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TOGETHER IN CHRIST



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EDITORIAL

We bring you a full and interesting issue with very much gratitude to all our contributors.

Congratulations to Churches Together in S. London on the "tremendous success" of Forum 2002, which Barbara Leigh has described so vividly.

Our faithful contributor, David Carter, has shared news of a wonderful week at Bose, with an important emphasis on the Holy Spirit, His presence and His gifts. Eileen Doyle is doing good work in distributing the prayer for Unity by Bishop Henderson. We hope others may follow her example! Do contact Eileen (or your Editor) if you want a copy.

Future ecumenical events are featured on pages 10 and 14. You would be welcome to attend them. Pentecost in Radnor Park was clearly an inspiring occasion. Thanks to Kitty Hart for her excellent report. Barbara Wood has described the ecumenical sadness (which many may have experienced), yet after her 'intense reflection 'and "the action of the Holy Spirit" there has been new hope and action. Thanks, Barbara. Robin Orton has written about hard times of ecumenism in Sydenham. Let us pray for change and deeper unity. We thank Robin for his sharing of the situation.

Joe Farrelly has kindly given us some of the history of ESBVM; it is doing great work in the spirit of prayer. New members would be most welcome.

Philip Eggleston has presented his "personal thoughts" and views on Christian Unity. It is good to hear from him.

It is by coming together with fellow Christians in a spirit of prayer, humility, and love, that we can come to deeper understanding, and perhaps, correction of mistaken ideas we may have. May the Holy Spirit guide us all.

FORUM 2002: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

This year's Forum for Churches Together in South London, held at St. John's Church, Waterloo, on June 22nd, was a tremendous success. The church itself provided a superb space and setting for the event which greatly benefited a change of format this time.

Bishop Colin Buchanan welcomed us all, and we in turn expressed our thanks to him for his hard work and his enthusiasm during his term of office, now completed, as Chair of Churches Together in South London, and welcomed Nigel Uden in his stead. Philip Jones (Vice Chair) also handed over to Christine Bainbridge. They have already given generously of their time and effort to the ecumenical process and can be assured of our prayers and good wishes for the future.

After the introductory prayers and reflections, we considered the crucial need for some changes in mind set and attitude in order to ensure a vibrant living ecumenism and deeper understanding of the rich diversity of our work in which we should rejoice. We were reminded that when we speak of what we do, we share and enrich, and understand each other better. We paused to consider the work of Borough Reps, Enabling Groups and LEPs in this context and enjoyed a few moments of silence together which provided us with an opportunity to centre our thoughts and come to stillness. (welcome for many after hectic journeys!)

At this time and throughout the day excellent music and singing was provided by the Focolare Group, ensuring responses of gentle sustained reflection and vigorously vocal sound, as appropriate. We all felt truly energised and joined in with great enthusiasm.

The day provided us with valuable opportunities to learn more about various 'Bodies in Association' with Churches Together in England, discovering how they can resource local unity as well as sharing what is good about ecumenical life in S. London.

A fine display of leaflets, brochures, visual aids and literature was arranged on tables and display boards very conveniently positioned around the church, whilst reps. from each group gave us information about the origins and ecumenical input of their work in today's world; our awareness increased as our knowledge deepened. The talks were very stimulating; and the sharing process invaluable.

Before the mid-morning break, we heard from Martyn Coe (Iona Community), Clare and Richard Jeffries (Inter –Church Families) and Mary Geraghty (L'Arche). Afterwards, Sally McAllister (Focolare), Stanley Jackson (Bible Society) and Barbara Butler (Christians Aware) expressed the ways in which their groups bear witness to Christ and help to make the unity process a living reality.

Lunch took the form of a splendid and varied buffet, appetisingly prepared for us by members of St. John's congregation. This provided an excellent opportunity to chat with established friends, make new ones, discuss the business of the day and ecumenism in general as we explored the contents of stalls and displays. Bags bulged with brochures as we began the afternoon session joyfully launched with communal song and prayer in a warm and friendly atmosphere.

After further welcome information from Stan Evans (College of Preachers), Wayne Morris (Church Action on Disability) and Paddy Lane (Retreat Association), we embarked on our "One for Sorrow Two for Joy" session. For this we broke up into small groups to exchange ideas, share ecumenical experiences and begin to select and discern how best to share and apply some of the riches of this day to make a difference in the future. This is a very positive and successful process. After so much attentive listening we had plenty to talk about and did so eagerly!

