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# TOGETHER IN CHRIST



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**A MESSAGE FROM UNA**

I am most grateful to all contributors to *Together In Christ* during the years I have been the Editor and to all who promoted and supported it.

I have now resigned as Editor, and I am grateful to Deacon Michael Baldry who has now taken over.  
May God bless you all,

Yours sincerely,

*Una Ratcliff*

Sincere thanks for those twenty-four years as our Editor, Una. I look forward to the challenge of continuing your good work. I also welcome the assistance of Dr Desmond Miller who has been helping Una recently and has agreed to continue to help me with the more ‘teckie’ stuff.

Pray for us,

**Michael Baldry**

How often the question ‘What can we do and why?’ is raised about Ecumenism. This edition contains some answers, approaches and ideas. In future I hope to include articles showing how our Catholic Faith leads us to need to know, love and learn from our Christian relatives. Then we will live our faith fully in Jesus.

John Richardson has started the ball rolling with a few suggestions. Do you have a reply?

Make *Together In Christ* high profile! There will be some free copies about, just ask. Leave some in waiting rooms, libraries etc. and subscribe for the next batch of goodies coming in June.

**QUESTIONS OF UNION AND COMMUNION**

In his pastoral letter for Lent, Archbishop Kevin reflected on the links between the Holy Eucharist and ecumenism, and described the Sacrament as ‘a sacrament of unity . . . [that] speaks powerfully to all conflict and division’. The Eucharist can be a source of pain for many Christians, and indeed the Bishop went on to encourage all to strive for an end to division among Christians, and continue to hope for the full communion of all Christians. This essay will explore some of the issues associated with the sacramental division we experience.

In the Catholic Church, and in most other churches, the late twentieth century saw a shift in how people related to the sacrament of the Eucharist. It went from primarily being seen as communion with God to frequently being emphasised as communion with each other. Now the Eucharist has something of both in it, but the way one looks at the sacrament influences how one practically approaches it. It is true to say ‘As we pray so we believe’, but it is also true to say ‘As we believe so we pray’. I would suggest that it is partly this transition to the later model that has led to barriers breaking down in most of the Reformed Churches which has led them to be inclusive in their Eucharistic practice and allow other Christians to share from their tables. Sometimes it can be a source of frustration and even pain to those in the Catholic Church that we have not followed a similar path. However, from our perspective sharing from the same altar presupposes that we share one faith. Not merely that we agree on a few basics, we agree with the Jews and the Muslims on the basics: that God is one, that he is the sole, and almighty, creator of all that is and that he will judge the living and the dead. Those who receive the sacrament must be one in faith, or our integrity is compromised.

Neither of the aspects of the Eucharist as communion with God, nor the aspect of it as communion with each other is unscriptural, both have their roots in the lived experience of the early Church. Indeed, in the case of the former, it has a much longer history, and we will pause to consider this first. Jesus was fully aware when he instituted the sacrament of the New Covenant on a

cold evening in early spring that he was transforming the rites of an Old Covenant. In the Passover liturgy a lamb was sacrificed to bring protection and deliverance for those who entered into the sacrifice by eating the flesh of the sacrificial victim. In the Passover liturgy of the Upper Room the Lamb who was to be sacrificed to bring protection and deliverance – not from the Destroyer and the oppression of Egypt, but protection from all that is evil and deliverance from our very sins – gave those present his flesh to eat that they might share the blessings, for he was the sacrificial victim who gained for us eternal redemption, whose blood is greater than all offerings of goats and bulls.

This was also foreshadowed by the communion sacrifices of the old law, where the one who offered would eat of the beast once it had been slaughtered and made holy, and thus that one would be restored to fellowship with God, when they had been separated by sin. However, the types and shadows of the old law merely hinted at what was to come, and how communion with God was to be restored in a Roman execution on the heights of Sion. A Roman cross became the place where every offering of the Temple was to pale before the redemption achieved on Golgotha. As Saint Peter put it: ‘He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.’

