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UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO
50th Anniversary of
Decree on Ecumenism

IN THIS ISSUE

Archbishop Justin Welby's Visit to Rome

The Ordinariate - Pope Benedicts Vision

Easter Day at Loddon Churches

Christmas - An Ecumenical Opportunity

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**Together in Christ, Diocesan Bulletin for Christian Unity,
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CONTENTS

Page

- 02** Visit to Rome of Archbishop Justin Welby
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
- 07 Pope Benedict's Vision – The Ordinariate
Fr Scott Anderson
- 11 English ARC Meeting, Mirfield 2013
Michael Baldry
- 14 Easter Day at Loddon Churches
Brian Cox
- 16 Christmas: An Ecumenical Opportunity
Robin Orton
- 20 Bexley Foodbank
Michael Baldry

EDITORIAL

As we step into 2014 there is change in the air. A new Archbishop of Canterbury had been expected last year so the appointment of Justin Welby was no surprise. However, when Benedict XVI decided to retire and Pope Francis was elected, something new and dramatic was taking place. Here we reproduce the text of their first meeting. It was an opportunity to put aside some of the issues of the past and cooperate with the will of Christ for His Church.

Fr Scott Anderson spoke to some members of the Southwark Unity Commission about the path he was travelling to find Communion with the Catholic Church within the Ordinariate.

English ARC met at Mirfield last March. We carry a summary on the progress they are making to support ARCIC and lead our communities to embrace the Ecumenical message.

The Loddon churches have shown how a Receptive Ecumenism helped to make their Easter extra special.

‘Feeding the hungry’ is back on the Church agenda as more families struggle to meet their bills and homelessness increases and we hear how Christmas really can bring us together.

This year marks 50 years since the Decree on Ecumenism was signed. We hope that it will be marked and remembered as the catalyst for change across all our churches.

Michael

VISIT TO ROME OF HIS GRACE JUSTIN WELBY ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

Let us travel the path towards unity, fraternally united in charity.

This was Pope Francis' invitation to His Grace Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of the Anglican Communion, on Friday morning, 14 June 2013. Official addresses followed the private audience in the Library and gifts were exchanged in the presence of the delegation accompanying Archbishop Welby and the delegation of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Pontiff offered the Archbishop an etching of St Peter's Square made in 1775, and the Archbishop gave him an engraving with his episcopal motto. The exchange of gifts was followed by a moment of prayer in the Redemptoris Mater Chapel. The Anglican delegation comprised Archbishop David Moxon, Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome and Canon Jonathan Goodall, the Archbishop's personal assistant. The Catholic delegation included Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Council, Monsignor Mark Langham of the same Dicastery and Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster.

We publish here below the English text of the Pope's Address, which was given in Italian followed by Archbishop Welby's discourse.

THE ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Your Grace, Dear Friends,

On the happy occasion of our first meeting, I make my own the words of Pope Paul VI, when he addressed Archbishop Michael Ramsey during his historic visit in 1966:

Your steps have not brought you to a foreign dwelling ... we are pleased to open the doors to you, and with the doors, our heart, pleased and honoured as we are ... to welcome you 'not as a guest or a stranger, but as a fellow citizen of the Saints and the Family of God'

I know that during Your Grace's installation in Canterbury Cathedral you remembered in prayer the new Bishop of Rome. I am deeply grateful to you – and since we began our respective ministries within days of each other, I think we will always have a particular reason to support one another in prayer.

The history of relations between the Church of England and the Catholic Church is long and complex, and not without pain. Recent decades, however, have been marked by a journey of rapprochement and fraternity, and for this we give heartfelt thanks to God. This journey has been brought about both via theological dialogue, through the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, and via the growth of cordial relations at every level through shared daily lives in a spirit of profound mutual respect and sincere cooperation. In this regard, I am very pleased to welcome alongside you Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster. These firm bonds of friendship have enabled us to remain on course even when difficulties have arisen in our theological dialogue that were greater than we could have foreseen at the start of our journey.

