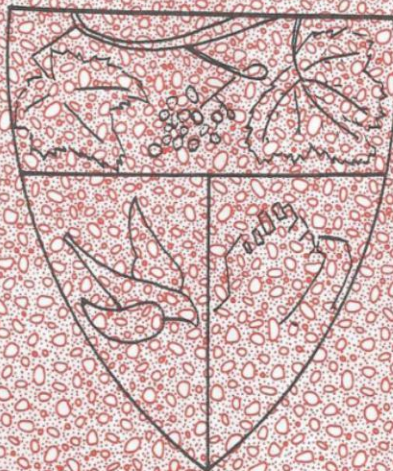


Together in Christ

60p



MAY THEY ALL BE ONE

Vol 11 No 35

June 1993

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EDITORIAL

"There is a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them". (1 Cor:12)

The material in this issue surely reflects the rich variety of gifts of the Spirit which have been used powerfully in His service. The message of encouragement is clear: may we all be ready to go out and do likewise, as the Spirit leads us!

A big welcome back to our pages to Bishop Henderson, who tells us of the impressive launch of a special year, opening our minds to wider issues and a global vision. A warm and grateful welcome to all contributors, most of whom are new this time. May the sterling work of Canon Pannett and his colleagues for a Joint Mission continue to bear much fruit. Splendid efforts in pastoral and spiritual care for the elderly are related by Mary Gallagher; the very valuable work of a Unity Contact is vividly demonstrated by Maureen Fitzpatrick; and Kathleen George shows how to take advantage of an ecumenical opportunity to very good effect. Sister Margaret brings us a Baptist's self-understanding of the faith, indicating the important aspect of listening to one another, and the WWDP comes alive for us through Margaret Moloney's detailed account of this year's service.

NOTE: The AGM of the three Area Commissions for Christian Unity takes place at Aylesford on September 11th; the officers meet again on October 2nd. Keep up the good work!

ECUMENISM FOR THE OLDER CHRISTIAN

About three years ago, I noticed a very small advertisement for the Christian Council on Ageing. As I was only two years short of my 70th birthday, and it was clear that this was an ecumenical organisation, I joined. I thought I was much too busy to do any work for CCOA, but that I could make it known through the Christian Unity Commission and our local churches in Lewisham.

After a few months I received an invitation to a meeting in Croydon to consider setting up a branch of CCOA in South London. The letter was signed by three people: an Anglican lady, a Baptist lady and a Catholic religious sister. They had invited all existing members living in London south of the Thames. About twenty people attended including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists

and Salvation Army, and several were very experienced in working with the elderly.

We soon realised that South London was too big a concept and we decided to try to set up branches borough by borough, as some six boroughs were represented by one or more people. We accordingly nominated a few people, of whom I was one, as a steering group to decide the order in which branches might be started.

As there were already several members of CCOA in Croydon, an inaugural meeting was held there in April 1991. Ann Morisy, who was a member of the Executive of CCOA gave a talk on "The Vocation of Ageing" and a Croydon branch came into being. The steering group was reformed with the title 'South London Umbrella Group', known as SLUG, and plans were made to start branches in Lewisham and Merton.

Every effort was made to publicise the Lewisham inaugural meeting in St Saviour's Church Hall in September 1991, nevertheless, nobody other than SLUG members had said definitely that they would attend. However, 38 people turned up, including a Jewish lady who had seen our poster that morning in Lewisham library. Dr Anne Brown, consultant geriatrician at Mayday Hospital, Croydon, gave a talk on the topic - "When is old age?" Ann Morisy explained that CCOA is a national ecumenical organisation which is keen to see local branches develop. Such branches have the following aims:-

(a) to encourage the full integration of older people in the life and work of the churches and community,

(b) to Improve pastoral care of elderly people and those who care for them,

(c) to encourage Christian education in later life,

(d) to educate church people about the ageing process, and

(e) to promote theological reflection on ageing.

After discussion in groups those attending were invited to complete questionnaires and about half did so. Of these several were willing to act as links with their churches and four were willing to serve on a Lewisham committee, and so, Lewisham branch was formed.

