

SOMERSET CHURCHES TOGETHER ANNUAL GATHERING



St Andrews's Church, Taunton
Saturday, 20 October 2007
9.30 am – 1.00 pm

Churches in Community

An exploration of the growing opportunities there are for churches to work together in partnership with other faiths, the police, local authorities, primary care trusts and other agencies to build good and lasting community life.

The programme will include worship, displays and presentations by speakers from the *Hope 2008* project, *faithnet.southwest*, faith representatives from local strategic partnerships and others.

ALL WELCOME

Further details will be available in July

Contact 01225 872903 or sctog@blueyonder.co.uk

COPYDATE FOR THE JULY NEWSLETTER: 10 June 2007. Please send copy to Robin Dixon, County Ecumenical Officer, 25, Claverton Road West, Saltford, Bristol BS31 3AL. e-mail: sctog@blueyonder.co.uk

Knowing What We Are About

I am writing these words in the season of Lent with the promise of Easter still some weeks away. This is the season of the Christian year in which we have often been invited to engage in self denial although I have never understood why going without chocolates or a few luxuries in any way replicates the so called temptations of Jesus. Nor does that apparent act of devotion do anything to prepare ourselves to celebrate the gift of resurrection. Lent should be about self examination and self awareness not only for the individual but for the communities of faith to which we belong. The time that Jesus spends in the wilderness is about discerning the purpose that God has for him, who is he to be, what is he to do, how is he to achieve it? Until the purpose is clear, then it is impossible to fulfil it.

Alice Mann, a consultant with the Alban Institute in Washington DC writes: *'vital organisations tend to be clear and persistent (even stubborn!) about their fundamental reason for being but flexible about the means they employ to live out their particular calling'*.¹ She tells a story of a historic organisation involved in running orphanages. When the age of the orphanages passed it had to ask if its day had gone, work finished? The organisational review in the context of decline (of income, endowments, personnel etc.) went back to its reason for being. Running orphanages was not, actually, they decided the reason for being, but was itself an expression of their 'core purpose'. They discerned the 'deeper calling' of protecting and nurturing children whose parents were either unable or incapable of doing it. This (re) discovery of core purpose enabled them to see that their work was not done or irrelevant.

But – and it is a big but – fulfilling their core purpose in a changed environment entailed massive change. They sold all their properties and went, effectively, into a new business. The question is really about continuity as well as discontinuity. The organisation did not leave everything behind from the past. But they did distil their story to one essential, unrelinquishable vocation or identity. Once that was identified they were willing to change everything else to see the core vocation continue. It probably felt like Good Friday, but, in fact, they were nearer Easter Day than they thought. What arose was the child of the parent. But the parent organism did die. Churches, in seeking vitality, often reverse this procedure. They are doggedly persistent about means and fuzzy about ends. The question is, can we learn from this example?

¹ Alice Mann *Can our Church live?* (Herndon VA, Alban Institute 2006)

A clear sense of purpose has to infect every part of church life. It is no good having a Mission Statement that is yellowing with age on the notice board or given such prominence in the Church Magazine that people are so familiar with it that they stop reading it. Knowing what we are about has to be rooted deep within us so that the stranger and the visitor see it in us without needing to read a notice board or a magazine. The truth is that if the purpose that really drives us is to preserve a building or to raise money or to find volunteers for the jobs we no longer want to do, then people will pick that up quickly enough without being told. Once they pick that up, then all the Mission Statements in the world will not shift their opinion. It is the story told by our lives that matters, how confident we are in the promises of God that will determine our future, how willing we are to be followers of Christ that will shape our destiny. Unless people matter most to us and that shows in all that we say and do, then we will continue to decline.

So let us be clear about our purpose, about our call to build a kingdom and to tell a story of God's promises and of a love and a grace that overflows to embrace every woman, every man, every child, regardless of age or skin colour, or wealth or standing or any of the other divisions which human beings erect and God tears down. God's purpose is to unite the human race that all may know that they are beloved, that each may look at their neighbour and see a sister or a brother, another who is the child of God.