I am grateful, too, for the sincere efforts the Church of England has made to understand the reasons that led my Predecessor, Benedict XVI, to provide a canonical structure able to respond to the wishes of those groups of Anglicans who have asked to be received collectively into the Catholic Church: I am sure this will enable the spiritual, liturgical and pastoral traditions that form the Anglican patrimony to be better known and appreciated in the Catholic world.

Today's meeting, my dear brother, is an opportunity to remind ourselves that the search for unity among Christians is prompted not by practical considerations, but by the will of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who made us his brothers and sisters, children of the One Father. Hence the prayer that we make today is of fundamental importance.

This prayer gives a fresh impulse to our daily efforts to grow towards unity, which are concretely expressed in our cooperation in

various areas of daily life. Particularly important among these is our witness to the reference to God and the promotion of Christian values in a world that seems at times to call into question some of the foundations of society, such as respect for the sacredness of human life or the importance of the institution of the family built on marriage, a value that you yourself have had occasion to recall recently.

Then there is the effort to achieve greater social justice, to build an economic system that is at the service of man and promotes the common good. Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor, so that they are not abandoned to the laws of an economy that seems at times to treat people as mere consumers.

I know that Your Grace is especially sensitive to all these questions, in which we share many ideas, and I am also aware of your commitment to foster reconciliation and resolution of conflicts between nations. In this regard, together with Archbishop Nichols, you have urged the authorities to find a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict such as would guarantee the security of the entire population, including the minorities, not least among whom are the ancient local Christian communities. As you yourself have observed, we Christians bring peace and grace as a treasure to be offered to the world, but these gifts can bear fruit only when Christians live and work together in harmony. This makes it easier to contribute to building relations of respect and peaceful coexistence with those who belong to other religious traditions, and with non-believers.

The unity we so earnestly long for is a gift that comes from above and it is rooted in our communion of love with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As Christ himself promised, “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). My dear brother, let us travel the path towards unity, fraternally united in charity, and with Jesus Christ, our elder Brother, as our constant point of reference. In our worship of Jesus Christ we will find the founda-

tion and *raison d'être* of our journey. May the merciful Father hear and grant the prayers that we make to him together. Let us place all our hope in him who “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20).

L'Osservatore Romano, 19 June 2013

DISCOURSE OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

Apostolic Palace, Vatican City, 14 June 2013

Your Holiness, Dear Friends,

I am full of love and gratitude to be here. In the last few days we have been remembering the death of Blessed Pope John XXIII in the midst of the Second Vatican Council. At the Requiem said at Lambeth Palace fifty years ago this weekend by Archbishop Michael Ramsey, my much-loved predecessor said of him:

Pope John has shown us again the power of being, by being a man who touches human hearts with charity. So there has come to many a new longing for the unity of all Christians, and a new knowledge that however long the road may be, charity already makes all the difference to it.

Having for many years found inspiration in the great corpus of Catholic social teaching, and worked on its implications with Catholic groups; having spent retreats in new orders of the Church in France, and being accompanied by the Prior of another new order; I do indeed feel that I am (in the words of Pope Paul VI to Archbishop Michael) coming to a place where I can feel myself at home.

Your Holiness, we are called by the Holy Spirit of God, through our fraternal love, to continue the work that has been the precious gift to popes and archbishops of Canterbury for these past fifty years, and of which this famous ring is the enduring token. I pray that the nearness of our two inaugurations may serve the reconciliation of the world and the Church.

As you have stressed, we must promote the fruits of our dialogue; and, with our fellow bishops, we must give expression to our unity in faith through prayer and evangelisation. It is only as the world sees

Christians growing visibly in unity that it will accept through us the divine message of peace and reconciliation.

However, the journey is testing and we cannot be unaware that differences exist about how we bring the Christian faith to bear on the challenges thrown up by modern society. But our ‘goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey’ (Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi* 1), and we can trust in the prayer of Christ, ‘*ut omnes unum sint*’ (Jn 17.21). A firm foundation of friendship will enable us to be hopeful in speaking to one another about those differences, to bear one another’s burdens, and to be open to sharing the discernment of a way forward that is faithful to the mind of Christ pressed upon us as disciples.