The first meeting in Merton was held in November 1991 and was well attended, including some younger professional workers with elderly people. Some of those who came learnt about the meeting through my mentioning it at the Christian Unity Commission AGM.

In March 1992, five members of Lewisham committee went to a study Day on ministry in sheltered accommodation, residential and nursing homes. This was organised by Croydon branch, and it included several useful hints about the work that an ecumenical group can do in this sphere. A talk about organising and leading ecumenical services in residential homes was given by Sid Smith, a member of London City Mission, who has considerable experience in this field. Another talk was by Edna Briscoe, Senior Social Worker for care of the elderly at Mayday Hospital, Croydon, about the scope for volunteers to be involved with reminiscence and activity for the elderly in homes.

The following week, Lewisham branch held a morning meeting on the topic "Communication between the generations" introduced by a talk by Ann Morisy. Major Gray, who was the matron of the Salvation Army eventide home that had not long been opened in Lewisham, and was a member of our committee, expressed her hope that the residents there would be involved in the local community and vice versa. There was some discussion about a topic for the next open meeting in Lewisham and it was agreed that this should be "Ageing in a multi-cultural society"

We organised a half-day workshop on the topic "Ageing in a multicultural society" with input by two of our committee members and from a young Ghanian lady who spoke on the theme "A young person looks at old age". All who came joined in the discussions and there were some very useful contributions.

A month later, Croydon branch held a morning conference on "Taking account of hearing loss in church and daily life". People from several different churches explained the particular difficulties faced by those suffering hearing loss at the services and events they wished to attend. We learnt that a portable loop system would enable those hard of hearing to be members of committees, and take part in other activities from which they now feel excluded. Two people who came were

young ladies from Bibleway church, a black-led Pentecostal church in Lewisham, and they are experienced in sign language. This conference was so useful that Lewisham branch are planning a similar one for September.

I find membership of the Christian Council on Ageing very worthwhile and am Particularly pleased about the opportunity of meeting so many people from different churches who support the idea of helping people to play a full part in the activities of their own churches. in the local community.

Mary C Gallagher

MISSION 92 REPORT

The Beginnings

At a Clergy Fraternal of the Churches Together in North Lambeth and District, in June 1990, the idea of Mission was discussed.

Representatives from the churches thought that this was an event we could share together. Its first "happening" was in September 1990, when 24 people from the four churches who were to participate met, together with Father Martin Hayes of the Catholic

Missionary Society, to

discuss possibilities and to make initial plans. It was then agreed that the thrust would be three-fold: "to deepen the faith of those who already believe and are members of Christian communities; to recall to faith those lapsed or on the fringe of Christian commitment; to win into our Christian communities those with no knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour" . A prayer was devised, prayer cards were circulated round the churches and the need to pray for the success of the Mission emphasised.



Next Steps

A Mission Core Group was formed with representatives from each church, to go ahead with the planning, and the next step was the Discussion Groups for Lent (1991) which considered "basic aspects of our faith and how we begin to share this with those around us" . Five Interdenominational Groups were formed and met in houses round the area each week. In the summer of 1991 four Formation groups were brought together, each of about a dozen members, and they considered topics with material supplied by the CMS, looking for Mission subjects to be adopted. There followed a Mission Forum, in October 1991, with the theme "Reasons to Celebrate", and 80 participants were encouraged to contribute both their views about the form the Mission should take, and to offer their skills in helping to bring it about. Advent groups in 1991 - again house groups, now well-known to each other - reflected the "**deepening, recalling, winning**" themes, as well as Bible study.

All this time the Mission Core Group was meeting regularly, and had set up sub-groups to plan the major Mission Event. Originally planned for October 1991, we finally opted for October/November 1992 to ensure maximum publicity for the Mission. These sub-groups had varied responsibilities such as event planning, publicity, transport, hospitality, prayer, liturgy, and so on, and drew widely upon the experience and talents of members of all the congregations involved. Three prayer groups met regularly to underpin other activities.

