

TOGETHER IN CHRIST

EDITORIAL

For many, probably most of us, 2021 couldn't come soon enough. We've had two pandemic lockdowns to endure and have now entered a third: only allowed to go out for essential work, shopping or health reasons. The new mantra: 'Hands-Face-Space', wearing face masks, avoiding others, is not how it should be. We've learnt new words and activities - live screened Mass, social bubble, video-conferencing, Zooming, as technology has allowed us to meet safely, virtually.

Reviewing 2020, I wrote to the Unity Commission: "Despite all the difficulties and hardship, we have achieved so much more than we could have hoped for this year. Going through the very old 1980s Together in Christ bulletins, I've noticed how similar the messaging was then. Una was a great ambassador and moving force in those times."

However, a change to Together in Christ was already likely. News was constantly hard to get, costs were rising, numbers sold falling. Environmentally it made sense to be 'on-line'. In 2020 Gwen and Juliet Chiosso had time to create a website for the Christian Unity Commission. As events were cancelled and with no news for TiC to report, the plug was pulled. Masterfully, they have created an archive of the old, printed editions on the website and have put the items received since early 2020 into the TiC Online. At the end of each year we will save those into an annual edition and move them into the TiC Archive.

The 2021 edition has now just been launched. Please continue to support the Commission's work towards unity by prayer, action and word. Tell others where to find us and visit the site often. **We still want your articles too.**

Michael

January 2021

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Three Accounts on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, 3rd – 10th March 2020

Thoughts on our Ecumenical Pilgrimage to the Holy Land

I've been involved in church unity activities in south London for more than twenty years, and I can truthfully say that this ecumenical pilgrimage to the Holy Land, sponsored jointly by the Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses of Southwark, was one of the most significant and moving ecumenical events I have taken part in. My wife, Morwenna, who is a Reader (licensed lay minister) in the Church of England, came with me, and we had the privilege of having Bishop Christopher Chessun, the Bishop of Southwark, and our own Bishop Paul Hendricks as our spiritual leaders. They were ably assisted by the Anglican Dean of Southwark (Canon Andrew Nunn) and by Fr Phil Andrews, who is on the staff of St George's Cathedral and shortly to become Archbishop John's private secretary.

The pilgrimage took place at the beginning of March 2020, during the second and third weeks of Lent, under the darkening shadow of increasing concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic; we were not able to visit the Palestinian territories in the West Bank, and had to fly home a few hours earlier than planned to avoid the risk of being stranded in Israel because of travel restrictions.



I'm not going to give a detailed itinerary or describe all the sites we visited. You can read an excellent account (with some great pictures) in the [blog](#) produced by Canon Wendy Robins, director of communications for the Anglican diocese, who was with us. In this article, I'll just add some personal observations of my own: first on the pilgrimage itself and then on the ecumenical aspects.

Why does visiting the sites where Jesus actually walked, and where pilgrims have prayed for centuries, makes such a deep impression? I think it's because it's so *material*, so expressive of the reality that God really did become a human being who walked and talked, was born and died, in a specific place and at a specific time in history ('suffered under Pontius Pilate'). We were able to venerate physically the birthplace of John the Baptist, the rock on which Jesus prayed in Gethsemane and the site of the Crucifixion; I guess it's like Orthodox Christians kissing an icon. (Of course, scholars argue about how historically authentic some of these sites are, but somehow it doesn't really matter. Someone quoted T. S. Eliot: 'You are here to pray / Where prayer has been valid.')

Jerusalem (where we started our pilgrimage, before moving to Tiberias by the Sea of Galilee) was incredibly crowded with pilgrims and tourists; this meant for example that only a few of us (not me) were able (eventually) to get into the Aedicule, that part of the Church

of the Holy Sepulchre which encloses the actual tomb of Christ. The crowds were partly, no doubt, a result of the West Bank having suddenly become unvisitable because of Covid-19 restrictions; also the Jewish festival of Purim was being celebrated while we were in Jerusalem. The crowds, combined with very warm weather, made much of that part of the pilgrimage quite tiring for those of us who were no longer in the first flush of youth. However, this seemed quite appropriate as we pushed our way through the streets of the Old City along the Via Dolorosa, praying the Stations of the Cross on the actual route that Jesus took to his crucifixion. We had to dodge out of the way of construction traffic and bin lorries: no doubt their first century equivalents were around on the first Good Friday.

