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Welcome



When historians look back on 2020 they will realise what a very strange and incredible year it has been. It seemed as if there was a perfect storm around so many issues. COVID-19 has continued to dominate all of our lives and change the way we interact with one another. That has been the backcloth against which the issues of racial justice, inter-religious relationships and climate change have continued to be played out. The untimely murder of George Floyd in the United States has impacted our understanding of racism and the Black Lives Matter movement has made us aware of deeply ingrained prejudice and inequality. This gave us an appropriate platform upon

which to begin a whole series of webinars that have continued over the last number of months. The early days of the pandemic allowed us to address issues of inequality with regard to PPE and the treatment of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic members of our community. This theme has grown and developed in all kinds of ways not least in the most recent webinar engaging with police officers from the Black community. Many other issues including a new initiative around Climate Sunday, which seeks to coordinate efforts around climate change as we approach the COP26 conference in Glasgow 2021.

The word Zoom has come into our lexicon and once unfamiliar word is now used to describe all kinds of activities. At Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) we have been swift in adopting the new technology in how we engage with our members. Online meetings with church leaders are now commonplace, just as we are also able to engage with those who are living with issues of justice on a day-to-day basis. This has I believe given so much of our work a sense of authenticity and rooted it in the day-to-day lives of those we seek to serve. The pandemic has created a great many problems but it has also given an opportunity for great creativity, and as we look to next year and a time when the pandemic will be over, at least across Britain and Ireland, there is a great deal to look forward to.

In this magazine you will find details of many activities from early in the New Year through into events in November and December. You will find notice of many resources that we hope will serve you in your own local context, whether Lent, Climate Sunday, children's worship resources or web resources on serious youth violence. We are delighted that we are still able to bring you so many high-quality resources and events during these difficult days. We should also remember that as we face this difficult time of the pandemic, there are so many whose daily lives face what appears to be unsurmountable difficulties. The work we highlight around racial justice and the Church of Sanctuary project, along with the crucial work of the Churches' Refugee Network gives voice to the reality that injustice and exclusion are no strangers to us. It must surely be part of our ongoing vocation to seek and serve those who are the most vulnerable, those whose lives are most at risk, those for whom the cross is a daily experience.

During the year we were able to appoint a new Moderator of Trustees and I'm delighted to say that the Revd Graham Sparkes has already begun to make an impact. We also would want to offer a huge word of thanks to our outgoing moderator Archbishop Angaelos.

We hope and pray that 2021 will bring new blessings along with a deep peace and fresh hope.

Bob Fyffe
CTBI General Secretary



44 member churches



**collaborating with
4 national ecumenical
instruments**
(across England, Ireland Scotland, Wales)



**working with 38 other
ecumenical organisations**



**linked to
8 charitable agencies**



640 tweets + 120 facebook posts



**1 new website launched:
wearesynergy.org.uk**



**140,000 minutes on 132 Zoom
meetings and 13 Zoom Webinars**



Sri Lanka: a healing of memories

By Christine Elliott, former CTBI Director
of International Programmes

'If Christ be for us who can be against us?' said the Revd Maxwell Doss, the new General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL), as he opened the meeting of the Council's partners in Colombo. He went on, 'We meet at a time of increasing hopelessness and militarism in Sri Lanka which is shrinking the space for building peace and reconciliation.'

I was representing CTBI at this meeting of international partners, because we are working with NCCSL on a five-year programme about land justice and reconciliation. Maxwell continued, *'We need a spirituality of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a way of living that leads to healing, which demands forgiveness and truth-telling.'*

The CTBI programme addresses the heart of this, the General Secretary's primary, current concern and the focus of the meeting was on the contemporary political and social conditions in Sri Lanka and the churches' response. We

met at a time of increasing helplessness in the country and yet we were challenged and stimulated to think beyond our own imaginations.

Before the meeting we spent three days visiting NCCSL work near Hatton in the tea plantations area, in the town of Ampara where inter-religious tension has been particularly tense and Batticaloa where Zion Church was destroyed by a bomb in the Easter attacks last year.

"now your task is to use love to show everyone that Islam is a religion of peace."

The hilly tea gardens are a beautiful sight. Behind the beauty are many stories of hardship. Many people's livelihoods depend on very hard work for meagre reward. Most tea pickers are women and if they manage to pick at least 16kg of leaves in a day they will

receive a daily rate, which is just over £3. Of course, they are not able to pick every day, some days there is no tea to pick and sometimes they are too ill to work. Houses are provided by the estate owners, they are small, often old and poorly maintained. There is a real need for water and sanitation projects. A recent NCCSL 'Tea Day' was a great celebration of local Tamil culture and deeply affirming for many people we talked to.

In Batticaloa we met with ten Christian clergy, nine Muslim leaders, three Hindus and three women from civil society organisations in a very open exchange about the situation. One of the imams recounted a conversation he had had with his son. He told him that two men had bombed Zion Church in Batticaloa and their violence changed everyone's perception of Islam, now your task is to use love to show everyone that Islam is a religion of peace.

The deep and meaningful conversation was a challenge to us all about how we are too often too quick to think the worst about a situation and yet we are called to be witnesses to God's perfect love which casts out all fear.



Main photo: Tea plantations; Christine Elliott meets a church leader in Ampara; waving children after a meeting on the tea estate; tea plantation workers' houses.



Find out more at: www.ctbi.org.uk/sri-lanka-visit-with-nccsl/ and www.nccsl.org



We also met a group of 10 former combatants. All had taken part in 'Healing of Memories' workshops run by NCCSL. All felt that it had helped them to heal their feelings of hostility and resentment. They had also received help to find a new livelihood and a secure place within a community formerly divided by religion and ethnicity; we heard of two people starting small grocery shops, one had bought a cow, one had set up a small poultry farm, one had set up a breakfast food stall and one was making snacks at home to sell locally.

The visits and meeting were humbling and inspiring, I am full of admiration and deep gratitude to the NCCSL staff for what they do.

Some other NCCSL highlights

- Inter-religious dialogue and networking included programmes after Buddhist-Muslim violence in Kandy and children's events in Mannar.
- Healing of Memories work included workshops, training and reunions and also, for the first time, a one-day programme at a Buddhist university.
- After the Easter bombings Muslims faced a lot of hostility. NCCSL enabled dialogue to mitigate violence, understand coexisting and promote healing.
- Healing Through Art and Drama workshops were held with orphans who had suffered abuse.
- Work with farmers, plantation communities and ex-combatants to enhance their dignity and security through livelihood training and organisation for land rights.
- Two booklets, "Strengthening Christian Unity, Joint Witness and Ecumenical Relationships" and "Witness in a Multi-Religious Country and Strengthening Inter-Religious Relations."
- Regional church councils, ecumenical lectionaries, liturgies and hymn books.
- Symposia for young clergy on ecumenism.
- NCCSL challenges member churches to work ecumenically rather have denominational programmes.



throughout the Symposium allowed honest conversations about difficulties within worship and missional practice where ingrained narratives that are ethically problematic have not been recognised or considered.

While the passages from Peter were the main theme throughout the conference and allowed us to hear God's care for those who are facing times of tension and oppression, the Psalms also played a significant role throughout the Symposium in underpinning the theme and inviting us into spaces of solidarity with those who are oppressed and marginalised, speaking out in anger and opposition to those who would abuse their power, raising voices of dissent and protest in amongst intimate and honest moments of profound praise. The opening worship on the first morning of the Symposium used the refrain of Psalm 107 – "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress". Wendell Kimbrough led us through versions of the psalms written in response to the Revised Common Lectionary for his worshipping community. New songs rooted in ancient truths. Songs written in response to stories preserved for us in scripture that resonate with our contemporary experience. These songs allow us to worship in the midst of tradition that informs and deepens our sense of identity and heritage, while expressing the contemporary reality of our hopes and fears.

This opened us up to the formative nature of the Psalms beyond the performative way in which we can be inclined to use them. We were reminded that in travelling through the stories and narratives of the Psalms in our worship, we often encounter words that are not directly for 'us'. These words might be songs of resistance needed by those who are facing situations where praising God or crying out to God can be difficult or even impossible. The words of the Psalms can locate us or draw attention to where people reside, or are imprisoned. These words can articulate something of the feelings of those who are struggling in our communities to lift praise to God, when they themselves cannot yet say them.

The narratives and stories of the Psalms remind us that when there are deep questions of self and community identity, then part of the essential

Calvin Symposium 2020

'Living in Hope and Grace'

by Phill Mellstrom

The Calvin Symposium on Worship run by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship took place in Calvin University and Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA from January 29th until February 1st 2020. With around 1500 delegates and over 30 nationalities the symposium looked to speak into the many issues we face in contemporary culture by sharing in culturally diverse worship and looking to scripture for approaches to loving God and loving our neighbour in contemporary culture and society. This was highlighted by the opening gathering for international delegates which focused on how we love our neighbour in and through our worship practice. People shared stories of different practice and stories of creativity and innovation in worship

based on both profound experiences and lived theology.