Lent 1992 saw courses on the theme "Living the Good News" The House Groups, now welded together, discussed ways and means whereby they could share their living faith. A Disability workshop took place in September, and a "Booster Day". A Mission leaflet went to every house in the area.

Mission Event 1992

The event was launched on Saturday 31st October at St George's Cathedral, with guest denominational leaders from the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Baptist and Methodist traditions. It was wonderful to see Church Leaders kept to five minutes. A Healing Service at St. Peter's, Vauxhall, which provided opportunity for reflection and prayer, proved to be one of the most moving experiences of the Mission. One Minister's diffidence led to mutual support. People spoke of the powerful experience of being prayed for by Christians from all the different churches locally. A more political view came with the theme, " Love, Forgiveness and Reconciliation ", when Archbishop Trevor Huddleston spoke of the church in South Africa. An evening of hospitality in private homes brought neighbours together from different churches to meet and talk. on Guy Fawkes night, a Festival

of Light, followed by a procession and fireworks, was an impressive witness to the locality as 200 people processed with burning torches to a firework display in the Catholic Cathedral grounds. A unique chance to share supper together and to meet the Archbishop of Canterbury, was an excellent Opportunity to hear him speak of his own journey of faith. A prayer workshop, with interdenominational Shared prayer, a children's art workshop, a local "Songs of Praise" with Roger Royle, and an evening of exploration of individual faith provided further variety. The event ended with a "Where do we go from here?", when participants offered their views on what the Mission had meant to them, and ideas for the future. This session included an evaluation sheet.

Looking back

Overwhelmingly the views expressed were of the warmth of welcome, friendship renewed and friendships freshly made, the desire to go on sharing. the most popular events were the healing service, the procession. and 'meet the Archbishop', although all had appreciative comments. There were new faces who came to events who hadn't been in church for many years. People locally were made aware that the churches are alive and well in Lambeth, and that has been a good thing itself.

And looking forward

Some specific suggestions were made, and as the four participating Churches are all members of the Council for Churches Together in North Lambeth, it seems appropriate that the way forward should be through this body. We have already shared a joint Advent Sunday Service and plans are going forward for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Lent groups, Good Friday Walk of Witness, a Pentecost picnic, and exploring possible Sunday evening worship together on a regular basis.

We have reason to be profoundly grateful for the the help given us by Father Martin Hayes and Father Barnaby Dowling of the Catholic Missionary Society, by church leaders and other prominent figures who came and gave their time and talents, but the Mission could not have happened without the participation, the dedication and the hard work of many, many members of our congregations who, working together with the clergy and one another, made **Mission 92** what it became.

Canon James Pannett, K.H.S. (R. C)
Rev Michael Fielding (Methodist)
Mrs. Betty Percival (Anglican)



A CHANCE CONVERSATION AN ECUMENICAL OPPORTUNITY

During a conference of St. Alban's and St. Sergius' in August, I spoke to Father Michael, a Romanian priest, who was the ecumenical officer from the Patriarch's office in Bucharest. He had been training at Durham University, and was returning to Romania, and he would return to England one day. He was offered hospitality in Canterbury, should he need it.

Some weeks later a letter arrived from him, suggesting that Nicu Manole, a theological student and colleague from his office, would like to come in his place, and asked if it would be possible for us to pay for his ticket and finance his visit. Friends from the churches were approached, including the Cathedral authorities. Money came in, and a programme was arranged, aimed at showing the Christian involvement in different aspects of life here. This included visits to the University, and Roman Catholic, Baptist and Anglican centres. A letter was sent to obtain his visa, with a guaranteed address while here. Nicu arrived on January 10th to stay in England for nine weeks.

During his Canterbury visit, he went to a day centre for the homeless; to Canterbury prison; he met students from the University and Christ Church College, at both the Baptist and Anglican Churches. During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we attended an Orthodox liturgy in an Anglican Church, and a packed united service in the Cathedral.