John Bradley (Churches Together in England) gave an inspiring overview and concluding talk, urging us to make careful

decisions about what we try to do - we can't do everything but should avoid complacency - and "Access the Grace in which we stand ", making the treasure we have available to others. "Ecumenical" means looking beyond the immediate locality to the wider vision, finding the Word behind the Word.

Although it is impossible to write at length here about each invited group, I am sure that everyone present would agree that the speakers and available literature helped us to become much more aware of the diverse, dynamic work currently undertaken by all of them. Some of us knew very little about certain aspects of their endeavours until the Forum, and are now fired with enthusiasm to "spread the Word". It is heartening to learn of the vibrant efforts for ecumenism being made in so many different areas and encourages us to recharge our own batteries!

A big 'Thank You to Malcolm Drummond (CTSL Ecumenical Officer) and others whose hard work helped to ensure that this year's Forum in June was such a success. It should definitely help us to fulfil our mission, to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the World and to seek a deepening of our communion with Christ and one another in the Church which is His body.

Barbara Leigh.

*'That they all may
be one'*



BOSE, THE SPIRIT AND ECUMENISM

My wife and I spent the week of 13-20 at the Ecumenical Community of Bose in Northern Italy. Bose lies just at the foothills of the Alps about an hour from both Milan and Turin. In the latter part of the week we were favoured with brilliantly sunny and warm weather and were able to enjoy the brilliant autumn colours and a clear view of the mountains.

Bose is an ecumenical monastery with about 70 members, both sisters and brothers. The majority are Roman Catholics but there are also a few Swiss Protestants. The Community was started by a young Italian layman, Enzo Bianchi, about thirty years ago. In some respects, it has much in common with the rather better known, and still mainly Protestant monastery at Taize in France. Like Taize, it attracts many young people. Like Taize, it is dedicated to work for Christian Unity, but, unlike Taize, it includes women as well as men.

We went to Bose because I had been invited to speak at an ecumenical consultation sponsored by the Suenens Foundation. The Foundation is named after the famous Belgian cardinal, Leon-Joseph Suenens (1904-96), a man who later in life underwent a charismatic experience and came to appreciate the very real virtues of Pentecostal Christianity, so different from the Catholicism in which he had grown up. The Foundation was established to commemorate his name and further the ecumenical work to which he was so dedicated in his lifetime.

The Foundation decided to sponsor a conference on the Holy Spirit and Ecumenism in the hope that understanding the work of the Spirit amongst our very diverse churches might help us towards closer fellowship and mutual learning from each other

Accordingly, a group of over twenty of us met, about half Roman Catholic and half from other churches. About half came from the USA and half from Europe with one South African participant. Each of us presented a paper, mine being on the

Holy Spirit and the way in which the World wide Christian families, Methodists, Anglicans, Catholics etc. should relate to each other.

Every day we worshipped with the Community. Their singing was magnificent and deeply devotional. I shall never forget the way in which they sang, in Italian, 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit', at the end bowing deeply, a gesture of awed love and reverence. We met several of the members of the Community, all very well informed about the Ecumenical Movement, including developments in England. We were well looked after and well fed. On the Wednesday, they took us into Turin to meet a community of Catholic priests who have a special ecumenical vocation.

My wife had decided that she would make the trip part of the 'Probationers' studies' that every Methodist minister in training has to do. She, and the wife of a Pentecostalist minister, attended all the sessions and she will have to write a report.

The sessions were very lively. Very sensibly, the organisers decided that we would not have full papers read. All the papers were circulated in advance and each speaker had about quarter of an hour to summarise his or hers. Then the questions began!

We were very privileged to have a visit, and a paper from Cardinal Kasper, the German Catholic bishop who is responsible for the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity. I had wondered what to expect- a rather heavy German academic? Not a bit of it! He was brilliant theologically but also very human with a big smile, a man who clearly enjoys life and enjoys his work. We were very pleased he should take our work so seriously as to want to be with us amidst a busy schedule, if only for a day.

One characteristic of ecumenical theologians is that they are enthusiastic, as who cannot be when he or she contemplates the riches of the Spirit's gifts to so many different churches and in

such enriching ways. Particularly keen is my friend, Sister Lorelei, an American nun of the Atonement Order (branch, in turn, of the Franciscans) who radiates enthusiasm and has a quite remarkable knowledge of all the ecumenical dialogues. It was wonderful to be with her again. In her own paper, Lorelei said of ecumenism, 'Our work is not merely a work to be done...but an ecumenical faith to be celebrated and an ecumenical life to be lived'.