But, although Jesus bore our sins this does not automatically makes us sinless. We do not always live for righteousness, and so the Apostle John advises us to acknowledge our sins, knowing that Jesus is trustworthy and will forgive those who confess, as he is the sacrifice who expiates our sins, and those of the whole world. So in many Christian traditions confession of sins has gone hand in hand with reception of the Eucharist. In the Catholic Church, we are familiar with the practice of going to Confession before Mass. This association of confession and communion can be found right across the denominations. In Methodism until the third quarter of the last century the ‘Class’ system required potential communicants to confess their sins before the annual or quarterly Eucharist, and only those who were issued with a ticket to show that they had confessed were allowed to receive. Communion was stressed as a meeting

with God which demanded that those who came to God should be prepared to live life on God's terms and not on their own. Reception of the Eucharist was one aspect of a life lived in fellowship with God.

The idea of communion as fellowship with each other comes from 1 Corinthians 10, where Saint Paul assures us that 'as there is one loaf, so we, although we are many of us, are one single body, for we all share the one loaf'. However, it would be rash to take the verse out of its original context. Paul is arguing that since the sacrificial food that we partake of is a sharing in Christ's Blood and Body we who share in Christ are one body in Christ, and so we must not partake in pagan sacrificial offerings and eat food and drink offered to dark deities. Those who share in Belial's rituals, and partake of that which belongs to Belial, are Belial's, but since we are Christ's we should have no part of Belial's festivals. 'You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons as well; you cannot have a share at the Lord's table and the demons' table as well.'

So 1 Corinthians 10:17, a passage that is often cited as a very inclusive one, is just the opposite. It was not written with any thought of inclusion, rather its very point was exclusion. Belonging to Christ we are excluded from pagan sacrifices. It is starkly binaristic, we are the light, they are the dark. We must not receive from their altar, nay, we must not even have fellowship with them! How can Christ come to an agreement with Beliar and what sharing can there be between a believer and an unbeliever? The temple of God cannot compromise with false gods, and that is what we are – 'the temple of the living God'. While our unity in Christ draws us together, it separates us from the world. For there is one God, one baptism, and one faith; this one faith separates us out, it excludes us from pagan rites and sacrifices.

But how does this then relate to the issue of Christians sharing communion? After all they all belong to Christ, can they not share from one table? Ultimately the divisions of history have answered this for us, and the answer, sadly, is no. Although ideally they should, history has placed barriers in the way. The problem is that we are no longer the inheritors of one unified Christian faith; we are

the inheritors of different shades and emphases. We may feel the separation unwarranted and unjust when we meet Christians who are not from our Church whose faith stands painfully close to our own, but there are other Christians whose beliefs are (to use one of Paul's favourite phrases) anathema, even to the extent of denying Christ's full divinity and full humanity. Those who call themselves Christ's are no longer one in faith. The faith has been shattered and broken, and people of God have divided and fragmented. We can try to gloss over the differences, but there are differences, and when we try to set them aside we are setting our integrity aside too.

Communion by its nature is a divisive act – the question is who it divides. For Paul it divided Christian from Pagan, for us it may frequently, and terribly, divide Christian from Christian. However, we should be able to stand back and see that all Christians draw lines, that say who may and may not receive the Eucharist. The only question is where you draw the line. Even so-called 'open tables' are not open to all. Usually only baptised Trinitarian Christians may receive; Mormons, Unitarians, members of the Salvation Army Jehovah's Witnesses, and even some Quakers and Baptists are debarred by such arrangements. Some Christians remain excluded. Now I am not arguing that non-Trinitarians should necessarily be included in such arrangements, I am pointing out that all policies on communion exclude someone. For me the Catholic and Orthodox Churches draw the lines more honestly by only admitting members of their own Church, except in cases of genuine need where the individual seeking their sacraments shares their sacramental faith. Others issues must be seen as secondary to the individual Christian who genuinely needs the sacraments.