No matter how glorious or precious our past, without a sense of purpose we have no future.

David Grosch-Miller, South Western Synod Moderator, The United Reformed Church.

The South West Churches Regional Forum

The next conference to be organised by the Forum will be on
Wednesday 27 June 2007 at the Albemarle Centre, Taunton

People on the Move

Migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers - terms like these can be stigmatising and lead to confusion and sometimes conflict. Members of these groups often find themselves exploited. This conference will examine how migration affects the south west and how churches in the region might respond.

Look out for further details nearer the time on various websites, in news bulletins etc or contact vena@ccisr.org.uk

Bishop of Bath and Wells Welcomed at Clifton Cathedral During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The Bishop of Bath and Wells, Rt Revd Peter Price, was welcomed to Clifton Cathedral's Family Mass in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January. Bishop Declan Lang of Clifton celebrated.

Dean of Clifton Cathedral, Canon Robert Corrigan, said, 'I was delighted to welcome Bishop Peter to Clifton Cathedral for what I think was his first formal visit.'

In his sermon, Bishop Peter called for Christians to strive for reconciliation. He regretted the inability of people of different denominations to share Communion in spite of 'our common belief and the saving justice of God.' He said that his invitation to the Cathedral was a rich indication of the longing for reconciliation.

However, he said that the lack of full Communion illustrated something even more profound: that the poor, sick, oppressed and down trodden experience real hunger, real poverty, real oppression by powers and principalities that have not chosen the path to peace, reconciliation and harmony.

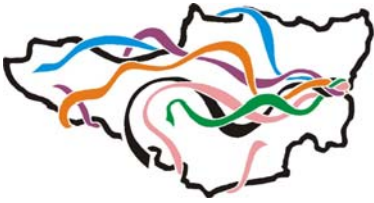
'Our theological poverty helps us, at some level, to enter into that reality,' he said. 'If we cannot gather around the same table for reasons of history and tradition, we nevertheless can strive after the justice of God for all humanity.'

'As we approach the season of Lent, could we not make our penitence for our sinfulness and division, not by feeling bad, but by thinking differently about the world and its need; understanding, at a deeper level, Jesus's identity with the poor, hungry, dispossessed, the war weary and not needed of this world?'

'If and when we do this, the substance of our traditions, the rituals we observe, the liturgies we repeat will find new life in the seeking of a world in which there is truly something better to come.'

New Chair for Somerset Churches Together

At Somerset Churches Together's Annual General Meeting in January, Revd Nigel Coles, Senior Regional Minister for the West of England Baptist Association, succeeded the Rt Revd Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton, as Chair of the Council. The Council thanked Bishop Declan for his enthusiastic commitment to its work throughout his term of office and warmly welcomed Nigel Coles as its Chair for the next three years.



'One Somerset' **Celebrating Difference**

Friday 27 April 2007

'One Somerset' is a **FREE** event happening on 27 April 2007 at **Taunton Racecourse**. It will be a **fun** day for all to experience and learn about the diversity present in our immediate region and to encourage understanding and integration in our society. The event is being organised by The Forum for Equality and Diversity in Somerset.

The event will open to the general public at 12 noon and continue through to the evening. Workshops will be running throughout the afternoon; there will be a blend of fun/participative workshops alongside some lecture-style ones. There will also be an 'information fair' with stands from each strand, plus a marquee on the parade ring as an area for displays, bands, and performances, etc.

Acts and workshops from the faith strand include:

- Reflections on The Life of the Spirit with Farhad Shahbahrami
 - An interactive presentation and workshop organised by the Baha'i Community of Somerset.
- Basic Beliefs (a comparison of 3 major religions)
 - Respected speakers and teachers from the Christian, Islamic and Buddhist faiths
- Demystifying Islam – Farooq Siddique
 - Farooq is a speaker respected by many people from different faiths. He clarifies many of the misconceptions of his faith and encourages a positive attitude towards a diverse world.
- Luminous
 - An Islamic youth band performing Nasheed's from all over the world
- Almost Elliot
 - A Christian Rock Band comprised of young people from Chard
- Somerset Baha'i Choir
 - A mixed race adult choir

Contributions from other strands include theatre, dance and awareness workshops. There are over 30 workshops, 16 performers and 100 information stands in all, together with 'The Man from Story Mountain'. Grandparents and parents should bring their young ones to the Creative Dance & Movement Play workshop with Carla Sheils. Check out our website for more (www.onesomerset.info). Workshops can be prebooked to be sure of getting a space, but otherwise just turn up on the day.



in our villages, towns & cities

What is Hope 2008?