Various contacts were made with people helping with aid to Romania, and slides of some of the worst conditions of old people and children were shown. Nicu stayed at Plaistow for a week with the Anglican Friars, as well as visiting St. Theosevia's centre in Oxford for five days. Days were spent at the Benedictine Abbey in Ramsgate, the Franciscan Study at the University, Burrowswood Home of Healing at Groombridge, and Edward Wilson House in London. Some of the staff at St. Augustine's psychiatric hospital took him to see some of the work done under supervision.

Nicu also saw the videos of the Lambeth Conference, and of the Archbishop's enthronement, so that he could see his Romanian Bishops taking part. A buffet supper was arranged, and about twenty of those involved in the programme met to bid farewell, as someone said, from the "Canterbury connection." We hope that, in the future, some of the contacts made, will bear fruit in the ecumenical field.

Kathleen George (Canterbury)

YEAR OF INTERRELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION The U.K. Launch of 1993

At a colourful and thoughtfully arranged event on 27th January, which blended together deep faith and commitment to dialogue with good humour and warm hospitality, the year of interreligious dialogue and cooperation was launched.

Lord David Ennals, tireless animator of interfaith in the U.K. and President of the Ghandi Foundation, welcomed over 700 participants to the full day launch at Global Cooperation House in north London, the recently opened centre of the Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University who magnificently hosted the event.

Why 1993?

This year has been designated a year of interreligious understanding and cooperation as it is 100 years since the World's *Parliament of Religions* took place during the World Fair in Chicago in 1893. A video film and a dramatised reading of some of the speeches given at the Parliament of 1893 vividly brought to our attention the extraordinary nature of that meeting as a moment in which the Spirit of God had been at work in achieving recognition in the participants of being brothers and sisters to one another and children of God despite diversity of religion. Quotes from the *Herald Tribune* and the *New York Times* humorously record both the surprise of discovering that the "heathens are not as heathen as we thought" and the profound respect engendered by the great Hindu leader Swami Vivekananda, whose appeal for universal tolerance won great sympathy and whose evident deep spirituality has gone down in the annals of history as one of the most significant aspects of the Parliament. The World's *Parliament of Religions* is now looked upon as the foundation stone of the modern interfaith movement .

Prayer and Water

During the launch of the year of cooperation an imaginative 'Prayer and Water ceremony' took place. Acknowledging the unique symbolism of water in human life and also therefore in religious life, representatives of the major world religions read prayers or readings associated with the meaning and use of water in their faith practice and poured water carried from various sources such as the River Jordan, the River Ganges, the Muslim Holy Well at Zamzam, simple rain water, or Thames water, into a fountain on the stage in the hall which blended together to one fountain symbolising our common search for God.

Global Vision

At the end of the morning Edgar Mitchell, Apollo XIV Astronaut, spoke of his own powerful experience of viewing Earth from space. He said that looking at the globe one could not see the political boundaries or boundaries in thought that human beings have made. He had gone into space a technician and returned a humanitarian. From this derived his interest in religion and interreligious dialogue for the healing of hearts .

Group Considerations

In the afternoon six workshops focussed on the themes of justice, peace, honesty, love, respect and humility. Items for discussion in the workshops included such vital areas of current concern as human rights, the environment, ethnic and racial discrimination and the welfare of the individual. They provided a forum for the sharing of experience, hopes and fears, recognising both the "disintegrating" tendencies of the world today and the power for integration which can come through believers united for peace.

The end of the day led into an evening concert to celebrate 1993 ; special guests at the event included Peter Gabriel, Carmen Monroe, Hayley Mills and the Rev Dr Edward Carpenter. The evening of music, drama and dance included local faith communities performing a variety of cultural items.

The Year of Inter religious Understanding and Cooperation is being promoted by four international interfaith groups : the *International Association for Religious Freedom*, the *World Congress of Faiths*, the *World Conference on Religion and Peace* and the New York based *Temple Of Understanding*. Numerous events are planned to celebrate the year, including a second Parliament in Chicago, an international multifaith conference in Bangalore in August, and countless local events and celebrations.