That way forward must reflect the self-giving love of Christ, our bearing of his Cross, and our dying to ourselves so as to live with Christ, which will show itself in hospitality and love for the poor. We must love those who seek to oppose us, and love above all those tossed aside – even whole nations – by the present crises around the world. Also, even as we speak, our brothers and sisters in Christ suffer terribly from violence, oppression and war, from bad government and unjust economic systems. If we are not their advocates in the name of Christ, who will be?

Your Holiness, dear brother, I assure you of the love, respect and prayer of the bishops, clergy and people of the Anglican Communion.

L’Osservatore Romano, 19 June 2013

Source Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
Information Service Bulletin 141

POPE BENEDICT'S VISION

I'm very grateful for the opportunity to speak to you on the subject of the *Ordinariate* as Pope Benedict XVI's vision for unity. I myself was an Anglican priest for thirty-six years, until I resigned from the parish of St Mary's, Lewisham at the end of 2011. I was received into the Catholic Church on 2 February 2012, and spent the rest of the year discerning what God wanted of me. In December I submitted a request to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) for ordination which was accepted, and I was ordained deacon in July. God willing, I shall be ordained priest by the Archbishop of Southwark on 19 October. I assist at the Ordinariate Church in this diocese, which is 'The Most Precious Blood' in The Borough, Southwark.

The Oxford Movement and reunion

In 1833 a remarkable Movement began in the Church of England: variously named the Oxford Movement or the Catholic Revival, and its followers called the Tractarians (after their propensity to write Tracts about controversial subjects). This Movement identified the heart of the Church of England not with 16th century Protestantism and its authority, not with the British Parliament, but with the undivided Church of the first millennium. It is then hardly surprising that the re-union of divided Christendom was on its agenda from the beginning.

The condemnation of Anglican Orders by Pope Leo XIII in 1896 was seen by many as a rebuff to the notion of corporate re-union in favour of individual submission. Nevertheless, between 1921 and 1927 the Malines Conversations examined informally the possibility of the corporate re-union of the Church of England with the Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, Cardinal Bourne of Westminster resented discussions which appeared to go behind his back, being held between a Belgian Archbishop (Cardinal Mercier) and an English nobleman (Lord Halifax). But if Mercier got a slanted understanding of the Church of England from the Anglo-Catholic Halifax, Bourne and the

English hierarchy were unwilling to acknowledge that there were a substantial number of Anglicans who held a Catholic understanding of the Church and engaged in a sacramental and devotional life remarkably like their own. It is this feature of Anglican life which was, decades later to intrigue and impress Pope Benedict.

In 1948 the World Council of Churches was formed as “a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures... .” The Catholic Church is not a member – though closely associated – and reflects its understanding of itself as expressed by the Council Fathers at Vatican II in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* that the Church of Christ, “constituted and organised in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.”

The 1960’s represent both the high point and the beginning of the decline of Anglo-Catholic influence in the Church of England. As a result of Archbishop Michael Ramsey’s visit to Pope Paul VI, and the Pope’s words about the ‘beloved sister’, the desire and hope for corporate re-union was strengthened among Anglo-Catholics. Indeed, it appeared to have taken hold of the Church of England. But looking back we can see that the hope for re-union was not quite the same as the desire for ‘unity’ being expressed by many Anglicans.

The ARCIC discussions between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion began in 1970 and issued Agreed Statements on such controversial subjects as the eucharist, ordination and authority. Nonetheless, the difficulty of the unresolved ecclesiology of the Anglican Communion was soon threatening to undermine the process. Early on Anglican evangelicals publicly stated that the Agreed Statements were not agreeable to them. On the liberal wing, moves to tolerate divorce and re-marriage, to ordain women to the priesthood and episcopate, and to treat homosexual friendship as marriage, continued the tensions. In 2003, Pope John Paul II suspended official talks between the Catholic Church and the Anglican

Communion, owing to the consecration of Gene Robinson as a bishop in the Episcopal Church in the United States. Moreover, the ordination of women has repeatedly been questioned as harmful to Christian unity. Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, said: The ordination of women to the episcopate “signified a breaking away from apostolic tradition and a further obstacle for reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the Church of England.”