Some Reformed ministers have tried to get around these problems by merely inviting 'All who love the Lord Jesus' to the table. But, even this has problems, with some thinking this casts the net too wide. While on the other side a few have even suggested that if we do see the Eucharistic as the principal way of celebrating together what then of other faiths? If we share social fellowship with Muslims, Jews, Hindus, or even Pagans can we truly say we are in fellowship with them if we do not admit them to the Eucharist? Such

suggestions are not taken seriously, but if they were, would those of other faiths be insulted by such an invitation, because basically we would be trying to slot them into our view of God's dispensation with the world? And is such a model an authentic expression of how the first Christians viewed the sacrament? Certainly one can picture Paul scowling at such a suggestion.

This does illustrate the difficulties we face, and may continue to face, unless we radically re-evaluate the current trend towards seeing the Eucharist primarily as an expression of social fellowship. I would suggest that there is something to learn from the Salvation Army's perspective. They abandoned the Eucharist when they seceded from the Methodist Church precisely because they found it to be divisive, and when the World Council of Churches published the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Report* back in 1982 Martin Howe, the then president of the Student Christian Movement (and himself a member of the Salvation Army) commented:

Coming from a tradition for which the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist are not considered necessary for salvation, or a fuller expression of the Christian's experience and practice, it saddens me that the expression of unity has so far been limited to the concept of uniformity in religious practice.

Christian unity is not achieved by a stress on inclusive sacramental practice here and now, nor is it furthered by breaking the existing rules – indeed such actions may serve to retard the ecumenical process rather than further it. Only prayer, understanding of our own faith and that of others, and a creative ability to think and celebrate outside of some of the boxes of the practices bequeathed to us will bring us closer to the day when we are all able to receive from one table once more, and all the scattered fragments of bread are gathered from the hills where they've been strewn to be collected together on the altar of God.

John Newton,  
Parish Unity Contact, St Christopher's, Cheam.  
National Mission Support Worker for the Methodist Church



## **LET'S CLEAR THE AIR A LITTLE!**

Several times lately one of you has said to me that you Catholics do, or don't do, various things. So I am writing to clear the air – which is always therapeutic – and you should do the same to us! We can all learn.

For instance, someone said, 'You Catholics don't have women as Eucharistic Ministers, do you?' Well, when I was being trained as a Eucharistic Minister some 20 years ago, we had more women Eucharistic Ministers than men. We still do! At the 6 p.m. Mass on Saturday, 23 April I counted eight Eucharistic Ministers but only two were men. Of the six altar servers only two were boys. The numbers vary at each Mass.

When women (or girls) were allowed to become altar servers about sixteen years ago, our Newsletter in Warlingham, where I then lived, seemed to me to be more than a little patronising of girls as servers. It suggested girls should only be used when there was a lack of boys. So I wrote to my Parish Priest and protested at the tone. No reply, but since then it has been taken for granted that girls and boys are both O.K. It must have been a shock for some priests – all of them bachelors.

Someone also said, 'You Roman Catholics worship Mary!'

I agree that some of us go way over the top in this respect, but the official teaching forbids it. The 'worship' allowed for Mary, as the Mother of the Lord (GOD!), is always to be at a lower level. Though how does one rate 'worship'? It's hard to judge what's in another's mind, isn't it?

So I hope we've cleared the air a bit. But why not try to prove me wrong? If you come to St Edmund's for the 6 p.m. Mass on Saturdays that leaves your Sundays free to attend your own church. I do so on Saturdays to leave me free on Sundays to visit all the CTiB churches in turn. I ended my 9<sup>th</sup> circuit of all the CTiB churches with great joy at Beckenham Methodist Church on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> May. I begin my 10<sup>th</sup> round at the United Reformed Church on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June. The coffee's always good there! So please come to St Edmund's and count. You will be most welcome.