The theme and focus of "Living in Hope and Grace," based on 1 Peter, was present throughout the conference and could not have been more apt with the timing of the Symposium coinciding with the impeachment trial of President Trump and with the UK formally leaving the Europe Union. One of the main worship sessions of the Symposium referred to 1 Peter 5v8 – 'your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour'. As we worshipped I was reminded of the emblem of the Barbary lion synonymous with the British Empire and the uncomfortable realities of colonialism, while the 'roaring' highlighted the problem of badly behaved loud men in power. The shared spaces for learning

process of shaping liturgical and worship language, is recognising the equality of story. Sharing authentic expression rather than imposed models or interpretations is vital if we are to find worship practice that is formative, genuinely participative and ethically informed. As we become more aware of issues of colonialism in our language and practice, of imbalance of power and narratives that oppress or dehumanise, we need to become more sophisticated in our creating and leading of worship, especially if this worship informs our theology, rhythms of life and fuels our missional practice. The practice of mission that came to America was built on the idea of 'absence' – that God came with those coming to the land. Mission based on the premise of 'presence' has a healthier theology at its core and has more potential for contextual worship to develop organically and authentically. If we cannot find the people that we think should be emerging as leaders, then we are looking in the wrong places. The places where people are already making a difference, where people are already changing culture, where local wisdom and insight are leading the way – that is where we should be looking. St. Irenaeus, who said, 'The word desires in all times and places to become flesh'

'The word desires in all times and places to become flesh'

helps us understand that this missional endeavour should not be to try and find a perfect worship style or shape of church to be replicated, but to recognise that the word becomes flesh continually in all cultures, so we need to ask, where do we find the essence of Christ in amongst the diversity?

We were challenged in several sessions to consider –who gets to tell the story? This was set in context by considering the issues around the novel 'American Dirt' written by a white author, but telling the story of Mexican migrants. Input from several 1st Nation leaders, namely Bishop Mark McDonald and Mark Charles, helped to dig deeper into issues of historic narrative, systemic racism, oppression, marginalisation, privilege and power that are easy to ignore especially if the majority of your experience is rooted in communities that are not particularly

diverse. Bishop Mark highlighted that moving outside the paradigm of western worship practice is the place where authentic development of practice, spirituality and formation for indigenous people can happen in ways not incongruent with the reality of indigenous life.

The Symposium certainly did not lack diversity; with delegates from over 30 countries and input from so many different cultures and theological perspectives, it was clear to see the ethos of openness, welcome and a spirit of sharing. Learning and growing together are most definitely at the heart of this symposium and drive the leadership of Dr John Whitvliet, the founder of the Symposium.

There were profound moments of cultural awareness that I have very seldom experienced at large worship gatherings – such as when we prayed for the city of Miami as it hosted the Superbowl and in particular for the spike in human trafficking associated with these type of large scale events – which not only infused the prayers and worship in that moment, but challenged us to consider how we are working to make our idea of justice big enough so we might see what is captured in Psalm 85:10 'Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other.'

As I left the Symposium, I found myself asking – how might the themes, ethos and practices explored at Calvin become shared spaces of learning in the churches and communities with whom I work? What do justice, unity and ethically aware practices of worship and mission look like in the local context – whether city centre or urban priority



area church, rural or remote church, or fresh expressions of church?

In my role as a national Worship Development Worker for the Church of Scotland, I am interested in how we might explore these conversations at every level from local to national and ask real questions about unity, inclusiveness and equity as we seek worship practice that is collaborative and participative; where power is shared; where creativity and diversity are welcomed; where justice and peace are hallmarks of our ways of being and our intentions with each other; where no voice dominates or gets to shout down another, but rather our shared story is deepened. As we become more culturally and socially aware, as numbers of ministers drop, as more issues of gender equality are highlighted and the climate crisis and related issues of social justice deepen, we have to ask how this influences how we gather as church and the impact on our practices of worship and mission?

I am drawn back to beginning of my Symposium experience, when we asked how we might love our neighbour in and through our worship practice and how as we shared stories and learned from each other, the answers didn't feel too far away.



Climate
Sunday

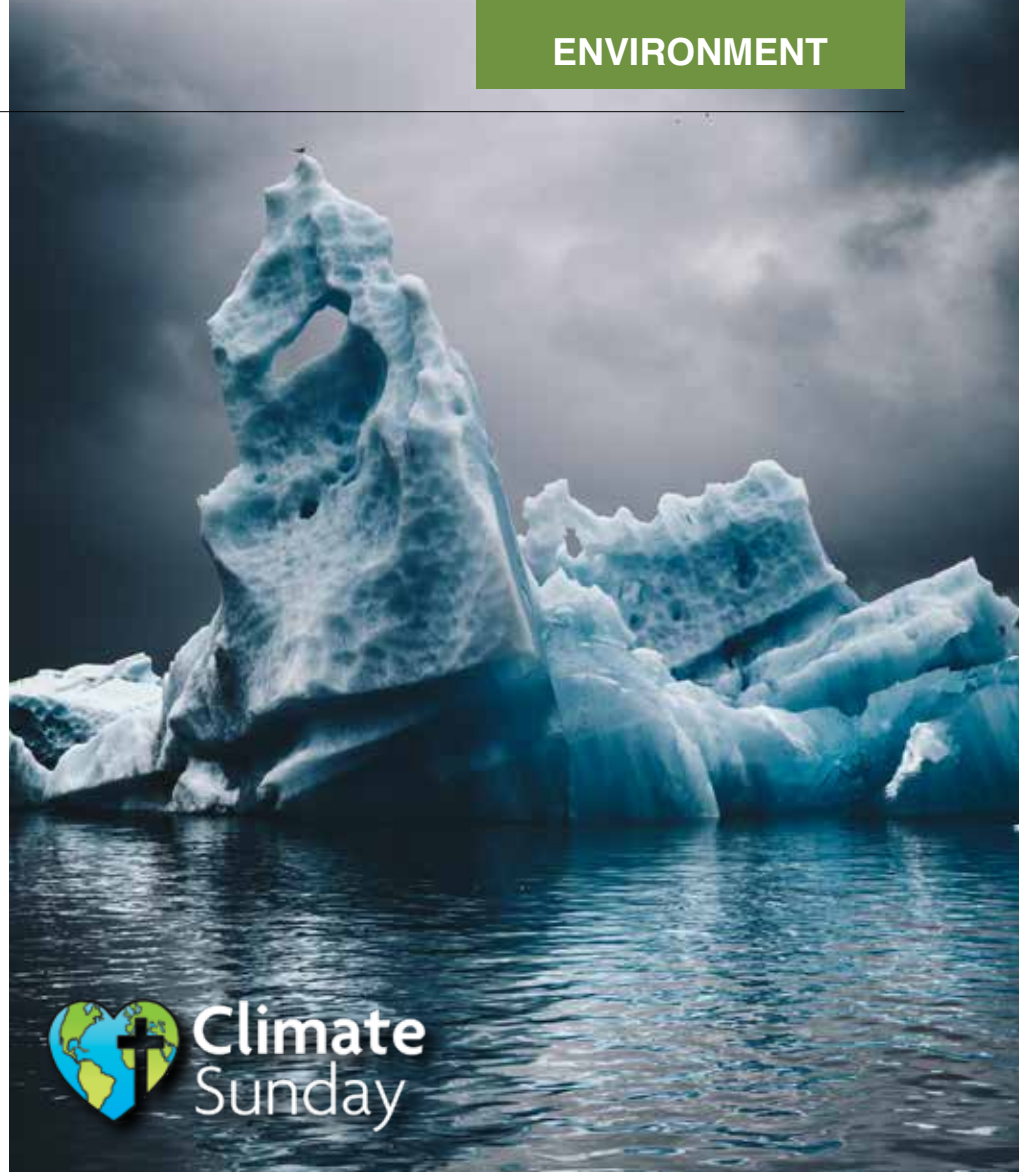
5th September 2021

Two years ago the world's leading scientists of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that humanity had just over a decade to cut emissions of greenhouse gasses steeply if we were to have even a 50/50 chance of keeping global temperature rise under 1.5 degrees above the pre-industrial average. Yet by early 2020 the world remained firmly on course to *overshoot* this goal by several degrees. We were, and still are, heading for global climate catastrophe; and time to avoid it is exceedingly short. That's why CTBI's Environmental Issues Network (EIN) has launched *Climate Sunday* – an initiative which brings together the major denominations and Christian environmental and relief and development agencies to make it easy for all churches across Britain and Ireland to take action, together, in what will be a critical year ahead.

...we believe the time has come for all churches across Britain to pray about and act on the climate crisis.

For many churches, action on climate change is not new. Quietly but in ever growing numbers, over the last few years local churches across denominations and styles of worship have been responding to this moral issue with creativity and determination. More than 3,400 local churches are now registered with the main church greening schemes. But with the climate crisis accelerating and Britain due to host the rescheduled COP26 climate talks in November 2021 in Glasgow, we believe the time has come for *all* churches across Britain to pray about and act on the climate crisis.

Our vision as a coalition is to see God's love and desire for justice manifested through the church on this critical issue of our age. The need and the opportunity are great. They include bringing pastoral support to a younger generation already experiencing climate anxiety and grief; teaching of God's love for all his creation; reducing carbon emissions from church buildings, land, congregational travel and purchasing; serving the local community by taking part in practical projects, such as restoring local green space, to help



The time is now

Add your voice to the call for a cleaner, greener, fairer future, by James Anthony

them adapt; and witnessing to our God of justice by joining wider civil society calls for a fair transition to a sustainable economy.

