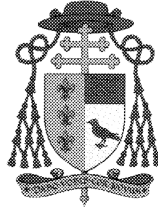


*Diocesan Bulletin for Christian Unity
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**TOGETHER
IN
CHRIST**



CONTENTS

Page

- 01 Bishop Charles Joseph Henderson, R.I.P.
John Richardson
- 02 Una Ratcliff – An Appreciation
Canon W Clements
- 04 The Holy Spirit has been at work in the Church
Michael Baldry
- 09 Catholics and Orthodox: Are We So Divided?
Peter Mitchell
- 11 Syriac Pilgrimage at St Mildred's Abbey
Peter Mitchell
- 12 Living in Unity
Joy Peck
- 15 Good Wishes and More Small Steps!
Terry Davies
- 16 Unity Service, Christ Church, Eltham, 2006
Desmond Miller
- 19 The New Dean of Rochester
Terry Davies

EDITORIAL

On 10 April 2006 Bishop Emeritus Charles Henderson passed away after a short illness. He was involved in work for the Unity Commission in Southwark Diocese from its beginning and was known, respected and trusted by the many Church leaders and representatives he had contact with. When I took over *Together in Christ* in December 2005 he encouraged me with ideas for the future. I am sure he will be even more active now in bringing Unity to the Church. May he rest in peace +

Dear subscribers of *Together in Christ*, the spring edition saw 550 copies distributed across the Diocese, a 20% increase. Apologies to some who requested extra copies that could not be provided. Many new subscribers have signed up for the annual set costing £3.30 with postage and packing. It is noted that for those purchasing more than five sets there may be a disincentive as the postage costs mount up. For the 2007 issues there will be free delivery for six sets and over, to a single address within Southwark diocese. It is hoped this will encourage parishes or deaneries to take extra copies, or for individuals to join together and create a bulk order. *Together in Christ* is non-profit making; all income is ploughed back in improvements.

The current edition looks at the important contribution the Swanwick Conference has made towards Church Unity over the last twenty years since Cardinal Hume pledged a commitment for the Roman Catholic Church. What are the views of other Churches about the progress being made?

Terry Davies takes us for a wander around the Churches of South London. Joy Peck offers a story of charity and service ministering to everyone without limits or judgement.

There's a happy celebration as some Eastern Churches visit Minster Abbey, near Ramsgate. If you haven't been to Minster you must. The new retreat centre gives a vast new space to use and is disability friendly.

Tell us your story of cooperation 'across the divide'. It is getting narrower each day by God's grace.

Michael Baldry

BISHOP CHARLES HENDERSON

(1924 - 2006)

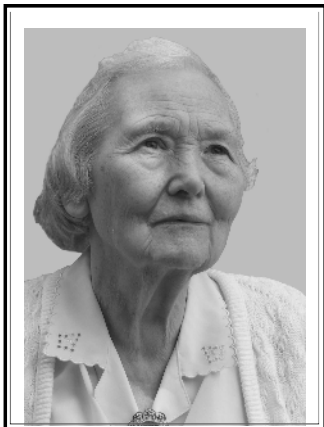


I have just heard the news of the death of Bishop Charles and, in the absence of Nigel Uden who is away at the moment, I write on behalf of *Churches Together in South London* to express sadness and the assurance of our prayers for the Catholic community at this time.

Since taking up the post of Ecumenical Officer a year ago I have heard many tributes to Bishop Charles. He played a significant role in ecumenical developments across South London and did so in a manner that inspired great respect and deep affection. In fact I heard of his passing while I was in a group reviewing a Covenant between local Catholic and Anglican parishes which he had helped to write more than twenty years ago. Those there who knew him paid tribute to his care and support. I am sure that thanksgiving for his life and witness to Christ will be in the prayers of many churches and individuals outside the Catholic community in the coming days.

We praise God for a good bishop and fine ecumenical leader. May he rest in peace.

John Richardson.



UNA RATCLIFF

AN APPRECIATION

One day in 1979 Father John Lennon, as Dean of Bexley Deanery, invited Sidney and Una Ratcliff to represent their Deanery on the Southwark Diocesan Ecumenical Commission. ‘Just four meetings a year,’ he said. Sidney and Una were already active in work for Christian Unity in their own parish of St Thomas More, Bexleyheath, organising Study Days where people of different Christian denominations met to share their beliefs, speaking the truth with love, and listening to each other. In 1980, a year after she joined the Commission, Una was chosen to represent our Diocese, along with Bishop Charles Henderson, on the national Ecumenical Commission for England and Wales (later to become the Committee for Christian Unity of the Department of Mission and Unity of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales).