Terry Davies. Unity Contact for St Edmund's, Beckenham

## **Reflections of an Evening Ecumenical Group Meeting**

### ***Should politics and religion be kept separate?***

Everyone spoke on this. Some thought it was impossible to keep them separate – they impinge upon one another. We need to give our spiritual eye to what is happening in the world around us. It is vital that a Christian perspective is fed into the many great issues of the day, not least, medical ethics. We were very aware that a General Election was upon us. Others, however, thought they should be kept separate, reflecting on the many historical disasters where religion had influenced politics in a wrong way – something that still happens today.

### ***Is it wrong NOT to have a funeral service?***

Most thought that the funeral service was as much for the benefit of relatives and friends as it was for the person who died. We need some way of saying goodbye and remembering our shared part in the life that is now over.

Someone said they had been to many funerals and come away feeling nothing! Could it be right to ask relatives and friends to remember in their own way privately?

The group felt that it was possible to have many varied forms of remembrance, which was good, yet nevertheless, it was important for family and friends to gather together to pray – if that was possible – and to remember with thankfulness the life of the deceased.

The death of young people is difficult today, with the growing expectation that we all live to a great age.

***To consider the marriage of people of the same sex.***

This was a keen discussion. All agreed that marriage was special and carried with it the expectation of children and family life, so same-sex ‘marriage’ was not the way forward. However, all seem to reflect that we live in a changing society and, what had used to be hidden, is now made known. There are many such people who need a way of being open within society, with a recognition that allows them to express their love and companionship. It must be right for people who share their life in this way to have legal rights of inheritance etc.

***To consider those who are unbelievers, or who have lost their faith.***

Again another keen discussion. This question had arisen because a friend of one group member had lost a relative, and through that, could not believe in God. Many of us knew people who had a similar response to death, but equally many knew of those for whom the death of a loved one had been a strengthening point in their faith journey.

We all agreed that death is to be faced; suffering is part of our lives, and gives depth and strength. The Christian faith is not an escape from life, but a way of walking through life aware that we are upheld by Almighty God.

We left after sharing the Grace with gladness in belonging to such a group.

John Littlewood, York.

## THE RELICS OF ST THÉRÈSE

In 1997 Thérèse of Lisieux, the Carmelite nun, popularly known as the Little Flower was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. Since then her relics have been travelling the world and have been enthusiastically received in thirty-two countries including America, Russia, Australia, Asia and the Middle East.

In 2001 they came to Ireland, and there are discussions for them to visit Scotland. The relics have to be requested by the hierarchy of each country, not by the Carmelite Order. So far the Bishops of England and Wales have made no such request. It is up to individuals and parishes to write to their Diocesan Bishop and the Cardinal requesting that the relics be invited to come here.

Prior to Thérèse being proclaimed a Doctor of the Church individuals and groups signed petitions urging that the hierarchy should support such a step. This was seen as a popular proclamation that contributed to the Pope's decision. Such efforts regarding her relics would surely be fruitful, if it is seen that people want them to come here. Wherever the relics have gone there has been a renewal of faith and prayer. Thérèse always wanted to be a missionary and this is now happening. Christians of other traditions and those of other faiths have seen a benefit in receiving the relics to their country. Muslims in the Lebanon said it was a great honour that they had visited their land. In fact Muslims have a regard for Thérèse, for her simplicity and openness to God.

Thérèse always carried a copy of the Gospels next to her heart. Her knowledge and love of Scripture anticipated the teachings of Vatican II. She quotes more than a thousand Biblical texts in her writings and said that, 'a single word opens up infinite horizons'. She discovered the feminine in God; 'I have always felt at the bottom of my heart that God is more tender than any mother'.

Her understanding of the Merciful Love of God completely turned on its head the theology prevalent in France at that time, of appeasing Divine Justice, an inheritance of Jansenism. She looked

to Proverbs, ‘Whoever is a little one, let him come to me’ and Isaiah, ‘As one whom a mother caresses so I will comfort you . . . you will be carried at the breast’ (66:13) to formulate her doctrine of the Little Way. The last words she wrote were: ‘I cannot fear a God who made himself so small for me . . . I love him! . . . because He is only Love and Mercy!’

