

For Friends involved in local ecumenical and interfaith work

Published by the Committee For Christian & Interfaith Relations of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain to encourage the exchange of news and views

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Opinions in articles and letters are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent those of this Committee.

## Bombs in London:

### Editor

At hearing of the reality of violence in London, I felt sympathy, horror, a turning to God to reach the still centre once again, but it only truly became real to me when I learnt that some of the bombers had stayed within two miles of my home while they were in North Wales; do I always need that immediacy to feel how vulnerable people in London must feel? I have re-read Advices and Queries with great attention to numbers 32 and 33. "In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations?.....Bear witness to the humanity of all people...Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society...?"

The Interfaith Network has put out a press release. Part of it reads:

"In general, the UK enjoys good inter faith relations and is a place where there is respect for the traditions of different faiths and for the beliefs and practices of different communities and for their places of worship. In times of tension, however, faith communities can find themselves vulnerable in a number of ways. Individually, they have their own systems for response. It is vital that there is also a shared response and mutual support where this is needed. Looking After One Another offers guidelines for faith communities to respond jointly to threats to their safety and security."

'Looking after one another' can be downloaded from the network's website: [www.interfaith.org.uk](http://www.interfaith.org.uk)

Please let Marigold Bentley on [marigoldb@quaker.org.uk](mailto:marigoldb@quaker.org.uk), know if you would be happy to receive this newsletter by email. We are trying to reduce the amount of paper copies produced.

## The Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations

This is a minute from our April meeting, which we feel it is useful to have more widely read.

"Quaker contribution to the ecumenical movement: We welcome Chris Cooke who has introduced this topic for us. She has reminded us that we are called to be who we are. We have a different view of how to organise the church and of authority; we have our testimonies and the experience of working in difficult areas; we have an approach to theology which is undogmatic; we have experience of persecution and of being excluded, and of the cost of unpopular principles. We are able to live with risk-taking and uncertainty. Most importantly, we have the meeting for worship which is the heart and foundation of all that we do. We can offer our silence in which we expect to meet the direct presence of God, not only in spoken ministry but also as a silent presence. We are called upon to share this understanding. Chris has found that members of other churches and faiths respond to this, recognising an articulation of what is within their own experience.

In our consideration we have exchanged experience of our encounters with God and others. What is it that brings us together? Silence is one contribution and the use of our meeting houses is another. The words 'friend' and 'meeting' express much of what we have to offer – a place of encounter and welcome where new ideas can be expressed in freedom and without fear, where questions are acceptable and where it is not necessary always to be right. We also still are in a situation where our practice of equality between women and men and the temporary nature of authority in the Society are vital and important witness.

We are reminded that all our work is spiritual and that we are involved in part because of the contribution we can make to peace, justice, and the building of community. We know that we learn and receive from others, and openness is important. But we have a tradition which enables us to show an authentic and prophetic way of Christian discipleship and, as well as an understanding and sympathy for other paths, we need to have confidence in our own way. We can do this when we trust and follow our leadings, setting out not so much to be 'the Quaker representative' as to be the servant of God in the place where we are called to be".

## Interfaith Network

### Chas Raws

Chas Raws reports on the Inter Faith Network 2005 Annual National Meeting, 'Connecting for the Future: Young People and Inter Faith Relations in Britain': "All the young participants communicated a real enthusiasm for the interfaith projects in which they had participated." It is important that we support these projects and see that, for most young people, co-operation and respect for each other are the way they wish to go.

## World Council of Churches (WCC)

### Religious leaders look to recast interreligious dialogue "in humility and hope": Margaret Boland

Representatives of the world's main faith communities have proposed reshaping the approach to global interreligious dialogue to face threats posed by the current world context more effectively. "Recasting interreligious dialogue as a practice of humility and hope offers a way of building greater trust," concluded participants in an international conference on a "critical moment in interreligious dialogue" convened by the Geneva-based WCC, 7-9 June 2005. "Together may we seize this critical moment and help transform its perils into a pilgrimage of faith that will guide us to a more just, compassionate and peaceful future," agreed the representatives from ten of the world's religious traditions involved in the event.

The conference outlined specific strategies which aim to shift the emphasis of interreligious relations from dialogue to common action, including new education and training programmes and exchanges which foster a culture of dialogue.

Symbolic actions which promote healing of historical memory, new structures and networks, and action plans at the national and regional levels were upheld as practical ways to follow up.

The conference also enabled open discussion of divisive issues, notably those of religious violence and conversion, and called for repentance and humility that "opens a way to move from a dialogue of strangers to a dialogue of neighbours". Participants expressed caution about understandings of dialogue that diminish particular identities and traditions, and that generate suspicion and hostility to dialogue within religious communities.

Referring to the conference as a "landmark event", the WCC leadership reiterated the strengthened commitment of the worldwide fellowship of Christian churches to interfaith dialogue and understanding. "Dialogue with other faiths has become a core issue for the WCC," confirmed WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia. "We can only be effective and successful in our search for hope if we work together. Together, we can go far towards restoring hope for another possible and better world in which all people may experience abundant life in dignity."