Three years later in 1983, the South East Area of the Diocesan Commission decided to produce *Together in Christ*, a regular bulletin appearing three times a year, including articles

on various aspects of Christian unity from distinguished contributors of various denominations, as well as news of local, diocesan and national ecumenical events. Una agreed to be the Editor, with the assistance of Sidney, her husband, and the first issue appeared in January, 1983. With gentle persistence, Una has obtained articles on a wide variety of subjects from contributors of various denominations, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Coptic Orthodox and others. In the first four years there were fifty-five different contributors, and the work has gone on.

In June 1987, with the encouragement of Archbishop Michael Bowen, *Together in Christ* became the official bulletin of the Ecumenical Commission for the whole Diocese of Southwark. Sidney died in 1997, but Una has carried on alone as Editor, working from home. To her great credit *Together in Christ* has appeared regularly every four months for twenty-four years.

So, Una, our congratulations and sincere thanks for all you have done to further prayer, education and active work in the cause of Christian Unity.

Canon William Clements, KHS

The Holy Spirit has been at work in the Church

To know where we are going, we need to know where we come from. Our historic roots show centuries old separation and isolation, persecution and antagonism. But here we are now, 150 years after the re-establishment of the Catholic Church in England, able to work together with the other churches, share our belief, promote the Gospel, live in tolerance and talk about Unity.

The great landmark for the Catholic Church was the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* 1964, from the Second Vatican Council. It was seen as ‘a principle concern’. This laid the foundations and freedom of action to seek understanding and reconciliation, first with the sister Churches of the Orthodox traditions, and second with those of the Reformation. A distinct difference existed between these two relationships. The Orthodox Churches shared with the Catholic Church the same sacramental and ministerial tradition, and the same faith, but were unable to agree with Papal authority and ministry.

The Reformed Churches were in a more polemic situation from the Apostolic See of Rome and from each other. The Council saw the need for ‘dialogue’ between competent experts, making ‘every effort to avoid expressions, judgements and actions which do not represent the condition of our separated brethren with justice and fairness’. Then to engage in intensive co-operation carrying out duties for the common good, come together in common prayer, where permitted, and examine their own faithfulness to Christ’s will for the Church and undertake renewal and reform.

The Joint Declaration on Cooperation, made in March 1966 between Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey created a new atmosphere of fellowship. It was in this light that the following two articles came to be. Cardinal Basil Hume had struggled to move dialogue along; the Catholic Church lagged behind. He was not as progressive as Cormac Murphy O’Connor, who wanted involvement in The British Council of Churches (BCC). It was local initiatives that led Cardinal Hume to

be at Swanwick in 1987 and he decided to speak to the annual gathering of Churches. BCC then made the decision to sacrifice itself and create a new body to include the Catholic Church, CCBI, which led to formation of Churches Together.

Michael Baldry

The Cardinal's Decisive Intervention

I would like to think that it is now very clear that the Roman Catholic Church is committed to this Inter-Church Process. What of the future? I should like to make four points.

First, I hope that our Roman Catholic delegates at this Conference will recommend to members of our Church that we move now quite deliberately from a situation of co-operation to one of commitment to each other. By 'commitment to each other' I mean that we commit ourselves to praying and working together for Church unity, and to acting together, both nationally and locally, for evangelisation and mission. I recognise, of course, that up and down the land, such commitments have already been made. But I would like to see the commitment I have described becoming official policy. This will be in response to a gospel imperative, and, in our case, following a clear directive from the Second Vatican Council. This commitment, then, should be official policy at every level. But we should have in view a moving, in God's time, to full communion, or communion that is both visible and organic. We must not lose sight of this ultimate aim of all our ecumenical prayer and endeavour. By full communion I mean that *koinonia*, that fellowship, that one-ness in the Body of Christ, of which the essential elements, were already outlined in the Acts of the Apostles, '... be true to the teaching of the apostles, the breaking of bread, to fellowship and to prayer'. That followed the passage describing the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. From this followed the task of evangelisation and action resulting from concern for those in need. In a full 'communion' we recognise, of course, that there will not be uniformity but legitimate diversity. It is not often stressed sufficiently that even within the Roman Catholic Church there is considerable diversity.