Hope 2008 aims to encourage united, focused prayer and a year of activities. It aims to communicate the Gospel through words and actions. Its intention is to create a lasting legacy of both physical and spiritual change in the lives of communities and individuals.

Hope's purpose is to act as a catalyst to encourage, support and resource the churches in the UK to better serve the communities they are called to reach. Throughout the year, there will be Hope 'high points' where churches can organise activities, knowing that Christians across the country are doing the same. Leaders from many different denominations have endorsed the initiative. Somerset Churches Together's Annual Gathering in October 2007 in Taunton will feature a speaker from the project.

For more details, visit www.hope08.com. A promotional DVD is available.

Faith Communities' Response to Major Emergencies

An opportunity for leaders of faith communities & their nominated representatives to attend one of three FAMILIARISATION / BETA DAYS introducing /developing the Major Emergency Plan:

May 3 - Zion Baptist Church, Creech St Michael, Nr Taunton

May 9 - Avon & Somerset Police HQ, Portishead

May 11 - Yeovil Police Station

Contributors include representatives of the Emergency Services, the Local Authorities' Civil Contingencies Units, the Avon & Somerset Constabulary Operational Planning Dept and the Faith Communities. The days will be divided into two groups; those enquiring about joining the plan, and those already available for helping in a major emergency.

There is no charge for these events which run from 9:45am to 3:00pm but prior registration is essential. Arranged by ISR in co-operation with Avon & Somerset Constabulary.

**To register, please contact: sheila@ccisr.org.uk or
0117 9557430**

Radstock Churches Together: A Snapshot at Easter 2007

Norton Radstock parish is facing many changes at present, some so controversial and far-reaching that three church members joined neighbours to invoke the right to a 'parish poll' on 27 September 2006 under the 1972 Local Government Act. That a hundred people could turn out on a hot August night to support this demand is indicative of how strong the sense of community is, and how pressing the need is for ecumenical action to address our problems.

The parish poll concerned principles behind re-development and the much needed economic regeneration of this former mining and railways area where the 'dark satanic mills' have indeed become a 'green and pleasant land'. There is much unemployment among local families, as opposed to the incomers who commute to Bristol and Bath, so members of Radstock Churches Together have been active as school governors in both church-related schools and 'secular schools', and a very important part of ecumenical action in Radstock has been both informally supporting each other's youth programmes and holiday schemes, and employing Stu Brenchley, a part-time detached youth worker who works on the notorious Westfield estate, subject of a *Panorama* documentary. What the documentary did not show was all the excellent work that our young people do together, no more so than in the continuing Jubilee Debt campaign.

Whether the controversial Norton Radstock Regeneration scheme goes ahead or not, the Radstock Churches Together movement is endeavouring to address the issue of systematic evangelization of the new housing areas, and the pastoral care of the incoming families. This is above and beyond what can be achieved by joint leafleting, advertising, and the United Act of Witness every Good Friday when we march together from the miners' wheel in Radstock market place to Westfield Methodist Church. We are fortunate to have Harry Hughes working on a Radstock Churches Together website, which will link up the websites of the eight churches actively involved in RCT and their outstations or daughter churches. Since the Iron Age, the settlements in Norton Radstock have been on the hilltops, but the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Baptist churches have congregations based on the valley floor around the road junction and the former railway intersection. Greater use of the Internet may be the way to link the churches more effectively.