The Climate Sunday initiative invites all local churches across Britain and Ireland to hold a climate-focused service on a convenient date before September 2021. At this service, congregations are encouraged to make a commitment to greater action to address climate change in their own place of worship and community and to use their voice to tell politicians we want a cleaner, greener, fairer future at the heart of plans agreed during COP26. Then, on Sunday 5th September 2021, we will hold a national Climate Sunday

event in Glasgow to celebrate the commitments made by churches at a local level over the previous year and present the UK government with the combined commitments and calls which all local churches have made - to show our political leaders that they will have our support to act boldly, justly and compassionately on this issue.

Your church can register to take part at www.climatesunday.org where a selection of service materials and themed resources are available for all denominations and traditions. You can also sign The Climate Coalition's 'The Time Is Now' declaration via our website to add your voice to the call for a cleaner, greener, fairer future.



Food and the changing climate

by Hannah Eves, Executive Assistant and Researcher at A Rocha UK and member of the Climate Sunday Steering Group

Every month Climate Sunday publishes themed resources to help churches explore climate related issues, last month we focussed on Climate & Food:

Food is many things to many people. Food is a visceral necessity, and it is a delicious and good gift from God. It sits at the centre of some of the most treasured sacraments and teaching of the Christian Church. During lockdown, the rate of people making their own sourdough starters has gone through the roof. And yet, for some, putting food on the table is a constant worry. The Trussell Trust estimates a 61% increase in food parcels needed this winter. Modern food production also plays a

significant role in the climate crisis, with food systems placing huge strain on the natural environment. Issues of climate and of justice sit at the heart of food and eating.

We eat in Christian fellowship, we eat as sacrament, all food is a gift from God

All food production is reliant on and affects the environment. Many elements of global food systems are contributing to unsustainable environmental impacts which have huge consequences for the planet. Food systems account for

an estimated 19% of UK man made greenhouse gas emissions and 76% of this is related to cattle production.

When we eat out of season foods, there is a huge cost from importing the food from other countries and the energy required to produce out of season foods in the UK. However, it is rare that we pause to reflect on what is behind every bite. The commodification of food and the industrialisation of eating practices means that 'people eat with a diminished sense of the depth and breadth of relationships that constitute a food item' as theologian Norman Wirzba puts it.

Food is precious not only because of the human care that went into its production but because it points to the divine creator and sustainer. As it says in the Psalms, 'He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate - bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts.'

We eat in Christian fellowship, we eat as sacrament, all food is a gift from God and so, as the theologian Shannon Jung states, 'eating is a spiritual practice that reminds us of who we are in the global ecology. Forgetting what food is means we also forget who God is, who we are, and the nature of the world we inhabit.'

Exploring Climate & Food in Theology

by Caroline Pomeroy and Alice Corrie of Climate Stewards, an organisation which helps you calculate your carbon footprint, reduce it if you can, and offset the rest

The Bible is an ‘earthy’ book, and has plenty to say about food and farming. Farmers feature heavily in the old and new testaments, Levitical laws protect the land and people from exploitation, and many key events revolve around meals. At the heart of our faith is the Eucharist (literally, ‘thanksgiving’), when we eat a symbolic meal of bread and wine to remind us of Jesus’ death, resurrection and presence with us.

The bible doesn’t say much about carbon footprints, food miles or plastic, but it does talk about justice, generosity and loving our neighbour. That’s why we care about our what we eat. In response to the Pharisees’ question ‘Who is my neighbour?’ Jesus

told the parable of the Good Samaritan, reminding us that our neighbours are not necessarily the people who live next door (Luke 10:30-37). In today’s world I believe that our neighbours include our local neighbours suffering from food poverty; our global neighbours facing malnutrition and starvation due to crop failure, floods, droughts caused by climate change; our future neighbours - our children and grandchildren, who will see much harsher impacts of climate change; and our non-human neighbours facing extinction from our farming practices. If we are to truly love all of our neighbours, then our food choices should cause them blessing, not harm.

Speak Up

Resources to help you join with others to call for action around Climate & Food

- ☛ Contacting your local MP with your concerns and calling on them for action can make a difference. Hope For the Future can help faith groups to do this by providing tailored research, training and support as you build a working relationship with your local MP. Find out more about the support available at www.hftf.org.uk/faith
- ☛ You can also add your voice to the national campaign calling for climate justice by signing The Climate Coalition’s ‘The Time Is Now’ declaration at www.climatesunday.org



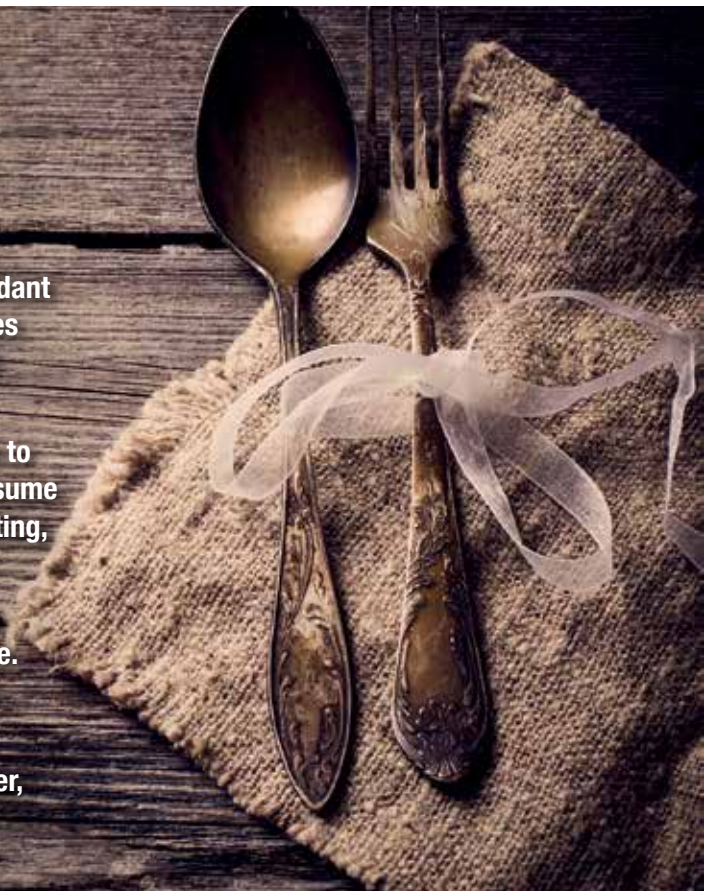
Creator God,

We thank you for your generosity in providing abundant food from fields and forests, sea and farms, factories and kitchens. Thank you for the joy and pleasure of preparing, eating and sharing meals.

But we know that our food choices can cause harm to your creation and our global neighbours as we consume more than we need, waste what others could be eating, and create unnecessary rubbish.

Give us wisdom as we decide what to eat, where to shop, what to grow and how to dispose of our waste. Help us to live more simply, to act justly and to love mercy.

We ask this in the name of our Saviour and Sustainer, Jesus Christ, Amen.





When the rains stop

Sarah Rowe describes how Christian Aid are building hope for a just and green recovery

“We pray for rain, but when there’s no rain, we have to dig.”

Mekonnen is a pastoralist living in Mukecha Kebele, in Ethiopia’s South Omo region where the effects of climate change are very real. The rains have stopped, drought has dried the rivers, and crops no longer produce a harvest. Even the honey bees have disappeared. The conditions are becoming unbearable.

Mekonnen knows his way of life as a pastoralist herdsman will not last much longer. Many of his livestock have already died, and hunger has forced him to sell off some of his remaining animals to feed his family.

Christian Aid partners are working with communities in this area, building more reliable water sources, providing drought resistant seeds to boost the harvest, and goats and sheep to help women build livelihoods. For Kawite who lives nearby, the support has empowered her to put food on the table and build a better future for her community and her family. Describing the new water source in her village, she says ‘The pond is not only for me. It has changed the life of this village.’ But unless we tackle the root causes of the crisis that are driving climate change, communities will continue to see their livelihoods threatened, despite their best efforts.

2020 has been incredibly hard for people everywhere and the future feels uncertain right now. But we also have an opportunity to chart a new way forward. We can go back to business as usual, perpetuating the climate crisis and growing inequality. Or we can take some positive steps to build back from the pandemic, with justice, and towards a healthier, safer future for everybody, including Mekonnen.

In the next few months, the UK government is making various plans that will make or break the opportunity to build back with justice. And in the run up to COP26, the crucial UN climate conference (now postponed to November 2021), there will be opportunities to ensure that we hold them to these responsibilities.

The struggle for climate justice: then and now

Christian Aid has been working for climate justice for over 10 years, as evidence from our partners around the world showed that climate change was making tackling poverty increasingly difficult. Today we can see ever more clearly how the climate crisis leaves people living in poverty hungry, homeless and heartbroken. Every day Mekonnen and millions more of our global neighbours battle the worst of a crisis they did not create. But a better way is possible. With God’s vision of a just world in our mind’s eye and hope in our hearts we can stop this climate crisis.

With God's vision of a just world in our mind's eye and hope in our hearts we can stop this climate crisis.