This brings me to my second point. I would not wish to be less zealous than any of the most zealous of you in respect of mission. Mission belongs to the essence of the Church as we all well know. But I would not want to see any lessening in our concern for those questions, generally termed *Faith and Order*. A Roman Catholic contribution will follow from a Roman Catholic concern about the content of our faith, about ecclesiology, about morality, about the sacraments – questions which I believe, as a matter of urgency, we need to explore together. Mission is of the essence of the life of the Church, but so is the exploration of the mystery of God. It has to be part of our dialogue arising from our common faith.

This brings me briefly to my third point. It concerns the ecumenical instrument. The confusion in my notes mirrors, alas, the confusion in my mind. Of one thing I am certain: that there will be no authentic evolution of Church unity which does not take place at the local level. Whatever else our ecumenical instrument must do, it must not only foster ecumenical relationships locally, but also action in the locality. Anything which prevents that, or does not encourage that, will not, to my mind, be on the right lines. My mind is totally confused as to the kind of instruments that we need, but I am confident, very confident, that there is in this hall a vast experience, skill and wisdom, and I would be very confident that the right instrument will eventually emerge.

And my fourth point is of a very general nature. When I think of what has happened here these last few days, three words are on my mind. The first is gratitude – gratitude that we have come together; gratitude that we have thought and reflected together; gratitude that we have prayed together. I would endorse entirely the proposal for some kind of assembly, which would meet from time to time, because experience such as our being together, our reflecting together, our praying together is an essential contribution to our ecumenical endeavour. It is in itself an expression of *koinonia*. We are deeply related to each other in Christ through baptism. And then my two other words: Christian unity is a gift

from God and in these last few days I have felt He has been giving the gift in abundance. It is also a process of growth. I would distrust anybody who tries to indicate to me what the end of that process will be. One step at a time, and Swanwick has been a very decisive one.

SWANWICK DECLARATION, 4 SEPTEMBER 1987
NO LONGER STRANGERS – PILGRIMS!

Appointed by our churches and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we declare that this, the broadest assembly of British and Irish Churches ever to meet in these islands, has reached a common mind. We are aware that not all Christians are represented amongst us but we look forward to the time when they will share fully with us.

We came with different experiences and traditions, some with long ecumenical service, some for whom this is a new adventure. We are one band of pilgrims. We are old and young, women and men, black and white, lay and ordained and we travelled from the four corners of these islands to meet at Swanwick in Derbyshire. There we met, we listened, we talked, we worshipped, we prayed, we sat in silence, deeper than words. Against the background of so much suffering and sinfulness in our society we were reminded of our call to witness that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. We affirmed that this world with all its sin and splendour belongs to God. Young people called on us to be ready to sort out our priorities so that we could travel light and concentrate on our goal. Driven on by a gospel imperative to seek unity that the world may believe, we rejoiced that we are pilgrims together and strangers no longer.

We now declare together our readiness to commit ourselves to each other under God. Our earnest desire is to become more fully, in his own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission. Such unity is the gift of God. With gratitude we have truly experienced this gift, growing

amongst us in these days. We affirm our openness to this growing unity in obedience to the Word of God, so that we may fully share, hold in common and offer to the world those gifts which we have received and still hold in separation. In the unity we seek we recognise that there will not be uniformity but legitimate diversity.

It is our conviction that, as a matter of policy at all levels and in all places, our Churches must now move from co-operation to clear commitment to each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed, and in common evangelism and service of the world.

We urge Church leaders and representatives to take all necessary steps to present, as soon as possible, to our Church authorities, assemblies and congregations, the report of this conference together with developed proposals for ecumenical instruments to help the Churches of these islands to move ahead together.

Continuing to trust in the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, we look forward with confidence to sharing with our own Churches the joys of this historic conference. We thank God for all those who, from Lent '86 and before, have been part of this pilgrimage. We feel their presence with us. We urge our Churches to confirm by decision and action the hopes and vision on which we have laid hold, and which we shall not let go.

This is a new beginning. We set out on our further pilgrimage ready to take risks and determined not to be put off by 'dismal stories'. We resolve that no discouragement will make us once relent our avowed intent to be pilgrims together. Leaving behind painful memories and reaching out for what lies ahead, we press on towards the full reconciliation in Christ of all things in heaven and on earth, that God has promised in his kingdom.

