on compiling (and gave help with the writing and processing of) a constitution for Local Ecumenical Partnerships in our area;
- put a Churches Together group in touch with another group facing similar issues;
- disseminated information, via major websites, on key developments in the Ecumenical Movement;
- sought to work with 'New Churches' in our area;
- encouraged and helped to set up, positive (rather than sterile and banal) encounters between Christians of different traditions so as to increase our understanding of each other and of our faith;
- reviewed the work of chaplains (in particular those chaplains that work in higher education) and sought to make this service known to Churches Together groups;
- supported the practice of united worship by, for example, providing preachers for such United Services of Worship;
- continued to seek God's will for making unity in Christ more visible in our area - not merely as an end in itself but as a way of participating in God's mission to the world.

We would like to say 'thank you' to all the CT groups that have invited CTHI to work in partnership on the above issues. If your group of Churches would like to explore a partnership with the 'new' CTHI on a matter of your choosing, then please contact us. We are hoping to appoint a Mission Together Enabler soon. In the meantime, you may contact Paul Rolph in the usual way. (But please note the new email address at the end of this paper.)

4. How will decisions be reached in the 'new' CTHI?

At the core of the new CTHI will be the Church Leaders' Gathering and the Ecumenical Development Group (EDG), which includes those Denominational Ecumenical Officers (DEOs) assigned to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. Hence all major decisions of the 'new' CTHI will be taken jointly by the EDG and the Church Leaders' Gathering. The plan is for these two groupings to work closely together to enable our goals to be met. It is recognised that new resources must be found so that the many partnerships that have been set up and implemented, since 1998, can be built upon and may develop.

5. Are there financial constraints on the 'new' CTHI?

We are all aware of the financial difficulties being experienced by a number of dioceses and denominations. Far more services must be cut, we are told, than were envisaged. It is not surprising, therefore, that many county, national and global ecumenical bodies are experiencing similar difficulties. To refer to just one example of national ecumenical body having funding difficulties, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is having to make major reductions in staffing and has had to find offices that are less costly. Although CTHI has been understaffed for some years, I am pleased to say that this situation has improved recently – for the first time in over a decade CTHI has almost all 'its' Denominational and Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (who are assigned to Hampshire and the Isle of Wight) in post. I expand on this welcome development in the next section.

6. Who are CTHI's Denominational (and Diocesan) Ecumenical Officers (DEOs)?

As I have said, it is good to report, for the first time in 11 years, that almost all those denominations and dioceses, which send representatives to serve on CTHI, have filled the vacancies in their posts of Denominational Ecumenical Officers (DEOs) - although the DEO for the Diocese of Winchester remains unfilled. The past difficulties of CTHI meeting its goals, due to understaffing, should now be put behind us thanks to these, often long-standing, vacancies being filled. All DEOs will sit on CTHI's Ecumenical Development Group and hence regular opportunities will be available to all 'our' DEOs to communicate and work with each other. The current DEOs in CTHI's area are:

- a) The Revd Stephen Wilkins, the URC Wessex Synod's Ecumenical Officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.
- b) Mr Peter McManus, The RC Diocesan Ecumenical Officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight
- c) The Revd Jacqui Horton, Convenor of the Ecumenical Team for the Southampton Methodist District
- d) The Revd Simon Sayers, The Portsmouth Anglican Diocesan Ecumenical Officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight
- e) The Revd Jacky Storey, Hampshire Representative of the Southern Counties Baptist Association
- f) Ann Titman is our representative from The Society of Friends.