And, on a lighter note, perhaps there would have been street vendors too. The ones who accosted us were very ingenious in finding ways of attracting us to their wares. 'Special juice for corona virus!' shouted one, with a tray of what looked like cranberry juice. When we identified ourselves as coming from London, an Arab decided that shouting 'Lawrence of Arabia!' would be the thing to get us on his side; 'I was born in Finchley Central, innit?' was what a Jewish guy preferred.



There were two other visits I found particularly memorable. One was to the Comboni Sisters in Bethany. They who work mainly with the Negev Bedouin people, who are unable to live in the traditional way in their home areas and many of whom are very poor. We looked down on the Israel/occupied territories separation barrier or wall, which runs through the middle of the Sisters' garden and means that their other house, nearby but on the other side of the wall, is accessible to them only by means of a two hour detour. Even closer to the other side of the barrier there is a nursery school; we

could look down on the roof and see the scorch marks left by the Molotov cocktails which angry Palestinians had thrown at the barrier.

I shall also remember our visit to Cana in Galilee. The last time Morwenna and I were there (more than twenty years ago) married people were invited to renew their marriage vows in the church. This time we were all instead invited to give thanks, silently or aloud, for our marriages or other significant relationships. This was very moving.

One of the most striking differences from our earlier visit that I noticed was how ubiquitous the use of mobile phone cameras by visitors to the holy sites has become. I personally found this very distracting and not conducive to prayer. Some people gave the impression – and I may be doing them an injustice – that taking photographs was primarily what they'd come to do! But, as Morwenna pointed out to me, it's only natural that people should want to take back pictures to share with their friends who's not been able physically to visit the sites. And in any case, I thought, if there'd been mobile phones around in the first century, no doubt people would have been snapping away during the first Holy Week!

To turn to the ecumenical aspects of the pilgrimage, we in the Archdiocese of Southwark Christian Unity Commission have as one of our objectives forming closer relationships with

the Anglican dioceses with which we overlap, which we do most obviously with the diocese of Southwark. In my view, this pilgrimage was a model of how that objective can be taken forward.

At the social level, we were all completely at one. The organisers had taken pains to ensure that there were equal numbers from each denomination in each of our two coaches, and everyone cheerfully mixed together at meal times.

More importantly, there was a very real sense of Christian unity at the spiritual level. We all said morning and evening prayer together; it was led alternately by Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy. There was a Eucharist nearly every day, again alternating between the two denominations. At each celebration, a vested priest or bishop of the other denomination stood near the altar, read the Gospel or preached the homily.

Obviously we were unable physically to share Holy Communion from each other's altars, but everyone came up for a blessing if the celebrant was from the other denomination. (I have subsequently gathered that many of the Anglicans were not familiar with the practice of giving a blessing to non-communicants at the Eucharist, and that they found it very moving.) I think most if not all of the Anglican clergy who accompanied us represented the (Anglo-) Catholic tradition of the Church of England, so it is perhaps not surprising that our two liturgies were so similar in structure, ceremonial and, to a large extent, language (though we all had to be given careful reminders about when to say 'And also with you' and when to say 'And with your spirit!')

And, as I find is often the case at ecumenical gatherings, everyone sang magnificently. Not surprisingly, during the second half of our pilgrimage, when we were based in Tiberias, we got to know that old favourite 'Dear Lord and Father of mankind' ('O Sabbath rest by Galilee' 'Beside the Syrian sea') quite well!

In conclusion, writing in my capacity of chair of the Christian Unity Commission for the Roman Catholic diocese, I would like to express the hope that now the precedent of joint pilgrimages between the Roman Catholic and Anglican dioceses of Southwark has been set, our bishops will seriously consider doing it again. There are plenty of pilgrimage sites nearer than the Holy Land! And it would be good if at some stage the possibility of involving Christians from other traditions as well could be looked at.

Robin Orton

Reflections on the Holy Land Shared Journey

Any pilgrimage is a shared journey, which I find brings me very close to those who are with me and experiencing the same places, while having their own insights and reflections to contribute. The short gathering we had after supper each day was a lovely opportunity to allow the impressions of that day to sink in a little more deeply, helped by the observations and reflections of the others. Part of the richness of this was the ecumenical dimension — the fact that we have so much in common, while having what I might call complementary perspectives which can offer deeper insights than would be available to us on our own.