CATHOLICS AND ORTHODOX: ARE WE SO DIVIDED?

A Franciscan view culled from a pamphlet supplied by the Franciscan Church, Rethymnon, Crete.

What unites us? Usually we underline those things that separate us from our Orthodox brothers, so much indeed that we have often forgotten the things that unite us. One and the same God unites us, one and the same Christ, one and the same Mother of God; the same sacraments, the same Sacred Scriptures, the Apostles together with the Holy Tradition, the first Ecumenical Councils which defined the Creed. That is, Orthodox and Catholics have in common these things that constitute the substance of Christianity. Through Baptism we do not become *Catholics* or *Orthodox* but Christians.

What separates us? Although all Christians are essentially united in the one and only body of Christ, there are however some differences that we should not underestimate. The main issue that separates the two Christian confessions in Greece is the 'Primacy of the Pope' which is so much stressed in our country. We Catholics recognise in the face of the Bishop of the Church of Rome, based on Christ's promise to the Apostle Peter, a universal pre-eminence; a pre-eminence (primacy), however not of sovereignty over the Church but a primacy of love and service for the benefit of the Church, for service to the Church, for the security of the unity of the Church and the authenticity of the Gospel.

Our Orthodox brothers, however, acknowledge this universal ecclesiastical supervision only to the ecumenical synod. Other differences like the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, with a little goodwill, can be overcome.

Differences that do not separate us: Other differences such as the Holy Communion under the substance (form) and the way it is communicated (unleavened bread as the host for Catholics), the outward difference of the sign of the cross, the way the sacraments and Eucharist are celebrated, the celibacy of the clergy, the difference in the liturgical calendar, etc., do not threaten unity but rather they express the spiritual richness, the pluralism and the freedom of Christians.

Each Church lives its faith in its own way, in its own temperament. It becomes wrong at the moment one Church makes absolute and exclusive its own way, its own traditions and refuses to acknowledge to the other Church its right to live Christianity in its way.

What accounts for the differences? These stem from historical, political, cultural and geographical/regional reasons. An additional reason is that one Church unilaterally developed one truth, completely ignoring the other Church. Often, the differing cultures of peoples led to different criteria for the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures which led to different conclusions. Nevertheless, as far as the Catholic and Orthodox Churches are concerned, there was not any premeditated action by which they decided to be divided. Rather, they found themselves separated, alienated, little by little, almost without them realising it.

Events from the distant past, like the Crusades, along with various movements of the Western World against the East still have a negative influence in the contemporary attitudes of many people and poison the relations between Catholic and Orthodox. In Greece many falsely identify the Catholic Church with the Vatican City State and give Catholics the inaccurate name of *Frangos* (French). The Catholic Church was never limited to particular nations precisely because it is catholic, that is, universal. The Greek Catholic remains both Greek and Catholic at the same time and this should be actively acknowledged by all our Orthodox brothers.

Intolerance and fanaticism are obvious indications that we are not authentic disciples of Christ who preached brotherhood and love. Catholics and Orthodox in Greece live together but do not know each other. Often our contacts are based on anachronisms, prejudice and ignorance. We Catholics must better understand our own faith so that we may be in a position to explain with simplicity, to our Orthodox brothers who we are and what we believe. We must also come to know the riches of the Orthodox Church in order to appreciate it more and love it.

Thus if Christians were once alienated without them realising it, the day will surely come when they will look at each other eye to eye and will find themselves to be brothers and sisters again.

Peter Mitchell

A SYRIAC PILGRIMAGE AT ST MILDRED'S ABBEY

Here at St Mildred's Abbey, Minster in Thanet, on 18 June, we were gearing up for a celebration, this time for the 'Syriac Pilgrimage in honour of Saints Theodore and Mildred'. The idea for this event was born after our last East-West meeting which made us aware of the increasing number of Christians from the family of the Syriac Churches in Britain, especially following the Iraq War. Deacon Aziz Nour of the Syrian Orthodox Church helped us to make contacts with Fr Safaa Habash of the Syrian Catholic Church and Fr Habib Jajou of the Chaldean Catholic Church and their mostly London-based congregations. Sr Benedict worked with a planning team and many volunteers to organise what turned out to be an extraordinary and unforgettable day!