The liberal moves in the Church of England were also viewed with dismay by the Anglo Catholics. In 1994 around 400 priests and several thousand lay people had been received – among them a number of married priests who were dispensed to entitle them to be ordained as Catholic priests. The loss of such a substantial number seriously weakened the Anglo Catholic witness in the Church of England and the liberal agenda proceeded at rapid pace. The evangelicals were growing in strength, influenced by new movements in America. Although they had voted for women to be ordained, their leadership has remained resolutely male.

In this situation a number of leading Anglicans approached Pope Benedict through the CDF. As I remarked earlier, he is reported to *have* been moved by the discovery of people who were trying to live by the Catholic life, although outside the Communion of Peter. He proposed a new model of unity by which Anglicans might enter into full communion, lay people coming with their clergy (who would normally then be ordained as Catholic priests) united in their acceptance of the primacy of Peter and in faith, as represented by the Catechism, but being able to retain elements of Anglican worship, pastoral practise and spirituality. Thus the world learnt about the new Ordinariates to be set up in the UK, in America and Australia.

From the first announcement in 2009 I was convinced that here was a movement of the Holy Spirit restoring the lost unity of the Church *and* here was something I must respond to personally. I was saddened by how few Anglicans saw the Pope’s appeal as for them

and how quickly *we* were being dismissed as “disaffected Anglicans” struggling *against* the legitimate aspirations of women, and being used as a force for reaction as Pope Benedict sought to put the clock back! I have to tell you that a contemporary of mine (now a Catholic priest) once described me as a ‘Vatican II fundamentalist’. Not all us by any means go misty eyed at the sight of a lace alb and a biretta.

It’s still early days for working out just what is the Anglican Patrimony which we bring into the Church. Many Roman Catholics are surprised to find former Anglicans who are deeply familiar with the Mass and having been going to confession all their lives. Some of the existing congregation at our Church of The Most Precious Blood *are* enthusiastic about what we have brought with us while we are still puzzling about what is different.

I am still surprised to find myself where I am. In the 1950’s many of us young Anglicans expected re-union by the Millennium. I am disappointed that the Church of England has gone for the sort of unity we now see in Wales where a concelebrated Communion Service was held with Anglicans, Methodists, URC and some Baptists, but with no concept of visible unity in faith and teaching that I can see. And above all it does not include the Catholic Church – the rock from which we were hewn. The Ordinariate in this country is small and fragile. It looks for integration into the Catholic Church, but not absorption. It has received so much, but also believes that it has something to offer. Above all, it wants to play its part in the fundamental mission of the Church, to bring Christ to the people of this country, so that they may believe and enter into salvation.

Fr Scott Anderson
The Ordinariate of
Our Lady of Walsingham

ENGLISH ARC MEETING AT MIRFIELD 2013

On 15-16 March, English Anglican – Roman Catholic Conversations met at the Anglican monastic Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield which is also home to a theological college training ordinands for the diaconate and priesthood. If there was a thread that ran through our deliberations it might be ‘making connections’.

We valued immensely the kind hospitality of the Community and the opportunity to join them for their worship. Father George Guiver gave us a tour of the Church re-ordered with sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of 21st century worship. We were also given insight into the life and work of Walter Frere, a Mirfield Father, a keen ecumenist and liturgist. We learnt of his commitment to the Liturgical Movement, and particularly of his involvement in the revision of the 1928 of the Book of Common Prayer as well as his work in developing the liturgical life of the community. We reflected on how the Church might be re-introduced to the deep wellsprings of spirituality which the Religious Life has enshrined: a key question for both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church and a further point of connection.

The International Anglican – Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM)

We welcomed Bishop David Hamid, Anglican Co-Chair of IARCCUM who shared with us the current work of the Commission in seeking to develop *practical* ways to promote the ecumenical agreements between our two Churches through the work of ARCIC. This included forging better relationships between ARCIC and the regional ARCs and establishing fresh dialogues where none exist – a point of view we shared wholeheartedly. IARCCUM also plan to gather together and re-present some of the earlier ARCIC work to help it to be better owned and received – another example of making better connections. We explored whether we are equipping ordinands in both our Churches to understand the significance and achievement of over forty years of ecumenical dialogue so they can further this work.