The quarterly united ecumenical services continue but the only attempt to address the theological issues behind the prayer 'That they may all be one' has come in the revival of the Lenten study course, which in 2006 was well supported although the subject was challenging: the doctrine of the Atonement. A more broadly based

popular approach to the question of what Christian love really means based on Tony Castle's book, 'By His Wounds' was less successful this year. Unfortunately we have not really taken on board the old slogan 'only to do separately what we cannot do together.'

Christian Aid week remains the focus of much ecumenical action, both in the primary schools and the ecumenical service, as well as with the highly popular Grand Cake Sale and a collection in the local co-operative store. Fairtrade goods are sold both there and through the churches. This year we are planting trees as part of the 'global warming' theme. Kilmersdon Village Church, which is part of Radstock Churches Together, supports this with a stall at Kilmersdon Village Day. A new and highly popular event, now in its third year, is the Whitfunday, which is held in Midsomer Norton for which we join Midsomer Norton churches.

The second major challenge is the impending retirement or transfer of several of the clergy within the next year. The Revd Colin Turner will be particularly missed after seventeen years in Radstock. Other clergy, such as the invaluable enthusiast, Fr Michael Clothier OSB of Downside Abbey, are having to cover ever larger 'parishes' so the core lay leadership in each church will be crucial to future development. The new Chair of Radstock Churches Together is a lay Reader (or lay preacher), Dr Eleanor Jackson, one of a growing number of 'early retired' people leading local community organizations who will strive to maintain the success and stability of Radstock Churches Together and move it forward in the service of the Lord.

Eleanor Jackson, Chair, Radstock Churches Together

Bath & Wells Diocese Now Has Its Own Environment Policy.



Preparing an environment policy for the diocese of Bath & Wells has been an exciting journey. Of course we could have made life easy for ourselves by re-writing the policies sent to us by other dioceses and other denominations. But it would not have worked. We needed one that was tailored to the unique geographical and social make up of Somerset churches.

Having said that, although the resultant policy and its support documents are geared primarily for the Anglican community, they will prove also to be a valuable tool for all church groups as they seek to work together within the individual parishes. The threat of climate change and the fight against it must involve everyone, and certainly it should involve all Christians as believers in a creator God.

For us, the story began in March 2006 when the Bishop's Council set up a working party to develop an environment policy for the diocese. The working party consulted widely across the diocese with deanery synods, diocesan boards, church groups and individuals, together with other denominations, the national church and other organisations.

It became clear that:

- there are a lot of church members struggling to relate their faith to the ecological crisis that we face,
- many other organisations and agencies are keen for the church to be involved in our society's response to what is happening to the world,
- these organisations want the church to make its particular contribution as a faith community and not simply as another environmental organisation,
- an environment policy could not simply be a checklist with boxes to tick as if our response was something that could be made and then finished,
- what was needed was for the diocese to make a commitment to a way of living and working.

The working party's full report consists of several documents: a core statement (the policy); a vision of how the diocese could be in a few years time if the commitment is made and kept to; background papers on theology and general principles for green living; recommendations for the diocese and parishes; resource papers, which can be posted on the internet and continually updated; examples of things that are already being done by individuals, churches and communities

At the beginning of March 2007, the policy was accepted wholeheartedly at the meeting of the Bath & Wells Diocesan Synod. It is believed by its authors to be the first policy presented to the synod that had cartoons scattered through it. We felt the seriousness of the subject it deals with justifies some light relief along the way.

But the real beauty of the document is that its core statement is essentially a single sheet of A5 paper. The rest of the documentation, though deep and wide-ranging in content, is simply there to back it up and to aid those of us who set out to put it into practice.

The one-page policy consists of three sets of bullet-pointed statements under the heading 1) We are aware that; 2) We believe that; 3) We commit ourselves to. For example the last of these reads as follows:

We **commit** ourselves to

- live simply that others may simply live;
- respect and celebrate God's creation in nature;
- radically reduce our carbon impact;
- facilitate and empower people and groups in Bath and Wells who want to put this into practice;
- lead by example from the centre.

Following acceptance of the policy, working party chairman Revd David Osborne said: 'This policy and the reports that go with it are working documents. We hope they will soon be widely available both in printed form and on the diocesan website to help local congregations and individual Christians to take on the commitment that the synod has made.'