Welcome banners were stretched out in the drive and in the grounds, a 'Kids zone' prepared with games, etc., tables and chairs placed at strategic points in the shade. The first arrivals were the children of the choir of St Ethelbert's School in Ramsgate who were going to sing for us under the direction of Mrs Elizabeth Pitt and Mrs Irene Walker. Then a huge double-decker coach from London arrived, heading a convoy of cars – there must have been about two hundred guests in all! Young and old; some carrying food hampers; others disembarking a great sound system; they streamed into the grounds where they were greeted by the sisters, our oblates and friends.

The pilgrims were introduced to our local saints, St Mildred of Minster and her older contemporary St Theodore, a Greek (or possibly even Syriac) monk from Tarsus, who was sent by the Pope to be archbishop of Canterbury in the late 7th century. Together we celebrated Midday Prayer which culminated in the veneration of St Mildred's relic in which all participated enthusiastically. Then the choir gave a beautiful concert which was received with great applause!

A marvellous picnic of typically Iraqi dishes appeared as if by

magic and people spread out to enjoy the food and each others' company. The Margate-based church group, Pipeline, organised football for the young people on the lawn throughout the afternoon, and there was an opportunity to visit the Museum next-door to see the falconer fly his birds of prey. This was a great success with young and old. We are immensely grateful to all our friends who gave so generously of their time and expertise to add to the enjoyment of our guests!

In the early evening we gathered in the Chapel for Mass in the Syriac Catholic Rite, with readings, songs and prayers in Arabic, English and Aramaic, the language of Jesus. The celebration was full of vitality and fervour and very moving. Afterwards – instead of the planned return to London – there was a spontaneous move back into the garden for the singing of traditional songs and Iraqi-style dancing. The sisters were quickly pulled into the lines of dancers; the older people clapped and sang along with gusto while babies dozed off in push-chairs. It was good to see how much everyone felt at home with each other.

'Monasteries are used for entertainment by us as there aren't many opportunities for fun in Iraq,' said Fr Safaa. 'People travel to them in spring and summer to have picnics. I was thinking how much people back home would enjoy this place.' And Dr Aziz Nour commented, 'If you don't know about monasteries you aren't Iraqi. Even the Muslims go to the monasteries. They are places for retreat and enjoyment.' Another visitor summed up his experience by saying, 'There are three different Iraqi Churches here today (Chaldean and Syrian Catholic and Syrian Orthodox). It is very rare that they meet together like this – it is amazing. People need this; we are recreating normal Iraqi life.'

We feel so blessed to have been part of this experience, to be inspired by our Christian brothers and sisters from the East and to share together our faith and life. We pray that God may continue to bless and guide all of us as we go forward in hope and love.

Peter Mitchell

Living in Unity

Many years ago I lived across the road from a family who came from the West Indies. They attended one of the local Black led Pentecostal churches. The lady of the house, Lynette, worked in a nearby hospital. There she found an elderly, fellow countryman who was in a poor condition, health wise and very heavily sedated. She bravely took him home and managed to improve the drug regime so successfully that he was, in a limited way, able to communicate.

As he began to tell her about himself she realized that he was a Roman Catholic. This being the case she came across the road and asked for help in getting William to Mass on a regular basis. Although he could communicate very little, William's sparkling personality shone out. He never said 'Amen', when he received communion but always 'that's better'. Once, as we drove towards some traffic lights he remarked 'Yellow means go faster!'

After Mass I found great pleasure in taking his arm and guiding him back to the front door. One morning as we returned, one of the young adults, whom I had not seen for some time, opened the door. Naturally we took some time exchanging greetings and catching up on the news. Once we had finished I proceeded to guide William in but he was rooted to the spot, smiling and refusing to budge! Quickly I realized that I had not given him his usual kiss on the cheek and that he was not prepared to depart without it!

William continued to come to Mass but gradually grew weaker and unsteady on his feet with the passing of time.

My Parish Priest had asked me to become a Minister of Holy Communion to which I agreed. However, the night before the training day, I had dreadful cold feet about it, asking questions like, 'Am I really good enough for this?' 'Is this what God really wants for me?' Never the less I went to the training day.

The next day Lynette rang and said that William would not be able to come to Mass today, as he was not well. I knew she was saying that William would never go to Mass again. At that moment I realized that God had a role for me as a Minister of the Eucharist.