Over the past decade, standing together with you and many others we have:

- 🍃 secured the UK Climate Change Act – the first legally binding climate legislation anywhere in the world.
- 🍃 persuaded the World Bank to stop funding coal power stations in middle-income countries
- 🍃 encouraged over 5,500 churches to move to clean energy.

Over the past 18 months, we've played our part in getting the UK Government to introduce a net zero emissions target and persuaded the Scottish Parliament to pass the Scottish Climate Bill. This will help the UK move closer towards ending its contribution to the climate crisis.

Despite this progress, there is huge work to do. Carbon emissions have continued to rise. World leaders can no longer afford to tinker around the edges whilst the planet burns and our neighbours around the world suffer.

Dr Rowan Williams articulates why this is so important for us as Christians. "Climate justice means ensuring that the security and well-being of our brothers and sisters in poorer countries is not compromised by the actions of those in richer ones. The Christian Church is a community in which people from the entire globe are connected together at the deepest level; and it is this that both allows us and compels us to speak a prophetic word into our present situation."

Standing together with climate campaigners around the world

Mithika Mwenda from Christian Aid partner, the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) reflects on campaigning for climate justice.

"I grew up in a poor family at the foot of Mount Kenya. As I grew up I began to see the changes in the environment. We used to have rivers crossing through my father's land: those dried up. We used to rely on rain-fed agriculture, and still do, and we used to have two rainy seasons. But no more. The rain comes but it doesn't last, the crop cycle we used to have doesn't exist anymore. People are in a very difficult situation.

For us, climate justice is about enhancing the voices of those at the frontline of the climate crisis, and giving them a voice to articulate their issues. And for industrialised countries to accept that this problem is their problem, and address it in a comprehensive manner – rather than transferring that burden to poor countries who have not caused the problem.

Campaigning at PACJA has helped change the discourse. I encourage you to do more to push your government, not only to cut emissions, but to also increase contributions to climate finance, knowing we stand together to stop this climate crisis."



Throughout 2021, there are many ways you can raise your voice with Christian Aid:

- 1 Pray for climate justice:** commit to pray individually or with others. We need prayer that will amplify prophetic voices and transform us; prayer that will help us understand God's care for those most affected by the crisis; prayer that will be a deep source of energy for the struggle ahead.

We will fill every day with prayer for a world where everyone can thrive, culminating at COP26, where we will show world leaders the depth and breadth of support for ambitious climate action. You or your church can sign up to join this global prayer movement at www.caid.org.uk/prayerchain

- 2 Call on the UK Government to implement a just recovery:** the corona virus pandemic has been devastating in its health, social and economic impacts. The way we choose to respond can see us go back to business as usual, with growing inequality and a deepening climate crisis, or it can help us to tackle these connected issues that we face. We're calling for the UK to:

- 🍃 Cancel the debts of poor countries to free up money to invest in health, education and clean energy.
- 🍃 Support the communities most affected by the climate crisis with financial and technological resources to leapfrog fossil fuels and move straight to clean energy systems.
- 🍃 Show global leadership by submitting an ambitious plan to the UN which will commit the UK to further emissions cuts, in line with the latest science.

Be the first to know more about ways you can get involved by signing up for campaigns emails at www.caid.org.uk/campaignsignup



Find out more at
www.caid.org.uk/prayerchain
www.caid.org.uk/campaignsignup

Open for business

The Mission Theology Advisory Group (MTAG)
can't stop talking over lunch, by Anne Richards



Who are the Mission Theology Advisory Group?

Take a military chaplain, a Welsh bishop, a peace activist, the CEO of a mission agency, a member of a Pontifical world mission charity and the episcopal successor to St Chad and what do you get? Before you answer that, what do you get if you take a Brazilian academic theologian, a pioneer chaplain, a world mission evangelist, a poet, and a musical scientist and put them in the same room? Or even, an expert on interfaith matters, a campaigner for inclusion and social justice and a man who (among other things) prays with people while having his hair cut?

If your mind boggles just thinking about those combinations, you have got some way to imagining what happens when we all get together. We're a mixed and varied bunch of women and men, some lay, some ordained, of various ages, ethnicities and denominations, and with very different personal circumstances and backgrounds. All we bring is relevant. And what brings us together from all over the country? – a massive, committed heart beating in communion for the mission of God.

How we work

So imagine this group of mission academics, practitioners and pioneers meeting up. Any meeting of the Mission Theology Advisory Group starts with a draft agenda. It's always a 'draft' agenda because it although we have 'business' to get done, resources to work on, papers to consider, reports to receive and all that sort of stuff, some things are more important than what is on the paper. One of those things in 'normal' times is accommodating people's needs with trains and other commitments, coming as we do with

"MTAG is a model of how ecumenical conversations ought to be: a safe space where people with diverse theological perspectives and church backgrounds can be themselves while finding common cause in mission"

– Rev'd Professor John Drane

long journeys from the four nations, but our agenda is also porous so that we can have extensive time for prayer and reflection, to allow a God-wandering of thoughts and ideas, to allow the Holy

Spirit to shout in our ears and lead us in unexpected directions, to pray for and hold before God our absent friends, to be prophetic, to laugh, to share food, to find pure pleasure and inspiration with being among friends. Our agenda always ends with news and prayer, as we share what we are doing as individuals within our churches and seek to cross-fertilise the work we do outside the group, teaching, campaigning, writing, and of course, following God's prompting for mission on the frontline, seeing the Spirit at work.

Currently, meeting over Zoom, we find we miss each other a lot and long for the time when we can get together again, but even before this we were constantly talking to one another on social media, in our MTAG chat space, or phoning or emailing one another, getting involved. The work we do is fuelled by a desire to share and inform, to bounce ideas around and create a current of enthusiasm for all our ongoing projects and ideas. And all of it is undergirded with prayer.

We are definitely not a committee but a committed community of diverse and complex talents. But we also realise that it is important to listen to people who are very different from ourselves and who come from different backgrounds and perspectives. So we often make space in our time together to hear from other people and to have a range of visitors who inform, challenge and change our thinking.

What we do

MTAG is open to receiving requests and suggestions from the churches on all kinds of matters to do with mission. That might mean commenting on documents or contributing to projects or assisting other people with initiatives and ideas we are working on. When we start on a big project, we typically do a survey first to check that we are not repeating work that is already out there and to check that the project is

really needed and wanted. Some of big projects have resulted in books like *The Search for Faith and the Witness of the Church, Presence and Prophecy, Unreconciled?* and *Sense Making Faith*. Other projects have been online like the three well-loved CTBI Lent Courses we have done, our Dispossession Project on social justice and ecology issues, and our popular 95 missional theses project.

Spiritual Journeys

Following *Sense Making Faith*, our beautifully illustrated book on apologetics, we set up a website for spiritual seekers and those who seek to share the Christian faith among them. Spiritual Journeys www.spiritualjourneys.org.uk offers all kinds of interesting things to explore, events and places to go, things to do,

MTAG displays within its membership and in its work a remarkable combination of rootedness in the Gospel, close attention to contemporary reality, fearless exploration of theological depth, and a gift for the truth which is found in narrative. In an age when all our churches face existential challenges, it is important that we pause to take breath, look around, and build on solid foundations; MTAG can help with all those timely tasks which are all the more important for not being headlined as URGENT.

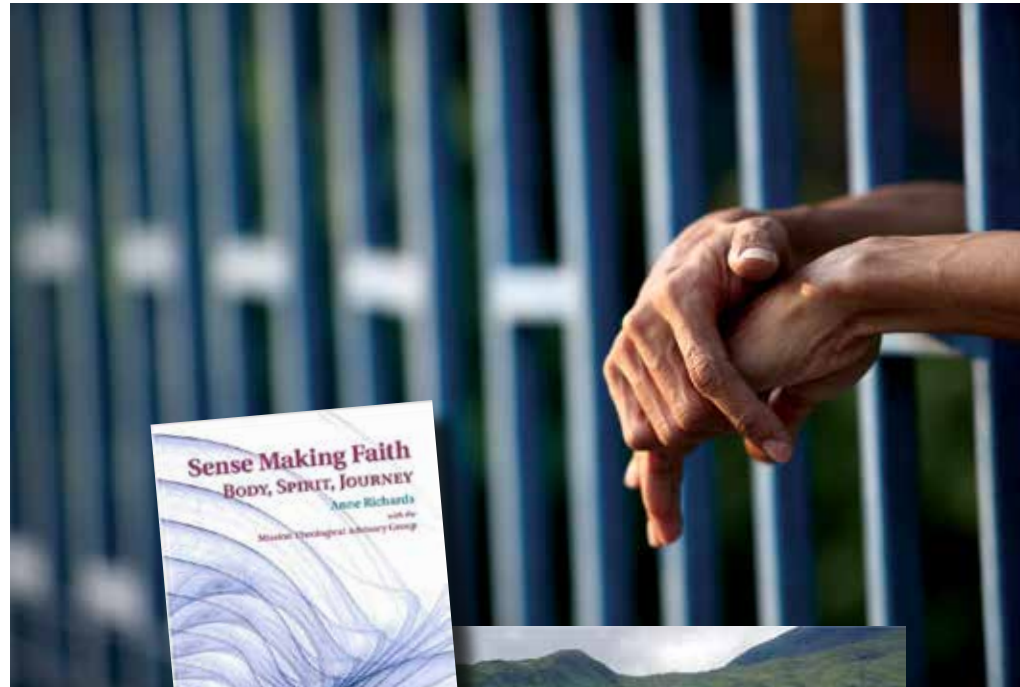
– Bishop Michael Ipgrave

and all kinds of creative resources around books, film, bible study and prayers. We provide a whole section for people to ask questions and give feedback on what they are looking for and we try to offer people relevant resources. We do hear extraordinary stories of people coming to faith through the suggestions offered by the site as people come back to say thank you and share their experiences.