The full report includes background papers developing the theological and ecological principles, as well as a number of recommendations on topics such as energy conservation and generation, travel, recycling, food, church services, churchyards and other church land.

'Our society is in a very serious situation and we need to change our way of living,' says David Osborne. 'But it is not without hope. When we were carrying out our research and working on the report, one of the most exciting moments was when the Schumacher Institute helped us think about how things might be if these kinds of suggestions were acted on. We then sketched out a description of what we thought a future eco-diocese might look like.'

In researching and drafting the policy, the diocesan working party has worked closely with the Somerset Churches Together Environment Group which continues in its valuable role of seeking to assist all church communities within Somerset on matters relating to the environment, climate change and global warming.

Brian Kellock, Bath and Wells Diocese Environment Working Party



MENTAL HEALTH CHAPLAINCY

The Chaplains remain active on your behalf although we are sad to report that Alison Vercoe, who worked one session a week on a young persons unit, has just resigned to take up a fulltime post in schools in the Wellington area. For the time being the Revd Ken Coles (West Region) will provide cover on this unit, in addition to the other units he visits in Bridgwater and Taunton.

Fay Wilson-Rudd continues to visit the units in Wells and Yeovil, with occasional visits, as required, to Chard. Increasingly both Chaplains are being asked to visit 'service users' at home. This can provide a valuable link between the 'service user' and a local faith community.

Within the Partnership the Chaplains are involved in working on many matters, including Equality & Diversity, particularly with regard to how government requirements affect Somerset Partnership's Spirituality Policy. This work is both challenging and stimulating as it becomes more and more necessary to ensure that the spiritual needs of all service users, carers and staff are met.

Both Ken Coles and Fay Wilson-Rudd will be involved in the Guild of Health workshops being held in Wells Cathedral on 28 April. There are many other interesting workshops listed in the programme and we are sure this will be a stimulating day.

We ask for your prayers as we seek to explore new ways of helping staff discover their own spirituality. We anticipate being part of a Conference Planning Group for an event to be held sometime during 2007-08 and further information will be made available to you once we have details of the programme.

Finally, please consider attending one of the consultations that will be held later this year by Somerset Partnership as they seek to achieve Foundation status as a mental health trust. It would be good to have church people stand as Trustees or Governors. Again, we will find a way of letting you know when these consultations will be held.

If your church would like further information about the chaplains' work do please ask one or other of us to visit – we would be very pleased to have the opportunity of sharing our experience with you.

Fay Wilson-Rudd, Chaplain – East Region

Noticeboard

A Day on Healing will take place in Wells Cathedral on 28 April 2007. The Guild of Health, an ecumenical organization serving Christ and the community within the Church's Healing Ministry, will be holding a teaching and study day on wide aspects of Christian Healing Ministry with addresses, workshops, fellowship and prayer. Speakers include the Rt Revd Peter Price, Bishop of Bath and Wells, the Rt Revd Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton and the Rt Revd John Pritchard, Bishop of Jarrow (President of the Guild of Health). Please bring a picnic lunch including drinks. The cost will be £12. Further details are available on 01722 710487.

Centenary of Glastonbury Abbey. Glastonbury Abbey will be open free of charge from 2.30 pm on 26 May 2007 to mark the centenary of the Abbey. A service will be held at 3.30 pm with Bishop Peter Price in attendance, the Abbot of Downside and representatives from Clifton Cathedral in Bristol. For further details contact Francis Thyer, Deputy Custodian, Glastonbury Abbey on 01458 832267.

One Planet – Fit for Life? Caring for the Natural World is a weekend workshop led by Mary Colwell and Sean McDonagh on 18-20 May 2007. The weekend will be interactive, with times of reflection, discussion, prayer and liturgy. Location: Emmaus House, Clifton Hill, Bristol BS8 1BN. Cost: £130 residential. Booking forms etc from administration@emmaushouse.org.uk or www.emmaushouse.org.uk

The **Fellowship of Reconciliation** is an international ecumenical Christian peace organization founded at the beginning of the First World War. For over 90 years, it has committed itself to building a world order based on love and justice rather than force or war. The Fellowship can provide speakers for churches in your area on Christian peacemaking and the wider work of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. For more information, contact office@for.org.uk or phone 01865 748796.