+ C. J. Henderson

A U.K. set of leaflets "Getting to Know People of Other Faiths" is available

HOW I BECAME A UNITY CONTACT



In September 1991 on retirement from teaching I commenced a two year "Education for Parish Service course" at *Maria Assumpta Centre, Kensington*. I had been looking for a course that would further my commitment to the Church, my parish, the local community and the world. The "*Education for Parish Service*" course comprises twenty-four modules covering a variety of subjects, theological and pastoral that enrich one's own spirituality and knowledge in order to give more loving, informed and constructive service to others. In this way one can be instrumental in bringing others closer to Jesus Christ and in spreading the "Good News" of the Kingdom.

It was during lectures on Vatican II and relevant documents that I experienced an "encounter" that triggered off my concern for and interest in ecumenism. The lecturer, Father John O'Farrell OP. pointed out that Christians themselves had contributed towards the divisions and impeded unity - quoting *Unitatis Redintegratio* -- the Vatican decree on Ecumenism - Article 3:

"In this one and only Church of God from its very beginning there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle (Paul) strongly censures as damnable"

I Cor 1: 18-19 "For to begin with, when you come together as a church I hear there are divisions among you ; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine"

I Cor 1: 11 "For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you. my brothers and sisters."

I Cor 11:22 "What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you."

Article 3 continued:

"But subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church — for which, often enough, men of both sides were to blame."

Later, in Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* :Evangelisation in the Modern World Article 77, we read:

"The division among Christians is a serious reality which impedes the very work of Christ. The second Vatican Council states clearly and emphatically that this division 'damages the most holy cause of preaching the Gospel to all men, and it impedes many from embracing the faith ' ".

Encounters are many and varied - they can be long or short - aural or visual - in my case it was the " look of hurt" that I discerned on the speaker's face at the contemplation of the scandal of Christian disunity. That " look" stayed with me, causing me to accept gladly the opportunity to represent my parish at the Old Bexley Group of Churches' local meetings. I approached my first meeting with some nervousness - yet keeping in mind Father John O'Farrell's advice: "Do not be afraid!" I have since enjoyed further meetings, and I feel privileged to learn of and enjoy the friendship of committed Christians of other denominations at a local level.

Finally, my local ecumenical involvement has led me to being a "Unity Contact" for my parish and local community at the Christian Unity Commission Area meetings directed by Bishop Charles Henderson. This gives me the opportunity to:

(i) observe committed and knowledgeable Christians working for unity at the diocesan level ,

(ii) acquire and publicise up to date information on unity progress through the Together in Christ magazine and related courses on ecumenism, and

(iii) to be supported in my endeavours as a " link person" in promoting local and diocesan unity prayer, events and activities for the parish and local community bearing in mind Bishop Charles' succinct, but invaluable advice: "One step at a time."

Since my first meeting, back in May 1992, our local churches have shared the following activities and events which I publicise by means of attractive and, hopefully, eye-catching announcements in the Parish newsletter, on notice boards and with hand-out leaflets to Parish group leaders. I keep my parish priest well informed and I find that as long as the ecumenical events are publicised in the Parish well in advance, then the parish response is good and ongoing .

These are some of the recent events we have organised:-

1992, 1st November: A united service at the Blendon Methodist church.
29 Nov - 1 Dec: Three days of prayer and politics for the Homeless Churches National Housing Coalition. (An inter-church group from Bexley lobbied Sir Edward Heath regarding the plight of the homeless.)
5th December: An Advent celebration at Baldwyn's Park Baptist Church
12th December: Inter-church carol singing in Bexley High street (E 155 was collected for Christian Aid)

1993 18-25 January: All churches participated in the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Every second Wednesday of the month there is "Taize Prayer" at St John Fisher's Catholic church, this is an inter-church occasion to which all are welcome.

5th March: Women's World Day of Prayer at St John Fisher (RC) and St Barnabas (C of E).

17-21 March. • "Billy Graham Venture - The Good News " , beamed by satellite from Germany at Baldwyn's Park Baptist church .

3rd April : Inter-church Palm Sunday procession.

9th April : Passion Play in the evening at Baldwyn's Park Baptist church.

11th Apr I I: Easter Day "Sunrise Service" at the U. R.C.