It was good also to make new friends. I met several American theologians whose names were familiar to me from their writings, but whom I had not met. Ralph del Colle, a brilliant young Catholic layman, kept us on our toes with some searching, and sometimes almost unanswerable questions. Mel Robeck, a Pentecostalist, moved us deeply as he spoke of his ecumenical journey and the trouble he had had to face from some fellow Pentecostalists who felt he was being disloyal especially in his work with Roman Catholics. Father Boris, an Orthodox priest, spoke movingly of the prayer of Jesus, Abba, Father, in which, as Paul teaches in Romans, the Spirit enables us to share. As he spoke, I remembered Wesley's sermons on assurance and the Spirit of Adoption and realised how close we were in our understanding of these deep truths.

We all felt that the Holy Spirit particularly unites us. He works within but also across our traditions and He opens our eyes to the gifts and insights we can receive from others. Great emphasis was put upon the Spirit as the one who creates our communion and sustains it. The importance of understanding the Church as this communion was stressed. As the Pope has said, 'We must make the Church the home and school of communion'. Cardinal Kasper said that the hierarchy (in all churches) 'must listen to the other charismata (i.e. of lay people), pay heed to them and give them the freedom of space due to them'. It was stressed that the different gifts given to each church tradition can be a source of enrichment or division

depending upon how we receive and use them. We can exalt our gifts over against those of others or we can offer them humbly for sharing while being open to the complementary gifts of others. The Spirit is the Spirit of humility and we must follow in His way.

We are convinced that the Holy Spirit will eventually help us to transcend our differences.

This was a tremendous week and I am still trying to take it all in. I am writing this in the midst of going through all my notes on the conversations that followed the many papers and will need to think further about it all. It was a great privilege to be involved.

David Carter.

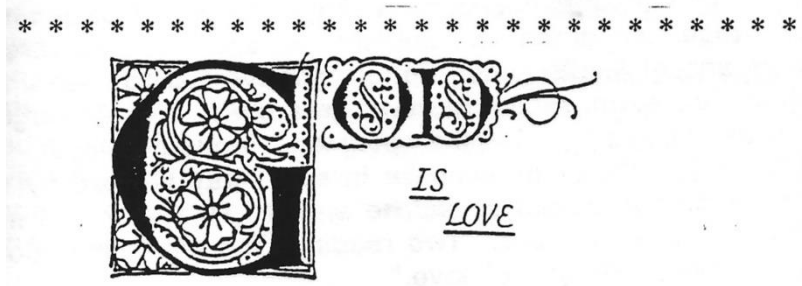
PRAYING FOR UNITY

The Unity Prayer written by Bishop Charles Henderson is to my mind a wonderful prayer. I have always felt the whole world should be praying it.

When I attended a meeting in Lewisham on Oct.10,2002, of Churches Together, armed with copies of the prayer, I introduced my idea, and explained that as our aims were the same - to promote Christian Unity, I asked "Why not say the Unity Prayer?". To my delight the response was positive. it was agreed that from now on, the Prayer would be said at every meeting.

On Sunday Oct. 27, I approached the President of the Legion of Mary, with the same request, and supplied copies of the Prayer. The suggestion was accepted. with pleasure.

Eileen Doyle (Unity Contact, Lewisham).



PENTECOST IN RADNOR PARK

While I was collecting for Christian Aid on Sunday afternoon I came across the Salvation Army van outside the United Reformed church. The manager of the Salvation Army shop was loading staging on to the van, and I supposed he was preparing for the evening service in the park.

I was right. By five o'clock there was a big stage set up in the middle of the park, beyond the bowling green, and near the place where the tennis courts used to be. Set in front were rows of blue stacking-chairs.

By 6.15, when I went across for the service, the Cheriton Baptist church's band was in action, leading the singing for a large congregation of people from a number of different churches and including several groups of children. I was given a service sheet entitled "Pentecost Celebration". It had been organised by Wes Hampton, the pastor of the Folkestone Methodist Church, and members of Churches Together in Folkestone. Then I was given the Christian Aid leaflet with three pictures on it: give, act, pray.