Thérèse’s message of complete love and trust in her way of spiritual childhood resonates today in a world torn apart by strife and secularism. She has been called the saint of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and was one of the most artistically creative, having written sixty-two passionate poems, her ‘jets of love’ and eight plays, the latter yet to be translated into English, illustrating her favourite themes, in addition to her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*. She was also one of the most photographed, although the originals were touched up, as were her writings, to portray a saccharine sweetness that is far from the real Thérèse with her determined mouth and chin, who ‘under the wine press of suffering’ proved her love of Jesus, and ‘loved the night as much as the day’. Thérèse is an intuitive saint who in her search for truth recognised that the call to holiness could be followed by everyone through experiencing everyday events in the light of the Gospel of love. Like her we can follow ‘in confidence and love’, allowing God to work through our weaknesses, as the Apostle Paul said: ‘When I am weak, then I am strong’ (2 Cor: 12:10). Her concept of Eternity was radical, no longer seen as a time of rest but a time of action. Shortly before her death she said: ‘I believe that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making known the love of God as I love him, to give my little way to souls’, and that in heaven she would do good on earth, making a shower of roses rain down; hence the symbol of a rose being associated with her. Pope John Paul writes in his apostolic Letter *Divini Amoris Scientia* (The Science of Divine Love) written for Mission Sunday 1997, the occasion of the proclamation of St Thérèse as Doctor of the Universal Church:

One can say with conviction about Thérèse of Lisieux that the Spirit of God allowed her heart to reveal directly to the people

of our time the fundamental mystery, the reality of the Gospel. What truth is more basic and more universal than this: God is our father and we are his children.

In Lisieux in 1980 he further spoke of her ‘unique genius’, saying that it was thanks to her that the entire church had found again the simplicity and freshness of the gospel truth which has its origin and source in the heart of Christ himself.

God speaks to us in signs and symbols; Thérèse’s remains are a sign through which her longings to be an apostle at the heart of the Church are fulfilled. Relics point to what lies beyond, they are not a talisman. Spiritual preparation and understanding of Thérèse’s doctrine will lead to renewed love and honour of God. Veneration of relics reflects the incarnational nature of Christianity. We need to remember that originally relics were mainly associated with the Eucharist, which was celebrated in the catacombs, the burial place of the early Christians. Later it became the custom that Mass was celebrated on an altar stone containing relics of a Martyr or other saint – a practice which is prescribed by Canon law to this day. At every Eucharistic celebration in a church, the celebrant begins by kissing the altar containing the relics.

Thérèse was radical for her time in desiring frequent communion: ‘It is not to remain in a golden ciborium that He comes to us each day’. It was not until later that Pope Pius X was inspired to change the church’s regulations, paving the way for daily communion. Spiritual preparation and understanding of Thérèse’s doctrine will lead to renewed love and honour of God. A request for her relics to visit our country will herald many blessings as seen by the reception they have received elsewhere, where united prayer and renewal has been furthered amongst many peoples.

Amanda C. Dickie, January 2005  
E-mail: [acadamat@aol.com](mailto:acadamat@aol.com)

## THEOLOGY IN THE CINEMA

While the cinema is likened by some to a spiritual experience, and despite the occasional ‘biblical epic’ or ‘biopic of a saint’, one does not immediately think of it as an occasion for theological reflection. Within the European cinematic tradition, however, there are a number of directors from varying Christian backgrounds who have expressed theological ideas through their films. I should like to discuss the best examples of these, from respectively the Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions. Nearly all the films mentioned are available on DVD or video, and all turn up occasionally in repertory cinemas. Most have been shown on television.