From my experience of Christian Unity Commission meetings I hope to encourage and promote:-

1. Together in Christ magazine,
2. Information and discussion on "Project '81" which involves a parish being visited by the South East Area Unity Commission members to encourage priests and people to take further steps towards Christian Unity,
3. The Pentecost Unity Novena with the hour of prayer in each parish,
4. The formation of a group of Inter-Church families, and
5. Attendance at the course on ecumenism.

Maureen Fitzpatrick.

LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING ABOUT BAPTISTS

On Friday, January 8th, the Rev Samuel Reading, Senior Baptist Minister in Canterbury gave a most interesting talk in St. Thomas' Hall, Burgate St. to the Christian Unity group. It was the second in a series of talks, which are planned to cover a period of two years, by ministers from the various Christian denominations in the city.

The Rev Samuel began by thanking the Christian Unity group for inviting him to share with them something of his personal journey. His talk was to cover historical, theological and personal aspects. He reminded his audience that he had started life as a teacher but that later he had switched to preaching.

The speaker then went on to say that Baptists, like other Christian denominations, were given their name in mockery. For example, the Methodists were given their name in ridicule, simply because they had a particular way of doing things; the Quakers, who were blessed under the eye of the Holy Spirit, became known as Quakers or Shakers. With time, however, these names have come to be revered. In the early days, Baptists were known as: 1. Anabaptists, 2. Separatists and 3. Ranters. The name Anabaptist is associated with being baptised a second time. Most of the first adherents of the Baptists were either Anglicans or Roman Catholics who were baptised a second time before they recommenced their pilgrimage.

The speaker told us how he was brought up in Kidderminster, which is famous for its carpets, and is also the home town of Richard Baxter, the man who had frequently ridiculed Baptists and who accused them of baptising naked virgins in the River Severn. This was, of course, a complete fabrication. Such a story however, provides evidence of the scorn in which Baptists were then held.

Baptists were called *Separatists*, just as Presbyterians were. Such an appellation was historically true, but theologically untrue. Ecumenism now shows that the things which bring Christians together are far greater than those which separate them. Baptists were also called *Ranters*. When the Rev Samuel was missioned in Maidstone parish years ago, he was reminded that the 'ranter' was still remembered. There was a man living in the town who knew his history well. and every time he met the Rev Samuel greeted him with a "Good morning/day ranting Reverend"!

Baptists began to preach in England in the mid-seventeenth century. Their first church, in Canterbury, was the Round House in Kings Street, which they occupied until 1840 and where they were known as "a company of professing Christian

people". When their numbers increased they moved to Blackfriars Priory. They moved to their present church in St. George's Place 126 years ago,

Baptists regard themselves as being fully orthodox and they share the Creeds with all Christians. Differences that make them Baptists include 1. The concept of church government and leadership. 2. Their concept of Baptism.

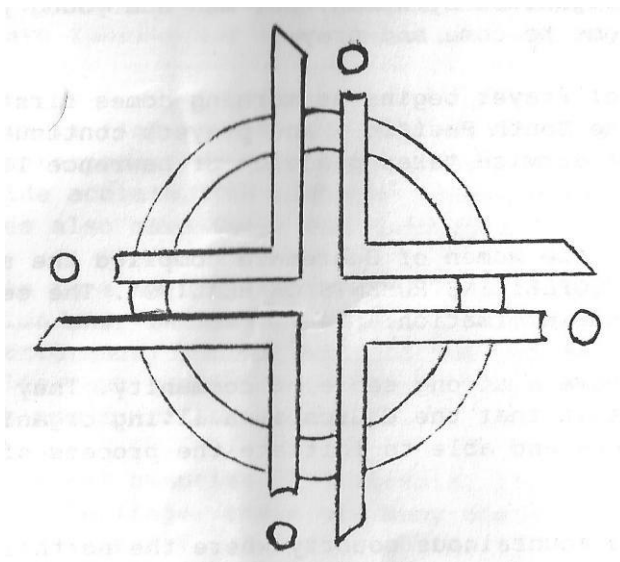
Baptists are committed to independence and to local Church unity. The conduct of members of the Baptist Church in an area depends on the Baptist minister. The second emphasis is on understanding the Christian belief. Baptists look for an intelligent approach in the people who present themselves for baptism and they concentrate on the substance of Ch.16 of Mark's Gospel from which they receive much inspiration. There are occasions, however, when they allow children as young as ten or eleven to be baptised. However they do not disregard churches which are devoted to infant baptism.