I felt that there was also something special about having this pilgrimage specifically with the Anglican diocese of Southwark. Our two cathedrals in particular, as well as our two dioceses, do often collaborate on various projects, which gives a certain sense of common purpose. And apart from our shared faith in Christ, which is obviously the most important thing, we do have so much in common with the Anglicans in particular, in terms of liturgy, sacraments and spiritual traditions.



I also greatly valued the particular experience that Bishop Christopher brought to the pilgrimage, in terms of his membership of the international Holy Land Coordination group, organised by our own Bishops' Conference. This means he is very much in touch with the Christian churches in the Holy Land and the issues that affect them — and this gave an additional depth to our pilgrimage. This helped, for instance, in arranging a visit to the 'Latin Patriarchate', which has pastoral responsibility for the Latin-Rite Catholics in the Holy Land and neighbouring territories.

We were warmly welcomed by Bishop Kamal Hanna Bathish, who mentioned that he himself is from Nazareth. He was glad to see that we were an ecumenical pilgrimage. He used a rather nice image, that God speaks only one Word (his Son) though we hear the Word of God differently.

Robin has already mentioned the fact that we celebrated the Eucharist as a single group, which I'm sure was the right approach, even though we could not receive Holy Communion together. I also valued the other times we gathered for a short period of shared prayer at other times each day, when we came to particularly significant places. Canon Andrew always seemed to have just the right prayer for the occasion, on a sheet which he'd draw out of a file he carried with him, for himself or for someone else to read. Fr Phil also gave a lovely reflection he had prepared, while we were visiting the Mount of Olives.

The singing was a high point, as Robin mentioned — and it was by no means always solemn and serious. I greatly enjoyed the rendition of *While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night*, to the tune of *On Ilkley Moor Baht 'at* at the start of the Mass which we had been planning to have at Bethlehem. Canon Andrew mentioned in his homily, the fact that shepherds in the time of Jesus were regarded as disreputable and unreliable — and so

would not have been seen as ideal witnesses to a great event. I suppose a more modern equivalent would be the cowboy. Isn't it strange how they, too, are seen as unreliable? A priest friend once claimed to have seen a builder's van which had the sign: 'Patel and Sons. You've been let down by the cowboys. Now try the Indians!'

While we were in Jerusalem, I wanted to visit the Anglican cathedral, so I went there towards the end of Friday afternoon. I was saying Evening Prayer as the light was beginning to fade. Then I heard a loud sound of horns, coming from somewhere outside. Was it some strange religious ceremony in one of the nearby churches? Was it some sort of air-raid warning? If so, I had no idea what to do. I felt a little foolish when I found out it was just the weekly signal that the Sabbath was about to start!



Renewing baptismal vows near Caesarea Philippi, led by the two bishops

On the day we moved up to Galilee, we visited Qumran (made famous by the Dead Sea Scrolls). Visiting the excavations was very memorable, but not as memorable as the lunch we had at a huge cafeteria-style restaurant. There was a very long queue to get in, taking us past a shop section that offered various sure-fire cosmetic treatments made from Dead Sea mud, plus other items of local interest. We eventually got through and I had lunch sitting next to a couple of Baptist pilgrims from Texas. After visiting the excavations, I bought an ice cream from a stall which advertised itself as 'the lowest on earth'. As the shores of the

Dead Sea are over 1,400 feet below sea level, I think their claim is justified!

Like Robin, I do hope we can find other opportunities for ecumenical pilgrimages in various forms. The most recent ARCIC document has the title *Walking Together on the Way*, and the image of ecumenism as a shared journey is very appropriate. It seems to me to imply movement on both sides, walking towards a common goal, rather than a static compromise between two fixed positions.

We mustn't lose sight of the goal of Christian Unity, but neither must we think that the journey towards it is without value. I've never done the Santiago *Camino*, but I'm sure that the experience of arriving at Compostela is all the more wonderful because it's the climax of a long (and probably difficult) journey. But from what I can gather it's the journey itself, and all that the pilgrims learn from each other along the way, which truly transforms their life.

Bishop Paul Hendricks

Some Initial Reflections on our Ecumenical Pilgrimage

This was always going to be a special journey taken to mark our fiftieth wedding anniversary, but we did not anticipate quite how blessed it was going to be.