Undoubtedly the most admired Catholic director is the Frenchman, Robert Bresson (1901-99). In a forty year career he made only thirteen films, three of which are conventional ‘religious films’, while the remainder deal with such topics as free-will versus determinism, and chance versus fate. God’s presence, and the occasional in-rushing of grace, loom large in all his work, though his films have sometimes been accused of Jansenism (a sort of Catholic Calvinism which emphasised predestination). Bresson totally distrusted psychology and the notion that people need ‘reasons’ for their actions, and his films contain many examples of characters intending to do one thing and then doing the opposite for no apparent reason, or suddenly acting completely out of character.

The best of his explicitly religious films is *Diary of a Country Priest* (1950), based on the much admired novel by Georges Bernanos. In this, his third film, Bresson developed his unique aesthetic of paring everything down to a bare minimum, using exclusively non-actors (‘models’) whom he trained to eschew all expressionism in their speaking and gestures in order to bring out the inner spiritual strength and turmoil of the

characters. Here the sickly young priest in a rural parish is consistently embarrassed and humiliated by the behaviour of his parishioners. But two great scenes illustrate God's grace: the long central scene where the Countess, in intense conversation with the priest, suddenly breaks from her morbid attachment to her long-dead son with a dramatic gesture, and the final scene where grace is seen to be channelled through a disgraced ex-priest.

Bresson's masterpiece is *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1967), where the central character Balthazar is a donkey, presented as a Christ-figure. We see his life from birth to death, passing through a succession of owners, mistreated by some of them, observing all the frailties of humanity and accepting the sufferings of his lot. Free-will is seen to reside only in the 'bad' characters, notably in the evil Gerard who causes havoc in the village in various ways. Most of the characters are passively 'acted upon', seemingly accepting their fate. This beautiful and complex film, with a sub-plot involving long-drawn-out legal proceedings, is a good example of Bresson's supposed Jansenist tendencies.

A very different French Catholic director is Eric Rohmer (born 1920), who is still working. An influential critic in the 1950s, he co-wrote a book about Catholic themes in Hitchcock's films. Most of Rohmer's films are witty romantic comedies, but his 1969 film *My Night With Maud* is nothing less than an excellent introduction to the theology of Pascal, particularly his 'wager' argument for belief in God (which one character uses to establish the truth of Marxism!). The story tells of a Catholic bachelor who, through a chain of circumstances beyond his control, finds himself having to spend a night with the beautiful divorced woman Maud who is intent on seducing him. After prolonged philosophical and theological discussion he passes up the opportunity. The film's first several minutes are shot during Christmas Midnight Mass in Pascal's home town (where the entire film is set).



For a Protestant film-maker there is none better than the Dane, Carl Dreyer (1889-1968). His film *Ordet* (1955) takes place in a remote region of Jutland where there are two rival sects, a mainstream one and a more exclusive fundamentalist one. The old farmer who heads the mainstream sect is having trouble with all his three sons: one has lost his faith completely, one wants to marry the daughter of the rival sect's leader, while one has seemingly gone quite mad after studying the theology of Kierkegaard! In the end all these conflicts are resolved through a genuine miracle, perhaps the most believable and moving one ever portrayed on screen (no special effects needed!). Dreyer was a deeply feminist film-maker; in nearly all his films the women are seen to suffer while the men pursue their interminable theological arguments. His silent classic, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1927) is another brilliant example, and is intensely emotionally draining to watch.

Another famous film-maker from a Protestant background is the Swede, Ingmar Bergman (born 1918), son of a Lutheran pastor. The fascinating series of films he made between 1957-62 illustrates how his own beliefs were evolving (he eventually abandoned formal religious belief). The best-known is the much parodied *The Seventh Seal* (1957), in which a knight returning from the Crusades is confronted with the figure of Death, whom he challenges to a game of chess in order to put off the day of reckoning.