The service started with Wes welcoming us and calling us to worship and praise. The band - a keyboard, drums, a bass saxophone and an electric guitar, plus three singers who were at microphones struck up that rousing hymn: "Lord the light of

your love is shining", with the splendid chorus "Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory, " and after another prayer of praise we all joined in " Majesty, worship His majesty". In spite of being out in the open, we seemed to be making quite a good sound.

After this, Wes led us in a prayer for our shortcomings, our ingratitude, our greed, our selfishness, and our heedlessness of others and of God's gifts. "Father, forgive us for our sins, for letting You down, renew in us an awareness of your forgiveness" He went on to pray for the poor and underprivileged in the world: "May those in need be in some way blessed by You, in spite of their situation", and he ended: "We ask this in the precious name of Jesus." Two readings followed, and "Come on and celebrate His gift of love."

The Rev. Anton Miller read a passage from Amos 8:1-6, the message of which came across very forcefully: "they practise deceit with false balances". Then Adrian Wilson read a passage from St. John 7:37-39 where Jesus states:" Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me", and "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of flowing water", referring to the Spirit who was to come.

After a short prayer we sang: "Jesus is the name we honour which ends with the verse:

Jesus is the Father's splendour,
Jesus is the Father's joy.
He will return to reign in majesty,
and every eye at last shall see
That Jesus is our God."

Next came the address, given by Peter Graystone representing Christian Aid. He began by saying it was "fabulously appropriate" that, for the first time in his experience, Christian Aid Week had come to an end on the day of Pentecost. He said Christian Aid was all about giving good news to the poor, and in

this country 361,000 Christians had been out collecting envelopes this last week, for the love of Jesus. He said Christian Aid was a fantastic witness to the Lord; hardly anyone could have missed seeing or hearing the word 'Christian' at some point during the week.

Then he told us how he'd felt like a cup of tea during his drive down here from Dartford, and produced from his pocket the "throw-away" stuff everybody takes away from the Little Chef, where he had stopped. First it was a sachet of sugar; he tore it open and scattered it on the grass. He said he shouldn't really do that, but there was very little of it, and it was free, just "throw away stuff" anyway. Then he did the same thing with a packet of salt. 'Little Chef's' were everywhere, giving things away, just like Coca-Cola and the other big brand names, recognisable everywhere.

But when his little two-year old god-daughter had been taken ill with diarrhoea, sugar, salt and clean water had been what she needed to cure her! This is what they do not have in so many undeveloped countries. Every four seconds a child dies from diarrhoea for want of these three things. "And this", he said, "is what drives me on."

Then Peter Greystone spoke about the passage from Amos which we had heard. He said, "You can hear how angry he is." Amos was a farmer and knew what he was talking about. He saw how the traders could load the scales in their favour, and cheat the poor. "The basket of summer fruit" was a pun which worked in Hebrew as well: the summer fruit the Lord would mete out 'summary execution'. (In the Jerusalem Bible it is translated thus: "What do you see, Amos?" the Lord Yahweh asked. "A basket of ripe fruit", I said. Then Yahweh said: "My people Israel is ripe for destruction; I will no longer overlook its offences.") Nowadays big companies rule the roost; they can ride roughshod over the poorer, less vocal producers. Trade

should be just; poor countries should get the same deal as the rich ones, without trade embargoes and restrictive practices.

Peter referred us next to the three pictures of poor people engaged in production and trade, and showing Ama Kale, a farmer from Ghana, with her little daughter. The Development Action Association has given her money to grow maize, which she will ferment and make into kenki dough. The money was £2 to buy maize seed, and she now makes 60p.profit a day by selling rolls at 5p. each. Ama has six children to support. This is a way to make people self-sufficient.

Trade for Life (this year's Christian Aid theme) meant giving everyone a fair deal, so that poor countries can export goods. Big companies should abide by the rules set originally by world trade, whose aim should be to eliminate poverty. We should pray for this; our just God answers prayer •."Let justice swell like a river."

Peter Graystone ended by saying he collected for Christian Aid in his own street, where people knew him and trusted him.