I walked back from Mass in the sunshine feeling quite overwhelmed by the treasure that I carried. When I arrived at the door of his room William's face seemed illuminated from within, so great was his pleasure in seeing what I had brought. Each time I went I conducted the small service, which is recommended, but it was more for me than for him as Our Lord was always so powerfully present in William. Once he managed to say 'I wait for you all week'. Lynette sometimes reads the Gospel, a fitting contribution from her.

I had explained to Lynette that, as a Roman Catholic, William should receive the Sacrament of the Sick. One day William was taken into hospital where I visited and took Holy Communion. The time came when I needed to say to a very distressed Lynette that William needed to be anointed with the Sacrament. My Parish Priest telephoned the Chaplain and arranged for me to meet with him at the hospital. I was there when William was anointed, ready for his journey into the next life. Later that evening, Lynette knocked on my door and asked me to take her to the hospital, as a nurse had phoned and asked her to come.

The doctor met us in a quiet room and explained that William had died. Lynette greatly needed comfort and support, which I was able to give.

William had been curled up tight in the bed earlier in the day but when we went to see him he was stretched out and completely relaxed; he looked at peace. He had waited for the Sacramental anointing and then left, secure in the knowledge he was meeting with Jesus. I was able to give him a last kiss goodbye.

Joy Peck. SW area

Good Wishes; and More Small Steps!

Sister Jo Harvey is one of the *Handmaids of the Sacred Heart* who live opposite the Church. We are so lucky to have them in the Parish; they are stalwart workers. Sister Jo was the Chair of *Churches Together in Beckenham* for two years until recently, and a good one too! She manages to visit at least one of the *Churches Together in Beckenham* each month and is well-known in the district.

Recently she visited Elmers End Free Church and conducted their morning service as they have no minister at present. Cleverly, she managed to weave the service round the four mysteries of the Rosary. Pity I missed it, but I have been there three times lately.

After her visit Sister Jo wrote the piece below for our own Newsletter, and as she says, ‘Little events like this keep Our Lord’s prayer “Make them one!” to the fore’, and these ‘small steps are vital steps towards Unity’. Here is what she wrote:

‘Good Wishes’ from the Southern Moderator of the United Reform Church. After Mass last Sunday I went to join in the worship at Elmers End Free Church: at present they are in an interregnum, that is, their former minister moved to another parish and they are considering whom they will ask to come to their church. The Moderator, Nigel Uden, led the service.

As I was leaving, I said I was visiting from St Edmund’s. At the end of our few minutes chat, Nigel asked me to convey his good wishes to all the clergy and people at St Edmund’s. Little events like this keep Our Lord’s prayer to the fore!

True Sister Jo! And thank you for cheering us up with those ‘good wishes’. But to have the freedom to chose your own minister!?

And we Roman Catholics are now allowed to visit non-Catholic churches! Such freedom! How things have changed in the past forty years! Thank God for the Second Vatican Council!

Terry Davies, St Edmund’s, Beckenham

A Service to Ask for The Gift of Unity in Christ *Based on the teachings of Saint John of the Cross*

The Catholic parish of Christ Church was host to the Christian Churches of Eltham as they gathered for *A Service to Ask for The Gift of Unity in Christ* on Sunday, 22 January 2006. The service was led by the Parish Priest, Fr Anthony Maggs of the Canons Regular of the Lateran. After welcoming the large congregation Fr Anthony presented the following reflection:

When we pray for the gift of unity it means that we are responding to God's invitation to love. That means learning how to respond to each other and to God more fully. John believed that everyone is called to love by the Spirit of God and when we respond God invites us into a dark night where we are stripped of our attachments and all those things which work against true unity in Christ. When we respond we are drawn closer to God and to each other.

Part of John's experience of the dark night was to be thrown into a tiny cell by his own brethren with little light and food. He was there for nine months! At the beginning of our time together I would like you to recall a time when you felt God's absence in your own life. Think of the struggle and the questions you asked, the torment you underwent. Now think of some of the big problems faced by the Church in our time. Have you been affected by any of them? Have they tried your faith? Have they affected the way you see your brothers and sisters in Christ?

After his escape from prison John tried to explain the purifying nature of his dark night.

