



Ecumenical Facilitator's Report

18 May 2020

Overview

My role as Ecumenical Facilitator has focused on four areas that serve the growth of ecumenism across Hertfordshire. These areas are local ecumenism, regional ecumenism, the connection of these with national ecumenism, and the communication of ecumenical activity and hope.

Local ecumenism

I have continued to visit a number of local churches together groups and local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs) across the county, building relationships by regular communications, attending meetings and services, and when invited preaching or talking to individuals and groups as well as providing support when needed. To give a few examples from the last year, I have been asked to preach at Panshanger Church on several occasions and am offering support to the Elders alongside Rev. Dr David Chapman during their vacancy. I have also attended services at Digswell Church and Radlett Free Church as well as offering support to a number of other LEPs regarding constitutional issues. I have had the pleasure of attending meetings with churches together groups in Stevenage, St Albans, Tring, Wheathamsstead and a planned meeting with Chipping Barnet which was cancelled most recently. I am in regular communication now with an increasing number of local ecumenical groups and they in turn keep me informed with their activities so these can be communicated across through Churches Together in Hertfordshire but there is still more to do in this area to make contact with those smaller churches together groups.

I continue to be encouraged by the ecumenical projects that are working across the county and to share these stories with others and this is something I hope to continue to do more of in the coming year. It has also been very encouraging to see how local ecumenical groups have responded to the recent changes in our national life and worship in response to the coronavirus, with a number of new initiatives supporting individuals and communities as well as new ways of sharing prayer and worship together.

Regional ecumenism

The Church Leaders of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire continue meet several times a year and it has been my pleasure to meet with them on three occasions. Those that gather regularly are from the Anglican, Baptist, Coptic Orthodox, Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reformed Churches, others are also invited. I continue to serve this meeting in an organisational capacity and have brought before the Church Leaders issues that may need their attention, as well as taking forward some issues and organising opportunities for further discussion outside of the scheduled meetings. There are also meetings of the Ecumenical Officers several times a year, and once a year a joint meeting with the Church Leaders. Again it is the Anglican, Baptist, Coptic Orthodox, Methodist, Roman Catholic and United Reformed Churches that engage with these meetings although others are invited. It continues to be a challenge to add to the

breadth of Churches that contribute to these meetings but I believe it will be a real enrichment to the Church Leaders and Ecumenical Officers groups if it can expand to encompass other churches.

This year I was also involved in the appointment of a new Chaplain for the University of Hertfordshire, Rev. Fiona Souter and I am continuing to work with the Church Leaders on the organisational arrangements for this ecumenical partnership. I was also invited by the Bishop of St Albans to give an ecumenical welcome at the installation service for the new Archdeacon of St Albans the Rev. Jane Mainwaring who is a previous Chair of Churches Together in Hitchin.

Thy Kingdom Come continues to be a remarkable development in the life of the Church and following the exciting and successful *Thy Kingdom Come* ten days of prayer in May 2019, I continue to Chair the ecumenical planning group for Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. This has been a large piece of work over the course of the year and it has been a privilege to work with staff at St Albans Diocese, St Albans Cathedral as well as Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist and Coptic colleagues. Although this year our plans for the Beacon event and a separate launch event at Bunyan Meeting in Bedford were put on hold due to the restrictions around coronavirus there are new plans currently developing. Although movement and gatherings are restricted we still aim to reach people across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire encouraging and inspiring prayer throughout the ten days between Ascension and Pentecost. The level of trust, respect and understanding between the planning group continues to grow and I am confident that these relationships will form a strong foundation that can take this project forward into next year. I am also grateful for the continued support of Rev. Dr David Chapman, Rev. Stephen Copson, Archbishop Angaelos and Bishop Paul, Bishop Richard, Bishop Michael and Bishop Alan with regard to this project. They always respond to requests for help enthusiastically which is an encouragement to all those involved in *Thy Kingdom Come* across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

Connection between local and national ecumenism

I have worked with Churches Together in England (CTE) in several ways. Last autumn I attended the annual national consultation of County, National and Denominational Ecumenical Officers. Since the lockdown I have also Chaired a number of Zoom meetings bringing together Ecumenical Officers from across England sharing news from their locality at this challenging time. I meet three times a year with the County Ecumenical Officers in the Eastern Region to share ideas and gain mutual support and once during the year I represented Churches Together in Hertfordshire and the Eastern Region at the CTE Enabling Group.

CTE continues to revise and improve the Flexible Framework for Local Ecumenism which was produced by the National Ecumenical Officers of the churches in conjunction with CTE and I was part of a consultation exercise on this subject in June 2019. The current full document can be found at

https://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx

In September 2019 I was elected as a Trustee for Churches Together in England for a three year period, this activity takes place outside of my working hours with Churches Together in Hertfordshire.

Communication of ecumenical activity and hope

Churches Together in Hertfordshire continues to have an internet presence and this includes the website which aims to be a main point of communication, sign posting "all things ecumenical" in Hertfordshire. Throughout the year churches and groups across the county have been encouraged to share their activity

and stories of hope and the number and range of events and news items being shared is growing. I am grateful to all those who have sent in information to me and would encourage others to think of the Churches Together in Hertfordshire website when they are considering publicity for their own events.

Sharing stories of hope continues to be a key part of the communication strategy. There is a dedicated web page to this, and each month a focus for hope is shared on social media. Sharing stories of hope does not forget the pain and difficulty caused by our Christian disunity but aims to highlight the good things that are happening and share examples of God's love in action when Christians work and worship together. At this challenging time for us as a nation as a church we need to hear these messages.

Churches Together in Hertfordshire has a Twitter account and recently I have started a Facebook account and plan to increase their use with the aid of scheduling software.

A new initiative in 2019 was the Churches Together in Hertfordshire Prayer Calendar which was well received. This combines a prayer from across the churches each month, a focus for hope and some information about Churches Together in Hertfordshire and working ecumenically. Over 500 copies were distributed throughout 2019 and this has been reproduced for 2020. So far in 2020 over 400 copies have been distributed as paper copies and it is also available as a download from the website.

Looking to the future

There are a number of things, over and above the normal round of facilitating local ecumenism, that I hope to develop as we move forward:

- 1) As the country and the churches adapt to the "new normal" I am keen to work with all our ecumenical partners to establish new ways of effective worship, prayer and work together. A first step was to bring people together to share what is happening across the county and a first meeting to facilitate this is happening on the 11th May 2020 at 7.30pm. Almost thirty people attended this meeting and a report is being prepared.
- 2) I hope to continue to make contact with new forms of mission in unity that exist in the county, in order to a) continue to understand and map what is happening, b) see what they can teach us about ecumenical practice and c) find out how they can be served by intermediate level ecumenism, that is, by Churches Together in Hertfordshire;
- 3) Continue to refine the communication strategy for Churches Together in Hertfordshire and ecumenical working across the county working with other communications teams where possible across the county.

And finally

On a personal note this year I also completed my MA in Contemporary Christian Theology at Newman University and I am currently looking to study further in the coming year. I want to say thank you to all those who have supported ecumenical working in Hertfordshire over the last year. For the continued support I have received from the Church Leaders, Ecumenical Officers, Local Churches Together Groups, LEPs and the Churches Together in Hertfordshire Trustees and Committee. I am particularly grateful to our Chair Rev. Dr David Chapman, who has been very kind and understanding as I have juggled home schooling and my various work activities over the recent months and to Pip Austin, my wonderful Administrative Assistant, for her continued kindness and support, thank you.

Doral Hayes