After the address we sang "O God of burning, cleansing flame" an inspirational hymn by William Booth, with the recurring refrain: "Send the fire today! Send the fire today!", very appropriate for Pentecost. A collection was taken, "while the motley crew are assembling" as the Chairman, Wes Hampton said, as ministers from the churches represented by C.T.F. came up to the front. There were Major David Lewis and Major Marion Lewis from the Salvation Army, Tim Simpson from the Cheriton Baptist church, three Church of England ministers, John Tapper from Holy Trinity and St. George's, Anton Muller from St. George's, David Buckley from St. John's, Gareth Webber from the Harbour Community church, Graham Coombs from the South Kent Community church, and Graham Thomson (Folkestone Baptist church.)

There was a prayer of thanks, and commitment, "we are Your hands and feet", followed by prayers for those moving on: The Lewis' from the Salvation Army, Dawn Mather from the United Reformed church and Graham Thomson from the Baptist church. Then we had the blessing, and sang one of Charles Wesley's hymns "O Thou who camest from above".

We ended in his usual informal way: "I'm so glad you came; it wouldn't be the same without you."

Kitty Hart.

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MY ADVENTURE TOWARDS UNITY

When I attended my first meeting I was nervous but optimistic. Southwark South West Area Commission for Christian Unity sounded pretty grand even though I was merely a Parish Unity Contact. Still, as the Bishop told us, we were important the labourers in the vineyard.

My particular vineyard had been lying fallow for many years. We had made great strides in the early 1980's after the Pope's visit to England. His message of peace, unity and prayer had inspired a rolling 'prayers for peace' programme moving each month to a different church. Then there had been Lent groups, joint action for justice, ecumenical services of celebration and, the high point for many, a Palm Sunday procession complete with donkey and a Salvation Army band. Our little band of 'ecumaniacs' (as we later discovered one of the clergy had named us) felt we were getting somewhere. There was a ground swell of support and desire amongst the people to move ever closer together. We were pleased with ourselves.

When it suddenly came to a grinding halt those of us who had been at the forefront of the push for togetherness felt hurt and angry. Hours were spent discussing what had gone wrong and why. Our anger was directed principally at the clergy. Why were they so fearful, so inward looking, so jealous of their power in their little patch? We were not asking for anything radical. We just wanted to build relationships and share what we could, working on the basis that we should do nothing apart that we could do together.

For me this was a period of intense reflection, particularly when I discovered that I was also pretty angry with God. After all, it was His work we were doing. Why had He allowed everything we had built up to be dismantled by the very people - His men on the shop floor-who should be leading us into unity?

As I told God about my anger and bewilderment various things began to become clear to me. Most important was a new understanding about what doing God's work means.

Firstly, it means reminding myself at frequent intervals that it is not my work but God's. When I start becoming too emotionally involved with what I consider to be success or failure it is a sure sign that it is becoming my work rather than God's. God has different criteria for success or failure. That does not mean that I should not be totally committed, with a passionate desire to do all I can to further unity.

Commitment and passion for God's work is vital. But it does mean that I must acknowledge at all times that it is God who is in control, not me. It there are times when it seems that there is nothing that can be done except to pray, then this may be a sign, not of failure, but of God's desire to bring us back to centre on His will. I came to realise that much of my anger, frustration and disappointment arose from a feeling of powerlessness and an inability to control events myself, a feeling that also inhibited me from praying for the unity I thought I so passionately desired.

Secondly, I have to remember that progress is according to God's timetable. Experience tells me that God takes His time about the things that I am impatient about! Sometimes, however, when I look back I am given the grace to see that God's timing was, after all, perfect. He sees the big picture. I see only the small one. In periods of fallowness and frustration God is still moving so that when He decides it is time to get going again (from my perspective) He acts beyond my imaginings.

Thirdly, I have come to see that when we do God's work nothing we do is wasted. When things began to get going again in my area after the fallow years everything was already in place. The soil had been tilled and was fertile The seeds had been planted. Suddenly they began to grow, better than any of us had dared

hope or imagine possible. This was not our doing. We were astonished onlookers at the action of the Holy Spirit and we felt privileged to be part of it. The very clergy who had dismissed what we had built up a decade earlier suddenly put forward new and exciting ideas to a group ready and waiting to implement them with an enthusiastic Christian community. We started to pray together regularly. For three years a few people from the various churches met each week for silent prayer before the Saturday morning Mass. We prayed for our area, for our churches, our clergy, and in particular, how we should mark the millennium. Our other activities continued as before: Lent groups, the occasional service, and a selection of charitable projects, the most ambitious of which raised £25,000 for ecumenical work in the Sudan. We waited for the 'Big Idea' to be revealed.