Turning to Russian Orthodoxy, Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-86) is my personal favourite of all film makers. His 1965 film *Andrei Rublev* is about the famous monk and icon-painter who produced the Old Testament Trinity icon, familiar to most of us, and who lived from 1360 to 1420. Hardly anything is known of Rublev's life, so Tarkovsky presents a succession of imagined episodes set against the background of the violent Russian history of the time. There is a fair amount of theological

discussion between Rublev and his colleagues, mainly centred around the correct way in which figures in icons should be painted. But the central theme of the film is to show how Rublev takes a vow of silence and gives up painting in reparation for what he considers a sinful deed, only to have his faith and artistic purpose reawakened by the action of a young boy. (All this is unhistorical, but Tarkovsky is making a point about faith.)

Orthodoxy is deeply centred on the material and the elemental, and all Tarkovsky's films are full of episodes involving fire, water, and the Russian soil. Characters are often seen gazing at the earth, even sprawling face down on it. Other films of his I would particularly recommend are *Stalker* (1978) in which two men are challenged to confront the innermost desires within their hearts, and *The Sacrifice* (1985), a parable about how one man's act of faith can change the world. Tarkovsky's films are deliberately ambiguous and multi-layered, and provoke deep reflection in the attentive viewer.

Many mainstream Hollywood films are used by youth leaders to illustrate moral and other issues, though the illustrations can often seem a little forced. I hope I have shown, however, that the cinema is not just a medium of entertainment, but, like great religious paintings, can deal directly with basic Christian theology in its various forms.

Alan Pavelin

## **Presentation to the South West and South East London Area Christian Unity Commissions**

A word first about my personal experience. I was brought up in Lancashire Methodism which was warm, loving, secure, inspirational, educational, all-embracing, enjoyable, narrow and judgemental, in particular where Catholics were concerned. You were, I'm afraid, beyond the pail. You might, by some miracle, be nice people, but your faith was unacceptable and when people 'turned' in a mixed marriage, it was somehow shameful.

I was therefore shocked when I went to university and found that my first Student Christian Movement bible study group was led by a well-informed Roman Catholic, who was there I think because he was in love with a Salvation Army girl who attended. What complications, except that it seemed to work perfectly!

Another influence early in my university life was a presentation by Brother Roger of Taizé on reconciliation between churches and between nations, and the link between the two. From then on, I was hooked on ecumenism! Over the years, I have experienced inter-church relations in many forms at international, national, regional and local levels. I feel privileged to have done so and long for others to know the richness of ecumenical encounter. I feel particularly privileged that, having recently retired from the National Health Service where I was a Director of the Central Office for Research Ethics Committees, I am now Ecumenical Officer in this area and can pursue the causes that are near to my heart.

Like many, including yourselves, I have concerns about ecumenism today. Let me list some of them:

- it's an optional extra for most church-goers.
- clergy overload makes things difficult.
- there is lay apathy.
- the ecumenical enthusiasts are middle-aged and elderly, and

some have grown weary in well-doing.

- ecumenism is ‘calendrical’; if it’s January, it must be the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, rather than heart-felt.
- we do ecumenical things rather than do things ecumenically an excellent sound bite, not my own!

But there are hopeful signs:

- ◆ ‘calendrical’ ecumenism is not necessarily a bad thing; it gives a framework for the year and can spill over into more joint prayer and action.
- ◆ there is less rigid denominationalism.
- ◆ some of the old battles feel just that – old and irrelevant.
- ◆ individual congregations are made up of people from many different backgrounds and traditions with a built-in ecumenism.
- ◆ friendships flourish across what used to be divides.
- ◆ there are new manifestations of ecumenism: e.g. through charismatic music events, courses like Alpha and Emmaus, festivals and pilgrimages.

Within this context, our convictions about ecumenism continue to be true, and should constantly be re-asserted. These include:

- the biblical imperative especially the prayer of Jesus that we may be one, and the emphasis of Paul on many gifts contributing to the one whole.
- the mission imperative that united witness to the world carries more integrity and is more effective than our divided efforts.
- the peace imperative, learned from Brother Roger all those years ago, that reconciliation between churches and between nations is linked to the justice imperative that the world needs united Christian action to tackle hunger, poverty and the harming of our planet.
- the Trinitarian model, so important to our Orthodox sisters and brothers, that the Three-in-One is the great sign of unity.