The national ecumenical newsletter, **Pilgrim Post**, has ceased publication. A monthly e-bulletin is now available as an alternative. Put your name on the distribution list and keep in touch with the wider ecumenical scene without paying a penny! E-mail: news@cte.org.uk. For those who have no access to e-mail, a quarterly printed newsletter is available. Contact Edith Steele at CTE, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH or phone 020 7529 813.

Christian Aid Week is 13-19 May. The theme this year is all about growth – how Christian Aid's partners and campaigning help people grow their way out of poverty. Contact E Perry on 01935 850849.

Noticeboard

Would you like to join with others who are praying and working for caring for the environment? There are two examples of such groups: one is the **Christian Ecology Link Community of Prayer** (the commitment is to pray at the same time on a Wednesday and to contribute to a growing collection of prayers on the website). Also, there is the CEL Daily Prayer Guide, again available from the website: www.christian-ecology.org.uk

Finance ReDirect has negotiated a unique Public Liability insurance scheme designed for Churches Together groups who have an annual turnover of less than £10,000 and have less than 50 member churches. The scheme is underwritten by Royal and Sun Alliance plc. Finance ReDirect is the trading company of the registered charity Create. Further information about the cover is available from Samantha Thapar on 01234 358535 and at www.financedirect.co.uk/insuranceproducts/churchfellowship/ctg.htm

Friends of Somerset Churches and Chapels have a new website at www.fscandc.org.uk The Trust is able to offer grants to historic churches of all denominations within the county of Somerset. It also organizes an annual Sponsored Bike Ride and Walk which this year will take place on Saturday 8 September. Phone 01963 440611 for further information about the event.

Abolition by Richard S Reddie (Lion Hudson, £9.99) tells the story of the slave trade in the British Empire and examines the movement to bring it to an end.

A **Regional Alpha Training Day** will take place at Canon Street Christian Centre in Taunton on Saturday 28 April from 9.40 am to 4.00 pm. Conference speakers will be from Holy Trinity Brompton, London and also the local area. To find out more, contact Andy Adam on 01823 412828 or email: andy@aeadam.plus.com

Growing Together in Unity and Mission is the Agreed Statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM), building on forty years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue. Part 1 lists the achievements in Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue since the visit of Archbishop Michael Ramsay to Pope Paul VI and the subsequent conversations. Part 2, entitled Towards Unity and Common Mission, points to various ways in which the agreements can be applied locally by both Churches. Published by SPCK in 2007 at £7.99.

Dates for Your Diary

APRIL

28 **Regional Alpha Training Day.** Contact Andy Adam on 01823 412828.

28 **A Day on Healing in Wells Cathedral.**

MAY

13-19 **Christian Aid Week.** Contact Elizabeth Perry, Somerset Representative, on 01935 850849 or eperry@christian-aid.org

26 **Centenary of Glastonbury Abbey.** Contact Francis Thyer on 01458 832267.

JUNE

3 **Environment Sunday.** For worship material etc, contact A Rocha on 0208 574 5935 or email: uk@arocha.org or visit www.arocha.org

15-17 **Nationwide Quiet Weekend.** Information from the Retreat Association on 020 7357 7736 or email info@retreat.org.uk or visit www.retreats.org.uk

18-24 **Refugee Week.** Visit www.refugeeweek.org.uk

JULY

15 **The Big Picture, Taunton.** Exciting Christian Aid Fund-Raising Event in Taunton. Contact Clive Haward on 01823 481008 or visit www.thebigpicture2007.com

Visit www.cte.org.uk, the re-designed website of Churches Together in England. It's easy to use, full of information and packed with useful links.

Somerset Churches Together Newsletter is published by Somerset Churches Together as a service to the churches and ecumenical groups in Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset and North Somerset. Views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of Somerset Churches Together.