



## Ecumenical Facilitator's Report

### 5 May 2020

#### *Overview*

This year has been challenging for everyone but I want to start by saying how grateful I am to all those at Churches Together in Hertfordshire who have supported me in my role especially in the last six months when as I have had the personal challenges of ill health and home schooling to navigate.

My role as Ecumenical Facilitator continues to be 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 connect 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 and Digswell Village Church on several occasions and continued to offer support to the Elders of Panshanger Church alongside Rev. Dr David Chapman during their vacancy. Additionally I have worked to support a number of other LEPs and local groups regarding constitutional issues. I have had the pleasure of attending meetings with churches together groups online but look forward to being able to meet people again face to face. Increasingly local groups keep us informed with their activities so these can be communicated across 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 across the county and to share these stories with others. 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 being continually creative in finding 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 we celebrated the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with an online time of prayer led by Rev. Dr David Chapman and Bishop Paul McAleenan which was attended by over 120 people. Additionally, throughout the week video reflections from representatives of local Churches Together groups and the Focolare Movement were shared on social media as well as short prayers from the regional Church Leaders.

At Christmas a poem by Rev. Austin Janes (Chair of Churches Together in Hemel Hempstead) was brought to life by a dozen people from across Hertfordshire which included representatives from Bishops Stortford, Digswell, Hemel Hempstead, University of Hertfordshire as well as Rev. Dr David Chapman and Rt. Rev. Michael Beasley, Bishop of Hertford. This video received over 1200 views over the Christmas period and brought some well needed comfort and joy at this time.

*Thy Kingdom Come* continues to be a remarkable development in the life of the Church and I continue to chair the ecumenical planning group for Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. This is 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 movement and gathering restrictions continue to be in place 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 this year we have had new members to the committee bringing new ideas and enthusiasm and creating new relationships. The focus for this year is to ask "How are you Praying?" and share stories of how people are praying locally as well as signpost people to the excellent national online stories that are available. There will also be a county wide meeting for prayer online facilitated by Rev. Dr David Chapman and supported by Bishop McAleenan and Archdeacon Dave Middlebrook, this meeting is open to all so please do join us. I continue to be grateful for the support of Rev. Dr David Chapman, Rev. Stephen Copson, Rev. Dr Andrew Prasad, Archbishop Angaelos and Bishop Paul, Bishop David, 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 this year. Since the lockdown I have chaired a number of Zoom meetings bringing together Ecumenical Officers from across England sharing news from their locality as well as learning together on various issues such as Racial Justice and Social Media. 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. I also sit on the Re-imaging Intermediate Ecumenism group which is considering the future of intermediate ecumenism across the country. I also try to bring local ecumenical projects to the attention of CTE to enable further sharing of stories of hope.

The CTE document A Flexible Framework for Local Ecumenism is now finished and available online, this 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 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](https://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx)

Outside of my role at Churches Together in Hertfordshire I am also a Trustee for CTE and so attend the CTE Enabling Group, sit on the Racial Justice Working Group and am one of the trustees assigned to developing and strengthen intermediate ecumenism within England.

Looking forward to 2022 the CTE Forum takes place on 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> March 2022 and there will be places allocated to Churches Together in Hertfordshire. Please do consider if you would like to attend or would like to nominate someone to attend. More details to follow.

#### *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 on the Churches Together in Hertfordshire site and CTE are also interested in hearing and sharing local stories through their monthly newsletter. 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 and as a church we need to hear these messages.

Churches Together in Hertfordshire continues to have a social media presence and its primary platform is Twitter. We do have a Facebook account and hope to increase its use in the coming year.

The Churches Together in Hertfordshire Prayer Calendar 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 400 copies were distributed throughout 2019 and 2020. This has been reproduced for 2021, so far in 2021 over 300 copies have been distributed as paper copies and it is also available as download from the website.

#### *Looking to the future*

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

- 1) The diversity of churches contributing to ecumenical life in Hertfordshire at a local level is very encouraging and it would be wonderful to see an increase in the number of churches involved at a regional level. This continues to be a goal for the future.
- 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.
- 4) I look forward to meeting people face to face again and deepening relationships as we are hopefully able to move out of restrictions.

*And finally*

On a personal note I started by Doctorate in Theology at the University of Roehampton last September, this is in the area of interchurch families as a model for receptive ecumenism. 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, for his kindness and understanding as I have juggled my various work activities over the recent months and to Pip Austin, my wonderful Administrative Assistant, for her continued support, thank you.

*Doral Hayes*