- the *oikoumene* vision that the whole inhabited earth belongs to the Lord and we are his stewards.
- the simple truth that spiritual and practical relationships between followers of Christ change things and help to proclaim the Kingdom.

My role as Ecumenical Officer is, as I see it, to acknowledge the concerns, recognise the new manifestations, assert the convictions, and facilitate action across South London.

I work mainly with *Churches Together* groups encouraging them to develop ways in which they can:

- ⇒ understand each other.
- ⇒ worship and pray together.
- ⇒ learn and train together.
- ⇒ evangelise together.
- ⇒ serve their locality together.
- ⇒ relate to the local authority together.
- ⇒ address justice, peace and environmental issues together.
- ⇒ develop international links together.
- ⇒ use resources together.

(a list taken from Jenny Carpenter's excellent handbook *Together locally*, Churches Together in England, 2002).

I hesitate to tell a Catholic Christian Unity Commission what it might particularly contribute to the overall objectives I have outlined, but you have asked me to give some pointers so, with apprehension and a willingness to be challenged, I suggest the following which graduate from 'softer' to 'harder' issues:

1. Continue to be a gathering of ecumenical enthusiasts.
2. Believe in and foster friendships that cross the denominational boundaries.
3. Continue to welcome observers from other Christian tradi-

tions to your meetings and have occasional meetings on key themes with your counterpart committees in the other Christian churches.

4. As individuals, support your local *Churches Together* group and share your experiences, good and bad, here.

5. Reflect together on how Catholics can share with others the richness of their non-eucharistic worship and prayer life.

6. Think of ways in which Catholic churches can best host ecumenical services.

7. Discuss together the shape of the church unity you seek.

8. Look at your stance on eucharistic fellowship, reflecting what is painful, possible and hopeful.

9. Ask yourselves how you can best share your devotion to Mary with friends in the Protestant tradition.

10. Seek ways in which you can express the value of the papacy to friends (and doubters) in the Protestant tradition.

Each one of these merits a debate in itself – I think they are enough to be going on with!

Thank you for your invitation.

May God, Father Son and Holy Spirit strengthen us all in our endeavours to promote the unity that is his gift.

John Richardson, Ecumenical Officer,  
Churches Together in South London  
27 October 2005

## THE DIACONATE IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

St Edmund's Catholic Church in Beckenham has been fortunate in having the ministry of Deacon Dennis Barratt for the past fourteen years, and two future permanent deacons are in training, whereas the 900 year old Anglican Parish Church of St George's has been without a deacon for the past eight years, but *Alleluia* they now have one.

I was present when Dan Harrison along with seven others, three of whom were women, was ordained on Saturday, 10 September at Rochester Cathedral by Michael Nazir, Bishop of Rochester, assisted by his Suffragan, Brian Castle, Bishop of Tonbridge. It was a joyous occasion and good to see these eight, called by God, to make their pledge to serve God for the rest of their lives. Deacon Dan Harrison proclaimed the Gospel at St George's for the first time at their Sunday morning Eucharist and officiated at Choral Evensong that evening. The preacher at that Eucharist was the Rev. Margaret Tremeer who has served some years as a priest in South Africa and helps at St George's when she can. She preached expertly on *Forgiveness*, the subject of yesterday's Gospel, turning her head frequently so that all parts of the Church, including the choir and organist (both behind her) were involved, and she did it in ten minutes flat, unlike some men I have seen at other Anglican churches recently – one went on for thirty minutes another, a black bishop, took forty. The new deacon will take some of the heavy burden from Fr Malcolm Hancock, the Rector.

So, let us pray that the eight new deacons, soon to become priests, will give good service to God's people throughout the Rochester diocese. One of the women will serve at St Mark's, Bromley. I found it a very moving occasion.

Terry Davies, Unity Contact  
12 September 2005