STREAM

MTAG provides resources for individuals and groups across the areas of Spirituality, Theology, Reconciliation Evangelism And Mission (we call this our STREAM resources, as it's easy to remember). We are really interested

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in the spirituality of people outside the Church and what those people tell us about their faith journeys and searches and we try to produce resources for churches which will not only equip appropriate evangelism but bring seekers into the Church's perimeter in a way they can handle. We also specialise in providing local-level resources that cater to a variety of learning styles – word based, activity-based, bible and prayer-based and spirituality-based. This allows groups to mix and match what they want to do, whether it's have a discussion group, a young people's activity day, a meditative prayer and bible study or a more reflective time of seeking understanding and change.

Open for business

MTAG members love a challenge and we are always busy! Have a look at the range of resources on offer for free download at www.ctbi.org.

Some of the excellent MTAG resources: The Dispossession Project, Sense Making Faith book, Spiritual Journeys website and new resource Ancient Wisdom, Modern Mission

uk/mission-theology-advisory-group-resources and www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/deeper-god-mission-theology

Can't find what you want or want to ask us questions? Contact Dr Anne Richards, MTAG's convener anne.richards@churchofengland.org.

At the moment we're producing material on the ancient wisdom of the saints as a way to kickstart ideas for mission, and a project on creating holy moments in daily life for people spending more time at home and away from church. We've responded to COVID-19 with popular resources on how to pray and how to care for our neighbours safely. We've got a lot going on! Join in with us!



Find out more at
www.ctbi.org.uk/mission-theology-advisory-group-resources

CTBI RESOURCES FOR LENT 2021

THE POET'S GOSPEL

A GOSPEL IN BLANK VERSE WITH RHYMED PARABLES

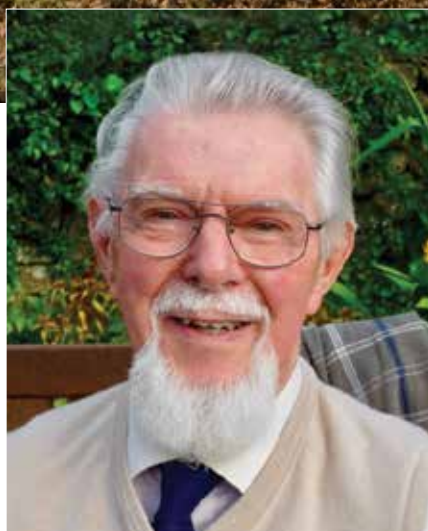
Bob Fyffe introduces this year's resources

This year's Lent programme is somewhat different from previous years. It is the outcome of a partnership which is rooted in fulfilling an elderly gentleman's dream. John Alan Davis (pictured) visited his wife every day as she lived with dementia. As Alan explains:

"During this period, and after Pat died in 2014, I turned to the only place of comfort I knew: my faith."

The task brought the life of Jesus and the relevance of his message closer to me. It became, as much as anything else, a way of staunching the wound of a personal tragedy."

It is here that we can recognise the relevance of a Lent programme. This gospel version, written in verse, is the outcome of a deep engagement with God in Christ. To listen to the sound files of this gospel being read out loud is to be taken onto a journey with someone who has clearly walked and experienced all of life's contours. When I first heard



Alan reciting his Poet's Gospel I was immediately moved and realised that this journey could bring some healing to so many other people.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has partnered with Alan and his family to produce The Poet's Gospel and has made the sound files available along with a hardcopy book, an e-book and Lent booklet in order to engage with this journey. We have also produced a Poet's Gospel introduction for chosen sections which will be of help

either for personal study or for small group interaction.

Each week can be read as a stand-alone unit whilst listening to the sound file as an introduction, or if you prefer on a personal basis to read through the whole publication and listen to the sound files, this alone will make a fascinating Lenten pilgrimage.

Some may find this approach somewhat unorthodox, but I believe in these unorthodox and strange times this gospel version, written as poetry, speaks to a situation, and is spoken in the style with which many will feel able to engage. We hope that however you use it, in Lent or across a longer time, this resource will bring you some comfort and reassurance.

Printed copies can be purchased online through [Church House Bookshop](https://www.churchhousebookshop.co.uk/).



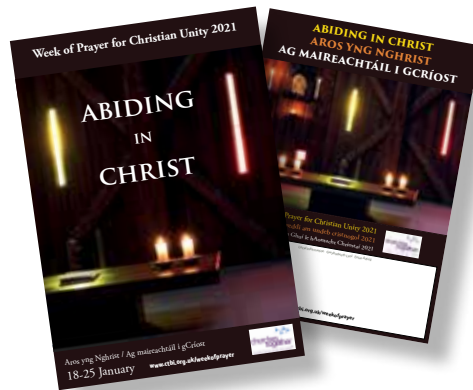
Find out more and download materials at
www.ctbi.org.uk/lent-study-2021/

Abiding in Christ

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) in 2021 has been prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland. The theme that was chosen, "Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit", is based on John 15:1-17 and expresses Grandchamp Community's vocation to prayer, reconciliation and unity in the Church and the human family.

Today the community has fifty sisters, all women from different generations, Church traditions, countries and continents. In their diversity the sisters are a living parable of communion. They remain faithful to a life of prayer, life in community and the welcoming of guests. The sisters share the grace of their monastic life with visitors and volunteers who go



to Grandchamp for a time of retreat, silence, healing or in search of meaning.

For 2021, the sisters are inviting churches across the world to enter into their tradition of prayer and silence that is rooted in the ancient traditions of the Church catholic.

Dates

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally observed from the 18th to the 25th January – the octave of St. Peter and St. Paul. However, some areas observe it at Pentecost or some other time.

Resources

WPCU 2021 materials are available to download in a variety of formats including pamphlets with 8 daily reflections plus a pull-out Order of Service, posters, PowerPoints of images, International Version and Go and Do action points provided by Christian Aid and are translated into English, Welsh/English and Irish (please check online for different formats available). For 2021, due to the coronavirus pandemic, we are making the resources available to download only and printed versions will not be available to order.



Find out more at
www.ctbi.org.uk/week-of-prayer-for-christian-unity-2021

Congregational Federation

Mayflower Fest



Mayflower Fest is a collection of short films in which the Congregational Federation have chosen to mark the 400th Anniversary that the Mayflower sailed from Plymouth in Devon across the Atlantic to the New world in America.

Worship tent

This is a collection of clips from Congregational Churches all over GB with a reflection from Mike Fales Moderator Elect of International Congregational Fellowship

A Children's tent

This tent tells the story of the Pilgrims reflecting on what it might have been like for the children on board and has lots in interactive activities for children to take part in.

Pilgrims and Promised Lands tent

Including interviews with Rev Dr Peggy Bendroth, former director of the Congregational Library in Boston and Rev Dr Lottie Jones Hudd about her church in Detroit on the underground railroad escape.

Mayflower Art and Artifacts Tent

We have a filmed conversation with the artist Rachel Carter who has created two life-size bronzes of a unnamed 'Pilgrim Woman' which will be sited in Doncaster, before moving to Austerfield and Gainsborough.

Missing Voices Tent

Telling the story of the Wampanoag Nation

Songs That Sustain Us Tent

Including the Mayflower hymn "The Lord has yet more light and truth"

Historical Voices Tent

Giving insights to William Bradford, John Robinson and Sara Willett Minter the Midwife to the Pilgrims

Summer School

This is an exciting new initiative that will enable Congregationalists and other ecumenical friends from around the UK to discern and debate key issues that affect us all as Christians in society today. We hope to highlight the distinctive voice and contribution that those in the non-conformist tradition have to make on these issues.

We had planned to launch this in 2020 but like many large gatherings this had to be put on hold because of the pandemic. Our aim now is to hold our first Summer School later this year or early in 2022. The theme for this event will be **Is Christian Non-Conformity a Thing of the Past?**

To see the programme and the presenters for this important time of serious reflection and renewed commitment, follow this link to the CF website: www.congregational.org.uk/spring-school



Find out more at
www.congregational.org.uk/mayflowerfest and
www.congregational.org.uk/spring-school

ROOTS

Reshaped resources for a reshaped world

A review of the ROOTS resources coincided with the transformation of worship and learning in 2020.

Review...reflect...reshape

It's vital for the team at ROOTS to keep up to date with the evolving ways in which churches provide worship and learning for their communities, to ensure that the ROOTS resources remain relevant to life in our fast-changing world. And in recent months the pace of change has been greater than anyone could have predicted. As we turned the corner into 2020, we were at the end of a year-long review: a process of listening, reflection and discussion – through conferences and events, focus groups and telephone interviews, and meetings with practitioners, writers and advisers. Over 1,300 of our subscribers responded to our survey, giving us a valuable insight into how our resources are used.