New Evangelisation

A consistent thread in our work over these two days was how both our Churches might think and work together on the New Evangelisation to make better connections in 21st century society. We were inspired to hear how much time the Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops had given to this, and Archbishop Bernard Longley, speaking from first-hand experience of participating in the Synod, introduced the 58 Propositions. Whilst we noted how language is sometimes used differently in each of our Churches, we recognised the degree of common ground in the challenges we face.

There was lively discussion which identified several questions for further thought such as:

- Is our society as secularized as we sometimes think?
- Fresh Expressions of Church are changing the landscape in the Church of England? Are there new ecclesiological expressions in the Roman Catholic Church?
- What was the role of the new ecclesial movements and the consecrated religious life in Evangelisation?
- Are there opportunities for believers and non-believers to dialogue *together* about key concerns?
- Is the church as an Institution sending out “bad vibes” and, if so, how might this be addressed?
- In Evangelisation how can we honestly recognise the pressure and busyness of people’s lives?

The New Evangelisation will be the main theme for the joint meeting of Church of England and Roman Catholic Bishops in Lambeth in November 2013. Members of English ARC have been invited to a small part of this meeting. We anticipate that this will give a fresh urgency to exploring what we should do together and what place the Bishops might wish English ARC to have in further developments.

English ARC projects

As well as Evangelisation we also discussed some of our other our on-going projects:

Joint Witness in Public Life

The Chairs shared initial plans for a Joint Witness event with parliamentarians including an ecumenical study day to resource and support MPs and Peers in their work. We discussed whether an annual gathering with opportunities to relate theological thinking to matters in public life would be welcomed. It is encouraging that there is considerable interest in these initiatives ecumenically from staff with portfolios relating to public affairs.

Ecumenical formation

We discussed a proposed pamphlet on *Praying for Unity* for distribution in our Churches. We expect to launch this at the joint Bishops' meeting in November. Work is progressing on a series of other pamphlets including one which seeks to address some of the common areas of misunderstanding between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, possibly for production in digital format on YouTube.

Spiritual Ecumenism

We revisited the question we have often asked: Can there ever be real shared witness without shared prayer? This will be a particular theme at our next meeting.

We also had conversations about the pattern of our meetings, how best to use our time together, how to make better connections with other ARCs and how to make the most creative use of digital technology to promote ecumenical engagement more effectively.

This was the meeting at which we said goodbye to Colin Podmore, Director of the Central Secretariat and Clark to General Synod, wishing him well for his future role. He has contributed immeasurably to ecumenical work and to English ARC, over 25 years. He will be much missed.

EASTER DAY AT LODDON CHURCHES

During the winter the United Anglican/Methodist Congregation of the Church, worships on Sundays in the well-heated Methodist St John's Church.

Over the same period the Roman Catholic Mass is held on Saturdays in St John's Church. Exceptions are at Christmas, with a Midnight Communion service in Holy Trinity Church and the Easter Sunday service in Holy Trinity Church.

Following an inspection and testing of the electrical installation in Holy Trinity Church, Loddon, the heating system of tubular pew heaters was condemned as non-compliant, (a proposed replacement system is currently with the DAC)

But

Infra-red heaters were hired for Christmas in Holy Trinity Church, where several events took place over the period so that a restriction of only weekly hire was not considered a funding problem.

But

This Easter was very cold and Holy Trinity was very, very cold. We would have to hire infra-red heaters for a week although they were only required for one day, whilst, at the same time there was a well heated St John's Church.

But

The Roman Catholics were having their service in St John's Church on Easter Day, it was unreasonable to expect them to re-arrange at such a late stage.

Consequently

There was much to and fro between the Churchwarden (Brian Cox), and the Anglican Priest (the Revd Ros Hoffmann) and then with the Roman Catholic Parish Priest, the Revd Mark Hackeson, whilst at the same time keeping the Methodist Minister, the Revd Robert Soanes

informed! And Father Mark said: ‘Why can’t we worship together up to and including the Baptismal Vows, separate for the Eucharist, and then come together again to conclude the service?’