The Rev Samuel spoke about his own chequered spiritual journey. He mentioned that he came from a non-practising Anglican family. One day when he was only seven years of age, a youngster in his school asked him if he had been christened. He said he had not. The child replied "you are going to hell"! When young Samuel went home he spoke to his mother who told him he had not been baptized because he was born during the war. After that episode, Samuel went regularly to Sunday school where he came in contact with a variety of denominations including Methodists, Presbyterians and others. During this period he experienced many ups and downs but added that he had acquired a great respect for members of other churches. He mentioned that during the last ten years he had been immensely influenced by Anglicans and by Roman Catholics to whom he feels deeply indebted. His life has been considerably enriched by the spirituality of St. Francis de Sales and also by his stays in Israel and in East London.

During his time in Maidstone, the Rev Samuel went through a period of the "dark night of the soul". After reading Geoffrey Gerard's book "Away from it all" and encouraged by his wife, he decided to take a break for prayer and contemplation at Nashdom Abbey, Buckinghamshire and in the adjacent Cenacle Convent where he was warmly welcomed and experienced a spiritual renewal. He returned home and continued his work. He sees Unity as coming from the heart and not from the head and is saddened by the growth of nationalism in certain areas. The Rev Samuel talked about features of the Baptist church which the Christian Unity group hope to see on their visit for the morning service on Sunday, February 21st. He has been invited back to St. Thomas' after Easter to complete the session on learning about Baptists.

Sister Margaret Mary O'Grady, LSU

WOMEN'S WORLD DAY OF PRAYER 1993



Our parish priest, Fr James Nolan, had given permission for the Women's World Day of Prayer to be held at St Anthony of Padua church, Anerley, and one of our parish sisters, Sr Jo Harvey, had very kindly agreed to be our guest speaker.

I had been asked to lead and to organise this service through the local committee. This seemed at first to be a rather daunting task for me as I had not had much experience of the Women's World Day of Prayer. In fact my only experience of it was a small reading part which I had been given at Anerley Methodist church the year before. In order to remedy this situation I set about trying to find out as much as I could about this ecumenical venture and also about the people of Guatemala whose women had compiled this year's service, the theme of which was "GOD'S PEOPLE; INSTRUMENTS OF HEALING". The Women's world Day of Prayer is worldwide and inter-denominational. Christian Women come together to observe a common day of prayer each year on the first Friday of March. Christian women in a different country each year are chosen to write the service which is translated into over 1,000 languages. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the National Committee then prints the service sheets and dispatches them to local branches.

Through this Day of Prayer, women are encouraged to be aware of the whole world and no longer to live in isolation; to take up the burdens of other people and pray with and for them and to become more aware of their talents available for use

in the service of others. The services are organised by women, but men and young people and children are most welcome to come and pray.

The Day of Prayer begins as morning comes first over the islands of Tonga in the South Pacific - and prayers continue around the world until the last service takes place on St Lawrence Island off the coast of Alaska.

This year the women of Guatemala compiled the service on the theme: "GOD'S PEOPLE: INSTRUMENTS OF HEALING". The service sheet gave this background information:

"These women have a strong sense of community. They share with us their recognition that the Church is a living organism, concerned with human conditions and able to initiate the process of change and healing.

Guatemala is a mountainous country where the northern plains and Pacific seaboard enjoy a tropical climate, moderated by temperate seas. In the western mountains it is cold with warmer, fertile river valleys. Among its mountains are 33 volcanic peaks and innumerable beautiful lakes. With this wide variety of climate and habitat it is not surprising that the country is rich in flora and fauna, particularly orchids, the national flower. The national symbol is the brightly coloured Quetzal bird with its unique characteristic of being unable to live in captivity.