What happened was much more surprising. As the new Millennium dawned new faces appeared amongst the clergy. The first thing they did was to publicly commission our little 'Churches Together' group. It was moving to have our work affirmed in this way and to feel the support and approval of clergy and people. We had the sense that at last we were all truly together in this adventure towards unity.

Most recently, our group, with the clergy, went away for a 'Vision Day'. Together we reflected on our community and its needs and explored possibilities for the future. Each person shared their vision of what 'the way to unity' could look like and by the end of the day the huge notice board in the meeting room was covered with coloured bits of paper full of challenging and exciting ideas.

What we are doing reminds me of an initiative during the Cold War. The Society of Friends initiated conferences to bring together young diplomats, economists, politicians and other opinion formers from both sides of the iron curtain. The idea was that these young men and women should exchange ideas

and get to know each other on a personal basis so that when, in the future, they were in positions of power, they would be part of a network of friendship that cut across political and ideological barriers. When the iron curtain fell so suddenly and unexpectedly these conferences had helped to create a network of contacts and goodwill ready to build the new political realities.

Our work for unity is similar. We are building relationships and developing respect and understanding for each other as individuals and as churches. When the Holy Spirit sweeps across scattering the barriers that divide us we will not be taken by surprise but will be ready and waiting to build the new Church together.

Barbara Wood.

CHRISTIANS IN SYDENHAM-SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Sydenham and Forest Hill are two adjacent 'urban villages' in south-west Lewisham. Historically they have close links - Forest Hill was originally developed in the 19th century as a suburb of Sydenham.

'Churches Together in Sydenham and Forest Hill' is a well-established organisation. But a feeling has grown up that it has become a bit unwieldy. So in 1999 it was decided that most day-to-day ecumenical activity should in future be organised through separate Sydenham and Forest Hill groups with CTSFH as a sort of 'holding company'.

The Sydenham group (which later adopted the name of 'Christians in Sydenham' - was launched at an 'Ecumenical Banquet' for key people from all 8 Sydenham churches in January 2002. About 75 people, lay and clerical, attended. After

the meal, and a 'keynote speech' by our guest of honour, Bishop Tom Butler of Southwark, we all spent some time informally sharing ideas about the proposed new organisation. People who were interested in actively helping were asked to leave their names and addresses.

My contribution to the discussion was to suggest that local ecumenism had to be a 'bottom up' rather than a 'top down' activity. Enthusiasm and hard work were needed in individual churches. Good ideas for ecumenical activity could usually be put into practice only if individual churches were prepared to take the initiative and actually organise something in which other churches could be invited to join.

I said I saw the main job of CiS representatives as being to stimulate and encourage such initiatives in their own churches. The main function of CiS as an organisation would be to provide and maintain a quick and effective communications network between the churches, using the telephone and e-mail as much as possible.

Everyone said afterwards how much they had enjoyed the Banquet. But later developments have not quite lived up to our hopes.

The attendance at the formal inaugural meeting in March (at which I was elected Secretary) was disappointing. Most of those who turned up were the faithful few who had previously been actively involved in CTSFH. Many of those who signed up at the Banquet didn't attend and seem to have played no active part in the organisation subsequently.

Specifically, it has proved difficult to get clergy involvement. We all thought that CiS could be effective only if it was clear to everyone that it had the active support and encouragement of the clergy. But appeals to the clergy to nominate one of their number to be our chairperson (which, we made clear, we did not

see as an arduous or time - consuming post) have so far been unsuccessful.

Largely to remind people we exist, I have compiled and circulated two CiS newsletters since the inaugural meeting. But these have elicited little response and have not so far helped to facilitate any specific ecumenical activity.

It seems clear to me that ecumenical activity has a low priority amongst both laity and clergy in Sydenham. Why should this be?

I guess that there is a sense that ecumenical progress at top level has for the moment run into the sand and that local initiatives are therefore eventually bound to run up against a brick wall, particularly in the areas of mutual recognition of ministries and eucharistic sharing.

I wonder whether the desire for organic unity may in any case be mainly a Catholic thing. At grass roots level it does not in my experience seem to have such a high priority for many Protestant Nonconformists. They seem to place more value on diversity and the freedom to witness to their faith according to their own traditions. More specifically, Sydenham demography means that attendances at our two Catholic churches are probably substantially higher than those of the Anglicans and the traditional Protestant Nonconformist denominations combined. Do our other Christian brothers and sisters feel they might be swamped by a Roman Catholic agenda?