The programme was packed; so intense that it was sometimes difficult to remember everything we had seen and done each day. It will take time to process it all. But, as we reflect together, our focus – surprisingly – is not primarily on the places where we visited, prayed and thought about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Of course it was wonderful to look down on Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, to follow in Jesus' steps to the Garden of Gethsemane, and pray the Stations of the Cross carrying a cross up the Via Dolorosa. We prayed where Jesus was condemned to death and where Peter denied his Lord. It was awesome to walk in the hills of Galilee, and to take a boat on the Sea of Galilee where we watched the moon rise while being anointed by our two bishops. We wept as we prayed in the various sites in Nazareth where the Holy family had lived, and renewed our baptismal vows being sprinkled with water from the Jordan. As Bishop Paul said, it was a baptism of the imagination feeding our meditation now we are home.

Yet what touched our hearts most was that we have glimpsed the unity for which Jesus prayed. We shared in prayer, received blessings from each other, and renewed our baptismal vows together. We worshipped together in the Mass and the Eucharist, respecting our respective disciplines, yet experiencing a profound sense of spiritual communion. It was a foretaste of that glorious day when we will share fully at the Lord's table. After this week together that day seems not only possible but close. We experienced a model of what life could be like if we practised such unity in our local communities.



We came home pondering all this in our hearts. The deep unity we felt was a gift that we received because we were walking together on the way of Our Lord. On this pilgrimage we were able to walk in His actual footsteps. Now the challenge is to continue to do so in our daily lives.

Barbara Wood

We have a Boat!

The theme for the Christian Unity Service 2020 was “unusual kindness”, which centred on the events told in the Acts of the Apostles of St Paul’s shipwreck on the island of Malta. Holy Cross Parish in Carshalton agreed to host the service in Unity Week (January) and I was responsible for calling upon the members of Churches Together to join us in uniting in prayer and worship. One of the challenges was producing a nautical theme in a landlocked village.



A large Turner picture of a shipwreck was projected on the church wall, and the sounds of creaking ships’ timbers and storm were played to create atmosphere. So far so good!

As an island nation, boats are an important part of Maltese life and for that reason, the Christian churches of Malta suggested in the notes for the service, that a boat or a large model of a boat be placed in the worship space. I was very sceptical that this could be

achieved and said so at one of our weekly church coffee mornings. Oh ye of little faith!

A voice piped up, “We have a boat!” I laughed in disbelief but was soon astonished to be shown a wonderful antique fishing boat complete with sails and fishing nets. It was very small but perfect in detail and it could be the focus of our service.

Another challenge was during the prayers of the people seven oars would be brought forward bearing the words: Trust, Perseverance, Harmony, Courage, Unusual Kindness, Transformation and Generosity. Each oar was to be held high during the petitions. The oars on our tiny boat were tiny so what to do?

It was decided to provide planks as symbols of ships’ decking – they were big enough to be seen from a distance and all went well. Since the service, these planks have been displayed on the window sills of our church and are quite powerful as a meditation aid. One young child was recently seen tracing her finger along the letters of the word “Harmony”. A charming image.

Alex Faircloth

Secretary, Churches Together in Carshalton

Canon John O'Toole – 40 Years of Discipleship

From 'The Evangelist' published by St John's Seminary, Wonersh

Interview with Deacon Peter Sebastian



Canon John was ordained priest on the Feast of All Saints 1978 having been an alumnus of both St John's, Wonersh and the junior seminary at Mark Cross, Sussex. I first met Canon John in 2018 when he came to St John's to brief us on ecumenical relations and was struck by how much he enjoyed and was at peace in his priesthood. Given his wealth of priestly experience — in parish life, in Catholic education, in building ecumenical relationships, in mission work — I resolved to interview him for *The Evangelist*. I caught up with him just as he was beginning his appointment as Episcopal Vicar for Kent.....

YOU HAVE A RICH EXPERIENCE IN FORGING ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS AND FRIENDSHIPS IN PARISH LIFE AND AT NATIONAL LEVEL. HOW HAVE YOU REMAINED HOPEFUL AMID THE UPS AND DOWNS?

The late Bishop Michael Evans, a fellow member of my year at Wonersh who became Bishop of East Anglia, used to say that "Unity is a gift before it is a task." It is a gift of the Spirit, not our doing. What we can do is share in the gifts we have in common; we are brother and sister in the one body of Christ. Let's celebrate that. We are in real but imperfect communion. The task is to work for the full communion. We should not get disheartened.

And let me crib the words of our new Archbishop John Wilson – we can learn from other Christians, particularly from the Pentecostal tradition. Why are they doing so well? Three things: the quality of their preaching, the clarity of their teaching and their sense of belonging. Archbishop John concluded that we as Catholics should excel at all three – and so we should. We should have the humility to realise that we can learn from others.