A deeper enlightenment and a wider experience than mine is necessary to explain the dark night through which a soul Journeys towards the divine light of perfect union with God that is achieved, insofar as possible in this life, through love. The darkness and trials that fortunate souls ordinarily undergo on their way to the high state of perfection are so numerous that human science cannot understand them adequately. Nor does experience of them equip one to explain them. Those who suffer them will know what this experience is like, but they will find themselves unable to describe it.¹

The good news is that God does lead us out of the dark night towards union with Himself. The good news is that God will, with our cooperation, lead us out of the dark night of disunity towards reconciliation and new life. Listen to the images he uses in his poetry.

One dark night,
Fired with love's urgent longings
– Ah, the sheer grace! –
I went out unseen,
My house being now stilled

On that glad night,
In secret, for no one saw me,
Nor did I look at anything,
With no other light to guide
Than the one that burned in my heart:

This guided me
More surely than the light of noon
To where he waited for me
– him I knew so well –
In a place where no one appeared.

(The Ascent of Mount Carmel)²

Now let us see if we can apply some of that teaching to ourselves first of all and then to our search for unity.

John emphasizes that the dark night is not our doing, much less a form of punishment. It is something along the lines of the wilderness experience that God's people experienced; a time in which God weans us from our attachments and false values. In the dark night God teaches us how to pray. At first we experience joy and delight in prayer and the things of God. Then the Spirit of God leads us deeper into the night and gradually takes away delight and prayer becomes dry and it is difficult to keep going. At this point we begin to learn that we have one source of help – God alone. Our loving is purified. God alone is sufficient. Does any of this resonate with your experience?

Have you known confusion, meaninglessness, felt alone?
Did you try to escape? How?
Did you learn something new about God?
As our churches opened up to others have you know confusion?
Where is it all going?
Are we going to lose something precious and good?
Do we feel it would be better to keep ourselves to ourselves?
It would be less disturbing, but is this what God wants?

In the night we have to begin to let God act, to move us and shape us, to guide the church. Can you remember times when you have wanted to take over your spirituality, to direct God's attention rather than let God transform your life, your church?

Let us now ask God to help us accept all the *necessary* changes in our life and in the life of the church.

The Service continued with a reading from Matthew 26:36-42 recalling Christ's experience of darkness in Gethsemane. A Hymn: *Breathe on me, breath of God* was followed by a reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor 2:1-10).

After a short homily the Bidding Prayers were offered by representatives of the various churches. The final hymn: *God Beyond all Names* was sung by a soloist and The Blessing given by the assembled Ministers.

Desmond Miller

* * * * *

There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. (Benedict XVI – From Mass of Inauguration)

1 *The Ascent of Mount Carmel, The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Washington D.C: ICS Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies., 1973, p.69.

2 Ibid.

The New Dean of Rochester

The Right Rev. Adrian Newman was appointed Dean of Rochester Cathedral in February 2005. As he was due to preach at St Mary's, Shortlands on 22 May Canon Jack Madden, Parish Priest of St Edmund's, and I took the opportunity to meet him there. The Vicar of St Mary's, Paul Miller, is a Canon of Rochester Cathedral

The Rochester diocese was set up in AD 604 and remained in unity with Rome until 1537 – 933 years – when its bishop, John Fisher, was put to death by order of the King. Since then it has been part of the Anglican Church, that is, for 467 years which happens to be exactly half the 933 years of Roman rule. I wonder how much closer our two churches will be in another 467 years? Eight years ago, Cardinal Ratzinger, when asked about Unity, was sanguine – he foresaw a continual fragmentation. My view too!

I am happy to record that on Sunday, 22 May, after the service we were fortunate to have a long and pleasant chat with Dean Adrian. He is about forty-five and described by those who work with him as 'very dishy!'. He is already making his mark on the Diocese and will go far.

On Sunday, 20 November, St Mary's celebrated their Golden Jubilee. The church was bombed during the last war, but has been beautifully rebuilt. I attended their ten-thirty Eucharist at which the Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, presided and preached.

When I became Parish Unity Contact in March 2001, my mission was to 'build better relations'. I decided the best way was to make my presence visible and obvious. So I began a perpetual pilgrimage round the fourteen *Churches Together in Beckenham*. I started the eleventh circuit in January 2006. The pilgrimage has brought me great joy and many friendships. So I shall press on, with God's grace, until I drop.

Terry Davies, St Edmund's, Beckenham.

*Lord God,
We thank you
For calling us into the company
Of those who trust in Christ
And seek to obey His will.
May your Spirit guide and strengthen us
In mission and service to your world;
For we are strangers no longer
But pilgrims together
On the way to your Kingdom.
Amen.*