And so we did

In consultation with the Revd Ros, Fr Mark produced a beautiful, comprehensive Service Sheet and on Easter Day St John’s Church was packed with people clutching their Service Sheet in one hand and a candle in the other as, starting at the rear of the Church the Revd Ros and Fr Mark passed through the congregation following the Paschal Candle. And so the Service continued, in the customary fashion with hymns, the collect, readings, the Gospel, and a homily, or sermon, from the Revd Ros.

Then, with candles lit from the Paschal candle, we renewed our baptismal promises, concluding with liberal sprinkling from our Anglican Ordinand, Jill Haylock, and thence to the Sign of Peace, with many a tear of joy as neighbour embraced neighbour.

After that, we had regretfully to separate, following the Revd Ros into the adjoining hall, the ‘Lecture Room’, whilst Fr Mark sternly told his flock; ‘Stay where you are, they will be coming back!’

And so we celebrated and received our Easter Communion. After that we came together again for a final blessing delivered jointly by our priests and concluding with a full hearted rendering of *Thine be the glory!*

As we all socialised afterwards over coffee, the constant cry was ‘wasn’t it wonderful’.

Brian Cox

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CHRISTMAS – AN ECUMENICAL OPPORTUNITY?

There are certain times of the year when local ‘Churches Together’ or similar groups of churches traditionally do things together: a joint service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, or at Pentecost, or a ‘Walk of Witness’ on Good Friday. But what about Christmas?

All the mainstream denominations have a common theological understanding of the Incarnation, and therefore of the significance of Christmas. And Christmas is the time of the year when Christianity and its beliefs and celebrations are more in the public eye than any other. Shouldn’t we be looking to opportunities at this time of demonstrating to a sceptical public that, despite our different denominational traditions, we really are ‘together in Christ’?

Against that background, I would like to mention two things which we in Churches Together in Sydenham and Forest Hill (CTSFFH) do at Christmas and which may be of interest to others involved in local ecumenism. The first is our annual Christmas Day lunch.

For at least thirty years a traditional Christmas dinner (turkey plus all the trimmings, together with musical entertainment of various sorts and Bingo) has been provided free for up to eighty local people who would not otherwise have a festive meal on Christmas Day, because they are on their own and/or are frail or disabled. Voluntary Care Lewisham, which was founded by CTSFFH some years ago and now operates as an independent charity, collects names of people who wish to attend, organises volunteer transport, and provides a small gift for everyone who attends.

A number of different churches in the area have taken the lead in organizing the lunch. In 2013 Jay Murphy of the Catholic Church of Our Lady and St Philip Neri in Sydenham was in the hot seat, although St George’s, Perry Hill (Church of England) generously made their modern and well-equipped premises available for the event (as they

have for several years now). It was, yet again, a great success. Volunteers from a number of other churches helped with the preparations and on the day, and I gather that they too enjoyed themselves immensely.

Finance has in the past come from various sources, including donations by a local supermarket. This year St George's organized carol singing to raise funds, and also, for the first time CTSFH made a contribution of £250; we envisage this happening again next year.



A more recent initiative has been the CTSFH Christmas Badge. For the last two Christmases we have commissioned a 2¼ inch enamelled lapel badge with an eye-catching design and a brief message – see illustrations. These were designed for us by 'Bright Sparks', the graphic design team at St George's, Perry Hill. Member churches distribute them to their congregations in early December and encourage people to wear them as a Christian witness during the run-up to Christmas, for example, when they are shopping or at parties. The badges cost the churches 50p each, and they seem to have become very popular.

What other opportunities are there for ecumenical activity at Christmas? What about joint services? Obviously individual churches will have their own services (in many cases eucharistic) on Christmas

Day or at midnight on Christmas Eve. But there are usually plenty of non-eucharistic services in the run up to Christmas to which it ought to be possible for Christians of different traditions to take part in.