DID YOU TRY TO SHAPE YOUR PRIESTLY CAREER?

I go where I am sent – the promise of obedience is important to me. Dr Freddie Broomfield at St John's taught us that obedience means you can have every word except the last! – The Holy Spirit is at work. Every posting has its advantages. The priesthood is a joyous calling with a rich variety of roles and work. We priests are privileged to have access to people's lives and to see the action of the Spirit.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE WANTED TO KNOW AT THE BEGINNING?

Probably not. There is no substitute for experience. Arriving at Lewisham hospital as a new chaplain on a sick call and being told that your parishioner has just died — who can prepare you for that? It is probably better not to know too much too soon!

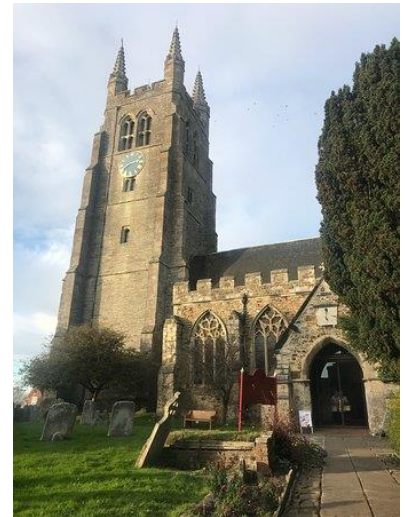
Deacon Peter was ordained to the Priesthood on 25th July 2020

Churches Together in Tenterden

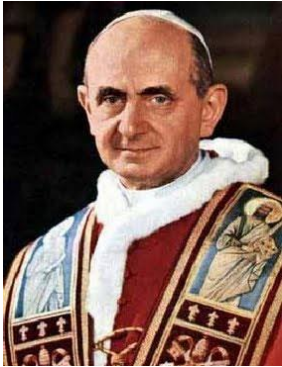
From the daily “Viral Times”, published by our CoE colleagues during this time (July 2020) with encouraging news:

“St. Mildred’s is in the fortunate position of being very central and able to offer all that is necessary for people to come in to pray. Everyone is welcome. We are delighted to be joined by members of the Zion Baptist Church, St. Andrew’s Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church, and we are privileged to offer St. Mildred’s as a space for prayer until they are able to make full use of their own premises again. This is another expression of our common life here as the Christian churches in Tenterden.”

They have been able to open every day from 10:30 to 15:00 and this facility has been appreciated by many townsfolk.



Fiftieth anniversary of the canonisation of the forty martyrs – 25 October 2020



Pope Paul VI

Fr Denis Blackledge SJ remembers the occasion

“Thinking Faith” as the on-line journal of the Jesuits in Britain, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the canonisation of the forty martyrs with an article from Fr Denis Blackledge SJ of Saint Xavier Parish in Liverpool. He was present at the canonisation in Rome and describes it with the lead-up to “an awe-inspiring occasion”.

This article quotes fully from Pope Paul VI at St Peter’s, with ecumenical outreach seeming almost ahead of its time: his greeting, “to all the members of the Anglican Church who have likewise come to take part in this ceremony. We indeed feel very close to them. We would like them to read in our heart the humility, the gratitude and the hope with which we welcome them.”

There follows an account of the ceremony from the memory of one who took part, who concludes, “I hope I have given you a rich flavour of the main event, which for me was capped by the extraordinary ending of Pope Paul VI’s homily:

‘May the blood of these Martyrs be able to heal the great wound inflicted upon God’s Church by reason of the separation of the Anglican Church from the Catholic Church. Is it not one – these Martyrs say to us- the Church founded by Christ? Is not this their witness? Their devotion to their nation gives us the assurance that on the day when – God willing – the unity of the faith and of Christian life is restored, no offence will be inflicted on the honour and sovereignty of a great country such as England. There will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church – this humble “Servant of the Servants of God”- is able to embrace her ever beloved Sister in the one authentic communion of the family of Christ: a communion of origin and of faith, a communion of priesthood and of rule, a communion of the Saints in the freedom and love of the Spirit of Jesus. Perhaps We shall have to go on, waiting and watching in prayer, in order to deserve that blessed day. But already We are strengthened in this hope by the heavenly friendship of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales who are canonised today. Amen.’”

<https://www.jesuit.org.uk/50th-anniversary-canonisation-forty-martyrs-fr-denis-blackledge-sj-remembers-occasion>