On the other hand, there is also certainly a wariness about ecumenism amongst some Catholics I have spoken to - a fear that too much association with other Christians will lead to compromise or dilution of our Catholic faith.

Finally, against a background of falling congregations in many 'mainstream' denominations, it is perhaps bound to be difficult to find the people who are able and willing to commit

themselves to ecumenical effort. It's hard enough 'keeping the show on the road' in our individual churches.

So the road ahead for CiS often looks a rocky one. But if we believe that full unity amongst all baptised Christians is God's will, we must pray hard for it and believe that our prayers will one day be answered. Meanwhile we have to believe that God will bless all our efforts to bring Christians closer together - in Sydenham just as much as anywhere else!

Robin Orton

ECUMENICAL SOCIETY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The Society was conceived in the autumn of 1966 at a reception given by the late Cardinal Suenens at his residence in Mechelin (Malines) to mark the last meeting held in 1926 by the Anglican-Roman Catholic theologians who had taken part in the meetings known as the Malines Conversations which were held under the presidency of Cardinal Mercier between 1921 and 1925. (He died in January 1926)

Cardinal Mercier, who was Archbishop of Malines, Belgium from 1906 to January 1926, had been motivated to support the talks between Anglicans and Roman Catholics by a consideration of the farewell discourse of Jesus to his disciples (John 13): "I give you a new commandment. 'Love one another, just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.'

Cardinal Mercier had left as his testament these words: 'In order to unite with one another we must love one another. In order to love one another we must know one another. In order to know one another we must go out and meet each other.' These words were recalled at a reception given in the autumn of 1966 to

celebrate the last meeting of the Conversations. Those who had taken part in that last meeting and left it in a despondent mood would not have been able to foresee any reason for a celebration but it was Cardinal Suenens, who was Archbishop of Malines 1961-1979, and had been a seminarian at the Belgian College in Rome when the conversations had taken place, and had been befriended by one of the Roman Catholic participants in the Malines Conversations who had advised Cardinal Mercier that the Anglican Church should be united to the Holy See but not absorbed if that were possible. Cardinal Suenens had been involved in the preparatory work of the Second Vatican Council where he had been one of the four moderators at the formal meetings. There can be little doubt that his guiding hand was of some influence on the Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism.

Martin Gillett was one of the guests at the reception given in the Archiepiscopal residence where the Malines Conversations had taken place and had declared to another guest, - Miss Veronica O'Brien, the Legion of Mary envoy to France and Belgium, that he would like to promote a movement to facilitate the meetings between Christians of different traditions and thus the ESVBM was brought into being early in 1967

The Society was founded to enable members of different Christian traditions to meet each other and so be able to dispel those factors which keep Christians apart: misunderstanding, ignorance, misconceptions, prejudice and isolation.

J. P. Farrelly. (ESBVM)



CHRISTIAN UNITY

Perhaps we have Christian Unity already. Christians of all denominations often pull together in action. Christian Aid is a prime example. The split started with Martin Luther was necessary to save the church from a more severe fracture. The diversity of the Christian Church is perhaps its strength rather than its weakness. People can make a choice. They can attend a church that suits them best. The Church of England must have been aware of this, otherwise there wouldn't have been High and Low Churches. Wesley was moved to bring people back to the bible and away from ritual. There is nothing strange in the Methodists forging closer links with the Church of England. After all, they are returning to the original fold.

It is important to recognise that people are different and to listen to others opinions. Each branch of the Christian Church has much to offer. The Roman Church, together with the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches concentrated upon an outward show of worship, and imposed disciplines upon an uneducated flock. The Church buildings became more ornate and created a sense of awe.

The Roman Church, fearful of losing its flock, imposed restrictions upon its members denying them attendance at other denomination's services. That thinking has been swept away along with other impositions.

Christ's message was simple. He didn't need a building to communicate His thoughts. So we must reinforce His message by constant study of His teaching, provided in the Gospels and the epistles of St. Paul.

Frank North often remarks that religion is the real stumbling block and it is better to state that a person is a Christian first and foremost. I have not done any research. These are my personal thoughts.

Philip Eggleston

(Philip Eggleston, a layman, has conducted services at Elmers End Free Church (United Reformed), Beckenham. This article, originally appeared in the News/Views of that church, with permission to publish it.)

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