In particular, there are carol services. I believe that the format of such services is similar in all denominations; their structure of carol, hymns and readings is based on the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols devised in the late nineteenth century by the Anglican Bishop Benson of Truro, and later made famous worldwide through its use at King's College, Cambridge. Don't such services present us with be a good opportunity for 'not doing separately what we can do together'?

For many years my own parish, the Church of the Resurrection of Our Lord in Sydenham (Kirkdale), has taken it in turns with our neighbours the Grove Centre Church (Baptist/URC) to host a Christmas carol service. But if I want to support any other church's carol service, I have found on a number of occasions that it clashes with our own.

Someone in my own parish suggested to me that in principle it ought to be possible for more churches in our area to get together to organize a single, joint, carol service in a particular area, rather than each church 'doing its own thing.' We haven't discussed this in our CTSFH 'enabling group', but I must say it did seem to me to be worth thinking further about.

A big joint service, if it was well publicized, could attract a large congregation and be a powerful ecumenical witness. And it would enable individual churches to 'showcase' their musical or other liturgical resources in front of more people than they might attract to a service run just by themselves.

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On the other hand, organizing such a service in such a way as to ensure that everyone’s traditions were properly reflected could be quite a challenging task. And I suspect that in any case, many churches regard their Christmas services as a good way of encouraging people who are nominal or occasional members of their own congregations (or with no church connections at all) to come to church. So they might see a carol service as an important evangelistic opportunity for their own church which they could be unwilling to see ‘diluted’ by making it into an ecumenical occasion. This might be an issue in particular for churches with a high profile in the local community and for those with an active and well-developed musical tradition.

It would be interesting to hear the views of other readers of *Together in Christ* about this. It may be that you have experiences of Christians doing things together at Christmas time which you would be willing to share. If so, I’m sure the editor would be pleased to hear from you!

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Bexley Foodbank

In April 2012 one of the churches within Churches Together in Sidcup, Avery Hill Christian Fellowship, announced its intention to start a 'foodbank' in Bexley and asked for prayers, volunteers and donations. There was a perceived need for a scheme covering the area from Greenwich to Swanley. By its launch in October, Bexley Council had already sent them their first client. At that time The Trussell Trust had seeded 270 foodbanks. It was calculated that 6% of the local community were likely to need help at that time.

Initially, Schools started by donating their Harvest Festival produce (Lev 19:9-10) and Lark in the Park, (our local Summertime Christian Community event) had collected 400 kilos of donated dry goods. Each parcel being distributed would contain a booklet about the Christian Faith.

The Foodbank would signpost other outreach centres and agencies and donate three days' worth of food for each person in a family. As well as donations of food financial help was also needed (Matt 25:35). Different Sidcup churches offered help in different ways. By the January of 2013, one hundred families were being helped and extra space was needed for the donations.

It was in April 2013, Rev. Rob Stevens reported that eight churches had volunteers working at the foodbank and 340 people were receiving help as well as debt advice from another of our churches. With the Council fully supporting the project and a second church

providing storage, plans were going forward to open more centres in the borough.

To date, two more churches in Sidcup have become Distribution Centres with others in Erith, Footscray and Crayford planning to open this year. In the last thirteen months 1100 people have been supported and local supermarkets now offer 'Foodbank Days' where donations collected at their store are matched, doubling the efforts being made. The foodbank programme has very strict criteria requiring its recipients to be allocated emergency food vouchers to obtain a hand-out while other social agencies arrange a long-term strategy for them. If needed a further two vouchers might be allowed. To avoid 'playing-the-field' of gathering vouchers from different sources a 'single issuer' policy exists. Confidentiality is protected, but there is a complete audit, statistic and accounting record including the nature of each crisis.

The condition of need has changed from just thirty or forty years ago. Bexley is a suburb in South London and many of the residents are homeowners, used to decent wages in the City. The pressure now on them with static pay rates or redundancy, rising prices for utilities, travel costs and high mortgages has forced many families into debt. As payday loans and extreme interest rates bite they struggle to face the truth. The Church has become the main provider of Charity once again as Government austerity erodes the social and welfare budget. As our churches unite to combat this malaise we bring to the world a renewed message of love, joy and hope to those with nothing.

Michael Baldry