What emerged from our research was a picture of a church that is neither complacent nor disheartened. It is a church that – led by the Spirit – is finding new and exciting ways of proclaiming the gospel, offering worship and learning that is inspiring and helps people – lifelong and new Christians – to encounter the living God, and live out the Christian life in an authentic and relevant way.



Making faith relevant in daily life

A strong theme that came through in the findings was the desire to help people live out their faith in their daily lives. This has given us renewed impetus

to draw out connections between Scripture and the world we live in. In reshaping the resources, we have built in opportunities throughout a service or session for people to think about how the Bible passage resonates in their life. We also describe the theme of the week's resources in simple, non-churchy language, helping to show Scripture's potential to inform and guide our lives.



Voices around the table

The ROOTS resources start their life at the writers' conferences. These meetings have been taking place every two months since ROOTS was first published, back in 2002. Our writers are all practitioners, both ordained and lay, and we meet with a different group of six or seven people every two months across the UK – now happening online. As well as their own experience in ministry, everyone brings the voices from their local context into the discussion about the Bible passages.

This helps us to consider how the passage will be heard in local and wider contexts, and how it might resonate within people's everyday experience of life.

A year like no other

During the early part of 2020, it became clear that coronavirus was going to have a massive impact on life across the world. The response within local communities to look after and support each other was reassuring evidence of the kindness of strangers and natural instincts to help and nurture.

The challenges of faith and worship at home became not just something to aim for but an almost overnight necessity. Alongside the care and support churches gave in reaching out to give practical help, a huge wave of creativity was born as people adapted and discovered new ways to keep in touch, and produced a variety of materials.

The ROOTS team has given much thought, and further consultation, to how best we can respond to these challenges. And what we learned from the adapting and writing and rewriting that was required to support churches during lockdown and into the 'new normal' has also influenced the shape of the resources for 2021 and beyond.

Going broader and deeper

We're expecting an even greater range of worship and learning provision – gathered groups in churches, church halls, and other buildings – and maintaining contact via online and telephone call-in facilities. Our communities will be the richer for these varied ways of connecting with people seeking to explore and develop their faith.

We know that the ROOTS resources are very flexible and can be used in a wide range of congregations and groups, and we've been giving advice on how to adapt them to the restrictions and limitations required to limit the spread of the virus.

We've also had the opportunity over the last few months to learn much more about how we can help people to explore their spirituality at home, and consider how faith can influence daily decisions and actions. This has enabled us to develop and produce our new 'ROOTS at home' resource that aims to give encouragement and motivation for Christian practice and faithful living. We hope that the new resources will inspire and support leaders to enrich worship and learning wherever and however they gather to nurture the life of the church and wider community.

ROOTS publishes worship and learning resources. For free materials to support you during lockdown and to find out more visit www.rootsontheweb.com

 is a partnership of denominations and other Christian organisations.

The Methodist Church



CHRISTIAN
education

churches
together
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND



Connected Communities

Nathan Eddy on proactive responses to antisemitism

CTBI and the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) are nearing completion on a new resource designed to help churches, ecumenical groups and theological colleges explore Judaism, begin local dialogue with Jews, and understand antisemitism. The resource has the draft title of *Connected Communities: Churches Responding to Prejudice against Jews and Judaism* and will be freely available through CTBI's website soon.

The resource is the product of several consultations with leading scholars and practitioners, and the fruit of the labours of CCJ staff and several rabbis and Jewish scholars who have contributed reflections. It features user-friendly sections on key points of dialogue in Jewish-Christian relations, including covenant, Jesus' Jewishness, evangelism, antisemitism, the Bible, and the state of Israel in relation to UK Jewish-Christian dialogue.

The need for the resource was recognised by CTBI as a strategy to promote community cohesion across Britain and Ireland, and grow understanding around antisemitism, which has hit the headlines in recent years. Antisemitic incidents online and on the street have also been rising year-on-year since 2016. The new resource does not explore the headlines, but rather takes a step back and considers the biblical and theological issues which Christians in particular should care about. The title *Connected Communities* also references the need, in 2020, for flourishing towns, villages, and cities in Britain and Ireland. A report released in March earlier this year found that 7 in 10 UK residents feel their community has declined in their lifetime, and 1 in 4 don't trust their neighbours. As the title implies, *Connected Communities* is about the special connections that bind Christians and Jews, but it also addresses the ties that bind us all, wherever we live.

The resource, first of all, is designed to be practical. There are many essay collections and academic books on the subject, and the recent Church of



England report, *God's Unfailing Word*, also features in-depth studies that merit close reading. *Connected Communities* is different. While the various sections have fairly meaty introductions, the emphasis is on group study and conversation. Each section has study questions and boxes giving pithy definitions, quotes, and background

At CCJ, we often find that Christians are surprised by just how inspiring the first steps in Jewish-Christian dialogue can be.

information. We are planning to publish the resource as a series of stand-alone, user-friendly leaflets so that they can be easily downloaded and shared. The tone is aimed at non-specialists and is geared towards church groups, house groups, Lenten study groups, ecumenical study groups, and mixed Jewish-Christian groups. A second part of the resource, which will be published at a later date, includes sample sermons, Holy Week resources, and Bible studies.

The resource is also designed to be conversational. We hope it gets groups thinking and talking about Judaism, Christian theology, the Bible, and our

society. In fact, the resource mimics a conversation by including personal reflections from several rabbis and Jewish scholars on each of the themes. Even if a church group lives far from a synagogue, it is possible to hear many contemporary Jewish voices by studying the resource.

Finally, *Connected Communities* is designed to be encouraging. At CCJ, we often find that Christians are surprised by just how inspiring the first steps in Jewish-Christian dialogue can be. For many people, taking the plunge opens a new perspectives on the Bible, on history, on Jesus' identity, and even on our own identities as Christians. Aspects of Christian-Jewish relations are certainly challenging and call for sombre reflection, and the resource equips churches to consider antisemitism and anti-Judaism. But Jewish-Christian dialogue can also inspire hope. The resource aims to encourage churches to begin the journey, inviting them to go deeper.

CCJ was founded in 1942 and is the nation's leading forum for Jewish-Christian dialogue, with 30 branches nationwide.



Find out more at www.ccj.org.uk



Crossing the Boundaries:

Inter-religious Ritual Participation by Dr Anthony Allison

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's Interfaith Theological Advisory Group (IFTAG) held a conference in Glasgow (3-5 March 2020) to reflect theologically on the challenges, risks, and opportunities related to inter-religious worship. Over two days participants heard 15 different papers covering a wide variety of themes such as music, language, silence, justice, and liturgical hospitality from both practitioners and leading academics in the field.

Professor Marianne Moyaert, Chair of the Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics of Inter-religious Dialogue at The Vrije Universiteit

Amsterdam, opened the conference by mapping the territory of inter-religious dialogue and ritual participation. She began by noting that the field of religious studies has historically been characterised as understanding religion predominately as creed, doctrine, or book – and often with a particular focus on topics such as salvation and truth. Such an approach is epitomised by the exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist paradigms in the theology of religions. While such approaches have their place, she argued that the field of inter-religious dialogue is much wider, including such areas as peace-building, social justice, art, scriptural

reasoning, inter-religious learning in educational settings, and inter-religious worship. She argued that those involved in inter-religious studies should be aware of the historic Christianisation of the field which has tended towards a de-ritualised understanding of religion. Moyaert argued that ritual is not something dislocated from society and people; rather, it is intimately related to both and, as such, is dynamic and can and does change. The topic of inter-religious ritual is not simply an abstract concern but also a pastoral one; for example, inter-religious marriages require careful and sensitive negotiation. While the extent to which

Opposite: The conference visited St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Glasgow. (L-R): Madinah Javed, Kelvin Holdsworth, Joanna Russell; right: Madinah Javed speaking of her experiences at the Scottish Parliament in May 2019

one might be willing (or comfortable) to engage in the religious practice of the other is something for the individual to reflect upon, it is a process equally balanced by the extent to which the ritual of the other permits or allows others to participate in their ritual – a question of liturgical hospitality – and, perhaps, its limits.

Our second day opened with Dr Rose Drew, CEO of Interfaith Glasgow, exploring Christian adoption of meditation practices from other traditions, especially Buddhism. Following an outline of some of the pioneers of the field, she equally noted a number of the problems. For example,

The discussion topics were complex and nuanced, balancing a concern for tradition and Christian practice with the prospect of liturgical hospitality for those of other faiths.

Buddhist meditative techniques are part of a tradition and path to salvation – it is therefore difficult to dislocate such meditative practices from their doctrinal meaning. Might it not be exploitative of a tradition to do so? An act of theological vandalism? Addressing such criticisms, Drew argued that dual belonging might be considered a more authentic approach than one in which a practice from another tradition is adopted in manner where it is severed from its contextual doctrinal significance. Rather, for dual believers, the second tradition becomes a second home that offers a complimentary approach to grow in the truth of their own tradition.

The choice of Glasgow as host city was apt given that it was in Glasgow that St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral invited some local Muslims to recite the Qur'anic account of the birth of Jesus during the Feast of the Epiphany in January 2017. The conference visited St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral to hear



more about that event from Kelvin Holdsworth, the Cathedral's Provost, Madinah Javed, who recited the Qur'an, and Joanna Russell, the office manager who managed much of the response to the incident. Hearing the human dimension of those directly involved helped provide further context and detail but also served to remind the group that the topic is not merely an abstract thought experiment but rather something that can have real impact upon individual churches and their wider communities.