7. Who are CTHI's current Church Leaders?

- a) Bishop Crispian Hollis, The RC Bishop of Portsmouth
- b) The Revd Grenville Overton, Lead Regional Minister for the Southern Counties Baptist Association
- c) Bishop Michael Scott-Joynt, The Bishop of Winchester
- d) Major Neil Webb, Salvation Army, Southern Division
- e) The Revd Adrian Bulley, Moderator of the URC Wessex Synod
- f) The Revd Dr Andrew Wood, Chair of the Southampton Methodist District
- g) The Ven Peter Hancock, Archdeacon of the Meon, Anglican Diocese of Portsmouth

8. What has been the role of CTHI's Counties Ecumenical Officer?

Since 1998, I have been CTHI's County Ecumenical Officer. This role has required me to work in a challenging and sometimes depressing ecumenical climate. Nevertheless there are national and international ecumenical developments, which are encouraging – that is why I have included a list of important ecumenical websites at the end of this newsletter. Exploring these websites will give you a feel of the many encouraging aspects of global and national ecumenism and also provide you with a wide range of valuable resources which can be adapted for your Churches Together group. (Again, I am willing to help.)

During my time as County Ecumenical Officer, I have been

- secretary to CTHI and its committees;
- responsible for liaising between CTHI and the South Eastern group of County Ecumenical Officers, Churches Together in England and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland;
- involved in advising on and drafting the necessary foundation documents for several local covenants between Methodist and Anglicans in Hampshire;
- responsible for setting up and co-ordinating partnerships (as detailed in 3. above) between CT groups in our area and CTHI.
- involved in An Anglican-Methodist Covenant, The Edinburgh 2010 International Ecumenical Conference, IBEX (a local industrial mission chaplaincy), a local Inter-faith Forum, two Universities' Chaplaincies and Hampshire's Emergency Planning Provision;
- centrally involved in several reviews of CTHI.

But by far the largest proportion of my time in this part-time (in fact, there is enough work for a full-time) post has been taken up with challenging issues relating to Local Ecumenical Partnerships in our area. It is really good news that CTHI's Church Leaders have agreed not to pass on the responsibility for LEPs in our area to my successor. This will free her or him to concentrate on other matters. If you would like a copy of the proposed job description and person specification for the CTHI's new part-time post of Mission Together Enabler, then please ask me for one.

I want to repeat what I've written above – that we are grateful for all the productive partnerships in which CTHI has been involved over the years. If your group of Churches would like to explore such a partnership (or to build on a previous partnership with us) by working on an issue of your choosing, then please contact us. We are hoping to appoint a Mission Together Enabler soon to replace the County Ecumenical Officer's post. In the meantime, please contact me but if you correspond by e-mail please use my new e-mail address which is paul.rolph@o2.co.uk

A request for information

Please may I have the following information - so that I can pass up-to-date details to my successor, if and when he or she can be appointed.

- *At least one contact e-mail address(es) for your CT group.*
- *An up-dated description of your Churches Together group so that I can replace the (probably out-of-date) description of your CT group currently on our CTHI website. www.cthi.org.uk*

Paul Rolph (contact details below)

9. Some valuable national and international ecumenical websites

The following websites are worth exploring, both to give you a feel for the current state of global ecumenism and also to help you to find resources for your local Churches Together group:

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland www.ctbi.org.uk

Churches Together in England www.cte.org.uk

Council of European Churches <http://www.ceceurope.org/>

Global Christian Forum, <http://www.globalchristianforum.org/>

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, <http://www.ctbi.org.uk/414>

World Council of Churches www.oikoumene.org

World Evangelical Alliance www.worldevangelicalalliance.org

Edinburgh 2010 - Ecumenical Missionary Conference <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/>

The Society for Ecumenical Studies <http://www.ecumenicalstudies.org.uk/>

The John Ray Initiative: connecting environment, science and Christianity <http://www.jri.org.uk/>

Christian Aid (you will be aware of the big Christmas sing to fight poverty) www.christianaid.org.uk

If you would like a book list of significant ecumenical texts, then please ask me.

Dr Paul Rolph, Research Fellow, Glyndwr University

New e-mail address paul.rolph@o2.co.uk

71 Andover Road, Winchester, SO22 6AU

Telephone number 01962 862574

NB Please note that an electronic version of this paper is available but do ask for a copy using my new e-mail address and then I can send it to you 'by return'. I should be grateful if you would help to distribute this paper so that the outcomes of our recent review and 'the new CTHI' are better known.

Every blessing this Advent and Christmastide