Guatemala is part of the cradle of one of the greatest civilisations, the Maya, which excelled in science and mathematics, particularly as applied to architecture, engineering and astronomy. It was the Maya who first developed a system of hieroglyphics and manufactured paper and books. They also had great artistic qualities, shown in their music, paintings, ceramics and pottery. The national book of the Quiché people which embodies their great mythological legacy, is one of the rarest relics of aboriginal thought.

The Maya were unknown to most of the rest of the world until 500 years ago, yet now archaeologists and scholars are discovering the inestimable richness and quality of their culture. After Columbus opened up the Americas to exploration, these lands were ruled by the Spanish until the independence of Central America in 1821. Later Guatemala became an independent nation. It is a multi-cultural country but unique in Central America because of the high percentage of indigenous people who still preserve their own language, customs, traditions and original dress. These people live mainly in the west and the women weave fabrics for their beautiful and distinctive costumes .

The native culture is rich in artistic expression of all kinds but there are also contemporary artists, musicians and writers who have achieved world-wide acclaim. The official language is Spanish but the indigenous peoples also have their own languages and dialects.

Although Guatemala is a secular state, its constitution protects freedom of religion and, in law, religious groups are free to do their work without interference. The majority of the population is considered Catholic, but traditional beliefs and practices also persist and there are considerable numbers of sects and faiths.

In spite of the natural beauties of Guatemala, its mild climate and the richness of its heritage, there are many obstacles to overcome. The high level of illiteracy, of infant mortality, the rapidly expanding population, urbanisation and crime have all led to deterioration in the quality of life. These problems must be solved before the children can be offered a better tomorrow.

The Prelude to the service included a welcome from the women of Guatemala, an invitation to pray that we will all be used by God as instruments of healing, and also the following information:

Guatemala is the cradle of a great civilisation, the Mayan civilisation. The Maya excelled in the fields of mathematics, architecture, engineering, astronomy and the fine arts. The Maya were experts in agriculture and they discovered and perfected their own means of subsistence. They had great knowledge of plants, especially medicinal ones, which they used effectively for healing the sick. These plants are still used in medicine today.

The Maya were also known for a profound sense of family unity which they continue to cherish. A strong sense of solidarity is very much part of Mayan culture; it allowed them to develop a communal life and greatly aided in the evolution of their traditions.

The Maya say, "let all be called; let there not be one or two groups among us that lag behind." '

The **Call to Worship** consisted of praise and thanksgiving to God, prayers and hymns of praise, Bible readings, readings on Guatemala, prayers of contrition, and praying voices from this land, etc. Sister Jo gave a very interesting talk on the theme. There was a special **Prayer of Thanksgiving and Dedication** and a final blessing.

As regards the local organisation of this special day of prayer, there were, of course, a few teething troubles. The biggest one for me was trying to find someone to play the music for us on an electronic keyboard, as our choir and

musicians were all working at that time of the day - 2 p.m. in the afternoon. However, this was sorted out, and when we held a rehearsal in the church a week beforehand. everything seemed to fall into place and our parish priest very helpful offering suggestions. I had chosen suitable leaders for the praying voices and a representative from each church to do the Bible readings, and had arranged collectors for the offertory and they all turned up: The UCM had offered to do the refreshments and we provided a crèche for the little ones, run by our Mother and Baby group.

I think this local event was one of the most successful ecumenical events we have ever staged in our parish. Although I have still to attend the follow-up meeting with the committee, I have been Informed that the numbers present at our church that day far exceeded any of the services held at other local churches in previous years. and everyone I have spoken to has told me how much they enjoyed it. It gave me great joy, and think I can vouch for other parishioners as well, to witness the coming together in prayer and the lovely, friendly atmosphere which prevailed between us and members of other churches Involved.

the theme of the service for next year is "GO, SEE AND ACT" and will be written by the women of Jerusalem (Palestine, Israel and Jordan). It will be at least another five years before it is held at St Anthony's again. Though!

Margaret Moloney.