Our final day opened with The Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave exploring the different ways inter-religious ritual participation challenges the churches and, in particular, the Church of England. He focused on themes such as the public nature of worship, liturgical hospitality, and ritual receptivity. He noted that from an ecclesiological perspective all those who reside within a Church of England parish have a legal entitlement to attend worship. This, he felt, was a good thing and that the profile of a church should be governed by the diversity of the community it serves. However, it equally raises questions of hospitality and, in that regard, Dr Ipgrave noted that hospitality is always offered to the human person as person and not necessarily to other faiths, in the first instance. That said, honouring people as guests includes honouring those things that are most

important to them. Nonetheless, Christian worship should remain recognizably Christian and should not contain elements that are hostile or contradictory to the Christian faith.

These three keynotes were supplemented by four panels of three short papers each covering subjects as wide-ranging as Christian Zen practice, mission as a context for ritual hospitality, visits to other places of worship, and 'Christian seders'. Those who responded to the call for papers came from all round the UK and as far afield as Helsinki and Boston (from the Comparative Theology programme at Boston College). The conference was described by Marianne Moyaert, the world's leading academic in the field, as the first public conference dedicated to inter-religious ritual that she was aware of. To that end, IFTAG is grateful for CTBI's initiative and wider support in organising the conference. The discussion topics were complex and nuanced, balancing a concern for tradition and Christian practice with the prospect of liturgical hospitality for those of other faiths. Precisely how far such hospitality can extend, however, is an area of legitimate and ongoing theological discussion for the Christian churches.



Find out more at ctbi.org.uk/category/theology/inter-faith-theological-advisory-group/

Racial Justice Sunday & Black Lives Matter

Richard Reddie on Racial Justice Sunday

The killing of George Floyd in the USA, and the emergence of Black Lives Matters, as a global movement, coupled with the disproportionality of the way COVID-19 has impacted Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, has brought the issue of racial justice sharply into focus. George Floyd's death has forced those on both sides of the Atlantic to look again at the racism and inequality in Church and society. The real challenge has been to move beyond rhetoric to actions that see real and lasting change.

In the aftermath of the alarming killing, CTBI implemented a number of activities that aimed to break the silence around racism and create a space where conversations and actions could take place. Since May 2020, CTBI has hosted a series of racial justice webinars exploring everything from COVID-19 to the Windrush Scandal. CTBI liaised

with racial justice experts from member churches who led online conversations on what the churches should be doing to address the racism in church and society.

George Floyd's death has forced those on both sides of the Atlantic to look again at the racism and inequality in Church and society.

Aside from the popular webinars, the CTBI website became a forum for ordinary Christians to talk about their experiences of racism and the importance of racial justice in light of George Floyd's death. These powerful responses came in the form of essays, poems, videos and prayers, and the vast majority were from individuals who had

never previously had an opportunity to share their thoughts on such a vital topic.

These activities will ultimately culminate in the establishment of a Racial Justice Advocacy Forum in 2021, which will provide the churches with much-needed training, resources and a platform on all issues linked to racial justice.

CTBI has also been working with a number of its member churches and parachurch groups to mark the 25th anniversary of Racial Justice Sunday (RJS) in Britain and Ireland. One response will be the book "Race for Justice", which will be published by Lion Hudson in 2021, and will explore how individual denominations, church groupings and nations have addressed racial justice over a quarter of a century.

It is working with the same folks to organise a RJS service at St Paul's Cathedral in 2021 (the service was postponed this year due to the pandemic), which will mark this significant anniversary. Finally, CTBI will be coordinating and publishing material for Racial Justice Sunday on 14 February 2021 that will enable churches to better engage with racial justice in our current climate.



Find out more at
ctbi.org.uk/category/witnessing-together/racial-justice/

Serious Youth Violence

The Synergy Network encourages us to take a stand with prayer and action

One of the very few positives from the first COVID-19 lockdown was the reduction in incidences of serious youth violence (SYV); sadly, as we came out of that lockdown the numbers began to increase again. CTBI is part of the growing Synergy Network (SN) which encourages churches, community groups and individuals to address SYV via prayer and action.

After a successful 2019, which saw the hosting of the groundbreaking 'Day of Prayer and Action' at the iconic Trafalgar Square, in central London, and subsequent gatherings involving key church leaders and youthwork practitioners, our activities in 2020, much like a lot of events, were stymied by COVID-19. The Network held a prayer breakfast for youth workers prior to lockdown and followed that up with

two further online gatherings, one of which was with young people who spoke about their experiences during the first lockdown.

One key tool in tackling SYV is the recently launched Synergy Network website. This digital resource is the only online portal that maps all church-related responses to SYV in the four nations and is a platform for those wishing to engage in these activities or wanting to find out more. There is currently nothing available that captures the full gamut of church-related initiatives, programmes or resources, which means Christians often fail to collaborate or develop partnerships that will see them work more impactfully.

Most experts agree that only a joined-up, multi-agency approach will tackle



SYV, and this website will be a further step for churches in playing their part in this solution. As well as providing information about funding opportunities from the statutory and voluntary sector, the website also disseminates information on training courses, seminars, discussions and other such events. It is also a space for conversation via discussion forums, blogs, articles etc., and provides a list of resources for Bible study, prayer and reflection.



To find out more go to: www.wearesynergy.org.uk

Churches' Refugee Network

Akin to so much this year, the COVID-19 crisis put pay to many Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) activities and events, such as the Annual Meeting (AM) in Glasgow on 30 April, which planned to focus on refugees and the climate emergency, as well as the annual conference in Birmingham on 13 June 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also wreaked havoc among certain segments of our community in this country, particularly refugees and asylum seekers who were already in a vulnerable situation. Despite this, there has been a sense that their concerns have been overlooked as the collective focus on other matters were prioritised.

The CRN's new Chair, Bishop John Perumbalath, and its Steering Group, decided to take advantage of social media technology and organised three webinars that explored the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and asylum seekers in continental Europe; Britain and Ireland as well as immigration

policy and attitudes to "migrants" during the crisis. The three events took place between June and July and featured participants from Belgium, Italy and France (for the European conversation) and speakers from the four nations for the further two discussions. Those attending these hour-long webinars had an opportunity to hear from practitioners linked to Christian organisations working "on the ground"; particularly the ways in which the churches were responding in these respective situations. Space was also allocated for Q&As, which not only provided further opportunities for discussion, but also gave these sessions an interactive feel.

The various conversations that began during the webinars continued at the online CRN AM in late October, at which actual asylum seekers and refugees provided further information and guidance on what is required to address the needs of vulnerable groups during this time.



Asylum seekers have been especially vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic

Church of Sanctuary

by Richard Reddie, Director of Justice and Inclusion

Six Ways Church

In the late autumn of 2019, I had the pleasure of speaking at Six Ways Baptist Church in Erdington, Birmingham, at a service that celebrated the church becoming a 'Church of Sanctuary'. Prior to my talk, the congregation was blessed by a wonderful group of singers, who before treating us to some of the best Gospel music around, spoke openly of the hospitality they received as asylum seekers when they first began attending the church. I also had the pleasure of speaking to other congregants who are still navigating their way through the asylum system, and the church members assisting them on this journey. And during the celebratory lunch after the service, I spoke with the charismatic leader of the church, Revd Gerard Goshawk, and the local Church of Sanctuary group about how this work is making such a tangible difference in the lives of those in need of hospitality.

"this work is making such a tangible difference in the lives of those in need of hospitality."

Six Ways is one of many churches and cathedrals that are embracing the Church of Sanctuary movement. Despite the complications caused by the COVID-19 crisis, Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, with whom I am working, has been engaging with colleagues from across the four nations (Ireland, Wales, England and Scotland), to organise conferences, which will now take place in the late spring of 2021 that enable church leaders and their congregations to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the movement and what is involved in becoming Church of Sanctuary. As these events will be held in the four nations, each will feature local speakers and groups who will ensure that everything is embedded within a regional context.

Prior to the conferences, Inderjit has been updating the Church of Sanctuary resource, taking into account recent developments, and the journey so far.



Sanctuary in Scotland

One of the last events I attended in person, prior to the horrendous COVID-19 crisis, was a ground-breaking 'Sanctuary in Scotland' conference that took place on Saturday 14 March 2020. This day-long event saw participants from across the length and breadth of Scotland meet in Edinburgh to discuss how the churches can better provide hospitality and a warmer welcome to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

The conference, which was organised by Church of Sanctuary (COS), Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), The Church of Scotland and Scottish Faiths Action for Refugees (SFAFR), took place just before the first lockdown, and featured contributions from theologians, campaigners, clergy and thinkers from Britain and Europe.

The day began with opening remarks from the host, David Bradwell, a Programme Manager for the Church of Scotland. David subsequently gave the floor to the Rt Revd Colin Sinclair, Moderator of the Church of Scotland General Assembly, who led prayers and worship, and used the Book of Ruth to explore the biblical tradition of hospitality.

Revd Sinclair's homily was a perfect prologue to the first speaker, theologian

Dr Jayme Reeves, who explored the concept of hospitality within Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Among other hospitality-related matters, Dr Reeves was also keen to point out that most of the major faiths have something positive to say about making the 'stranger in our midst' welcome, as they are a child of God who is loved by him.

Dr Reeves was followed by Dr Sabir Zazai, a former Afghan refugee who now heads SFAFR. Aside from speaking about his own circuitous route to Britain, which involved being shown hospitality by numerous people in several countries, Dr Zazai also outlined the new 'Scottish Refugee Integration Strategy', with its rights-based approach that sees refugees integrated from the moment they arrive in Scotland. In talking about the importance of respecting and showing dignity to refugees and asylum seekers, he suggested that 'numbers' (statistics and figures) tend to divide us; conversely, hearing their stories has the capacity to unite us.

After the Dr Zazai's contribution, attendees broke into groups and participated in workshops that explored 'The new Scottish Integration Programme'; 'The Welcome Churches' initiative; and 'Vigils and Witness at Dungavel'. (Dungavel is a notorious Scottish detention/removal centre.)



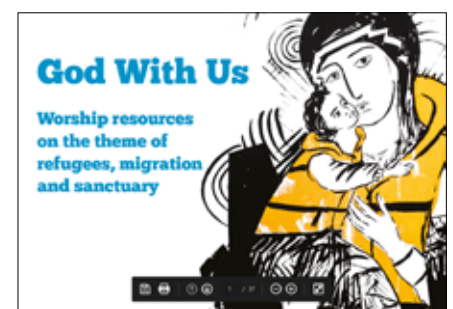
Participants at the Church of Scotland Office. The plenary session was led by Inderjit Bhogal, Methodist Minister (second from right), here wearing the 'Lampedusa stole', a rope reclaimed from a washed-up shipwreck on the Italian island in the Mediterranean.

emergency and the growing numbers of people forced to leave their homes. She also argued that real change could only occur through campaigning and advocacy, and encouraged churches to participate with groups like Christian Aid in this work.

This powerful testimony hammered home the reality that sanctuary can save lives.

It was left to Bob Fyffe, CTBI's General Secretary to provide a reflection of the day's proceedings and he started by noting that the challenge facing all events with excellent speakers and an engaging subject matter, is having sufficient time to unpack the key issues. Bob pointed out that this had occurred throughout the day, and that the conference itself demonstrated the real appetite among Scottish churches to engage with the concept of sanctuary. He also noted that the energy and verve which had characterised the day, augured well for forthcoming conferences – COVID-19 permitting!

Bob also spoke about CTBI's work and the importance of its continuing support for COS, and ended the conference by quoting the Dutch Catholic priest and theologian, Henri Nouwen, on social justice.



Find out more at:
www.churchofsanctuary.org

After a healthy (and hearty) vegetarian lunch, there was a second tranche of workshops focusing on 'Community Sponsorship'; 'Supporting refugees in your local church'; and 'Racial issues in Scotland'. Akin to the earlier session, the interactive nature of these workshops gave attendees the opportunity to delve into the various ways that 'sanctuary' can give succour to those on the margins of society.

Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal led the first afternoon plenary session and began by thanking the organisers, attendees and CTBI for their support of COS. Similar to Dr Zazai, Inderjit spoke about his refugee background – his parents were forced to leave India after independence and partition, and later Kenya, after it became independent. He subsequently spoke about life as a newly-arrived, young refugee and the hospitality he was shown at the time. He pointed out that it was an invitation to attend a local church that stimulated his initial interest in Christianity.

Inderjit then spoke about the work of COS and how 'Sanctuary Church Sunday', a COS initiative, which ends Refugee Week, is now recognised by the Refugee Council. He then outlined the process of becoming a COS and mentioned how 'sanctuary' was both rooted in scripture and an integral part of the Christian tradition in Britain. Inderjit called for the strengthening of the COS movement.

He lastly spoke about his visit to the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, and how he recovered a piece rope and

two sticks of wood from a boat on which hundreds of African asylum seekers had perished. He mentioned that he turned the rope into a clerical stole, which he wears around his shoulders while preaching, and fashioned the pieces of wood into a cross. This powerful testimony hammered home the reality that sanctuary can save lives.

Inderjit was followed by Dr Torsten Moritz, head of the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe, a Brussels-based organisation that advocates for refugees and asylum seekers across the continent. Dr Moritz was due to attend in person, but as a result of Belgium's then COVID-19 travel restrictions, had to speak via Skype. He began with a general update of the European situation and mentioned that Britain's exit from the EU had exacerbated efforts to forge a more coherent European asylum policy. He then spoke about the refugee crisis on the Turkey/Greece border and added that Greece's latest actions were a violation of international asylum and refugee law, and symptomatic of how refugees are invariably used as scapegoats in wider EU disagreements. He ended by arguing that refugee reception in EU countries should be a normality, and not solely limited to crises.

Christian Aid's Sally Foster Fullerton led the final plenary session and explored how poverty and climate change were drivers of humanitarian emergencies. By using Christian Aid's work as an example, she explained the inextricable link between the climate



Refreshing streams

CTBI webinars through the year, by Romina Infantino

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has looked at innovative ways to communicate with its member networks and the wider community when physical meetings have been impossible. One way that CTBI achieved this was through the introduction of a series of online webinars conducted through Zoom, enabling those wanting to take part in conversations to do so from the comfort and safety of their own homes.

The CTBI webinars were launched in May 2020, with the first webinar being “Standing Together: A Christian response to the COVID-19 crisis” affecting Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.

This was quickly followed by others covering a range of subjects from understanding Climate Change: Church and Green Recovery to looking at the way COVID -19 has been affecting the refugee and asylum seeker communities

in Britain, Ireland and Europe through a range of Churches’ Refugee Network discussions. In partnership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, CTBI ran a series of webinars focusing on racial justice in British Church and society, highlighting challenging issues such as the ‘Hostile Environment’, Brexit, the Grenfell Tower Fire Tragedy and the implications of the ‘Windrush Scandal’.

Being able to communicate through this new digital format, CTBI hosted

a webinar with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine-Israel (EAPPI), looking at the churches' commitment to justice and peace for those who live in Israel and Palestine: Jewish, Christian and Muslim.

Another example of collaboration was through the "Reset the Debt" webinar, hosted by CTBI and the Reset the Debt campaign, run by the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Union and the Church of Scotland, in partnership with Church Action on Poverty.

Participation has been in its hundreds and streaming the webinars on the CTBI Facebook page has allowed other individuals, sometimes outside of the CTBI member community, to engage with the discussions and pose questions to the panellists.

Taking this online format forward, other discussions on racial justice, interfaith



engagement and climate change in the form of webinars are being planned, bringing together interesting topics and expert presenters, which will be launched in the new year.



All our webinars are recorded and are available to watch and listen via our website. Further details can be found at www.ctbi.org.uk/webinars

For the sake of the world

Society for Ecumenical Studies update



Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch is Chair of the Society for Ecumenical Studies and Former Moderator of United Reformed Church General Assembly

Are churches able to act and think together, for the sake of the world? What are the issues that hold different traditions together and the challenges that lead churches down separated roads?

At a recent Society for Ecumenical Studies (SfES) conference (London, February 2020), the Revd Dr Susan Durber, Moderator of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order

Commission, spoke about the World Council of Churches report *Together Towards a Common Vision* (2013) and the responses that have been offered to this report. She noted that of the 76 responses received thus far, only one contested the need for the visibility of unity.

There are a number of issues which can cause conflict within and between Christian churches. Does the Holy Spirit need to be received in the same way in each tradition for people to be seen as fully Christian? In what ways can ministry be fully recognised between different parts of the church? Is the eucharist a sign of unity or of separation? What about gender issues?

Since February, the COVID-19 pandemic has arrived, across the world. There is an ever greater need for churches to witness to the one triune God, who holds people and creation in loving relationship. The Society for Ecumenical Studies seeks to open ways for people of different traditions to reflect together about shared faith in the one God and the way in which this leads

to sharing responsibility for reaching out lovingly into God's world.

The February conference also looked at the nature of Christian Law, a new international ecumenical initiative, which unpacks a range of understandings of the law in different churches, to see insights that these understandings can offer.

In response to COVID-19, the Society for Ecumenical Studies, in conjunction with The Tablet and Reform, offered 3 online webinars, looking at challenges that the churches face. The first of these reflected on Communion in the light of COVID-19. The second went international, hearing speakers from different parts of the world on the World Church's response to COVID-19. The third came back home and explored the Spiritual Health of the Nation.

More information about these webinars and the Society's work in general, together with links to the video recordings of the webinars, and information about further webinars, can be found on the CTBI website, Ecumenical Studies page, www.ctbi.org.uk/category/theology/sfes

For further information about the SfES and its work, please email the secretary at sfes.secretary@gmail.com.

CTBI STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) believe that ecumenism is an urgent evangelical imperative. It is time we cease projecting the image of a dismembered Body of Christ, which is a counter-witness to the Good News we proclaim.

The ecumenism we seek is dynamic and responsive not a monolith resulting from one powerful church swallowing the others, but a mega community composed of churches (local, national and international) that complement one another, each with its own historical identity, its unique tradition, its own doctrinal emphasis, and its particular worship form; in short, a pentecostal communion of communities that understand and speak one another's language.



ctbi.org.uk



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