Rev. Dr Hans Ucko underlined the specific nature of this event among the many global multi-faith initiatives. "This event was unique because it sought to assess dialogue, and looked at ways of fostering relations which are more realistic and less idealistic. We confirmed the commitment of those involved, and this adds impetus to our own Christian engagement in dialogue."

### The Pope's commitment to WCC

A three-point agenda for further collaboration - understanding of the church, spirituality, and ecumenical formation - was proposed by World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia to Pope Benedict XVI during their meeting at the Vatican. Kobia also invited the pope to visit the WCC headquarters "as yet one more concrete step in our long journey towards visible unity". In his remarks, Benedict XVI assured Kobia that the church he heads is "eager to continue cooperation" with the WCC, and expressed hope that the visit had been "fruitful, strengthening the bonds of understanding and friendship between us". "The commitment of the Catholic Church to the search for Christian unity is irreversible," said the pope. The three above-mentioned "areas of capital importance" for collaboration were at the heart of Kobia's remarks to Benedict XVI at what was a first meeting since both took up their current positions.

# Cytûn Women's Network

Catherine James

The second meeting of the network was arranged by the Quakers in the group, and our Friend Christine Trevett of South Wales MM addressed us on "*Finding our Voices as Women*". She spoke with the authority of great knowledge of the history of the Church, and with the practical knowledge of having made her way in what was seen as a "*man's world*". Her anecdotes were greeted with the laughter of recognition, and her analysis of the position of women and their responses to the situations in which they find themselves with great interest. She spoke also of a friend of hers, living in Palestine, who is dealing successfully with so many more pressures and difficulties than any of the audience have to contend with, giving us a perspective on the improvement in the position of women and on the problems some still have to face in many churches in Britain. Those of us who are Quakers thanked God for Margaret Fell and the many long years of the parallel women's meetings which eventually led to the equality we take for granted. The next meeting is on November 10th.

## Launch of new book at Yearly Meeting

The editor is very happy to recommend the new book, "*Patterns and Examples – Experiencing the Spirit of Other Faiths*" (ISBN 1 85072 336 2) which is edited by two members of the committee, Peter Jarman and Eva Tucker, but published under the auspices of the Hampstead Interfaith Group.

It is a series of articles by Quakers and others who have had their own spirituality and spiritual journey enriched by close contact with other faiths, including Buddhism, Christianity (from the point of view of non-Quakers), Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. The book was launched at BYM while the Interfaith visitors were present and generated great interest. Copies are available from the Quaker Bookshop at £9.00, plus £1.20 postage and packing.

## The Talking Wall

The QCCIR "Talking Wall" at Yearly Meeting in York was a great success. A future edition of CIRcular will report on at least some of the

many interesting accounts of Interchurch and Interfaith work sent in before Yearly Meeting and written up on the wall during the week in York. It is obvious that much good work by Friends is ongoing throughout Britain. We hope it can become more widely known.

## Christians and Jews

Mary Cook

Would Progressive and Orthodox Jews be more at ease with Christian worship which followed traditional patterns of Christian belief and ritual rather than be welcomed at specially adapted services which duck the issue of belief and tend to be neutral and inauthentic?

## Churches Together in England

Michael Gunton

In November 2002, participants in the more than 800 Local Ecumenical Projects (LEPs) in the UK came together to take stock of, and learn from, their experiences: of sharing buildings, being part of joint congregations, working with or in industrial or urban missions, or similar local ecumenical projects. This lived experience, in a variety of settings, is immensely valuable, often taking discussion of issues beyond existing denominational guidelines, and participants to new levels of co-operation and fellowship.

Phrases such as 'a theology of diversity in our unity', 'the diverse working of the Holy Spirit', and 'our provisional perception of God's truth' will probably appeal to Friends, but we should also be challenged by what 'radical hospitality', 'self-denial', and 'self-giving' might mean in our own contexts and situations.

Members of GLU (the Churches Co-ordinating Group for Local Unity) studied and discussed the reports of the meeting, and drew out key themes which became the basis of the document which follows (which was discussed and revised at several GLU meetings). It is hoped that the document will both inform and prompt discussion among all those interested in LEPs (existing participants, and anyone interested in setting up an LEP), and all who are monitoring this field of ecumenical activity or active in similar ecumenical environments.

(see the diagram on page 4)

## **Towards a Vision for Local Ecumenical Living (In Local Ecumenical Partnerships and More Generally)**

Communities of Christian Disciples  
drawing on all the riches of different Christian spiritualities, releasing God's  
transforming power for the healing of humanity  
as individuals and in their relationships with each other and with God.



### **The Spirituality of Sacrifice**

Working out prayerfully what is meant, in the practical experience of Christian discipleship, by 'radical hospitality'

Working out how "self-denial" might play out as a Christian virtue in the context of our church structures

Working out cost of 'self-giving' when sharing in 'ecumenical team working' and our calling to be at one with the whole of humankind.



### **A deeper understanding of team working**

In 'ecumenical teams' (as between accredited ministers)

In 'collaborative ministry' (as between ordained and lay)

And in the relating of the whole church community, led by the Spirit in mission

In learning through prayer and daily living what it means to be a Gospel people, able to communicate within today's complex cultures



### **A theology of diversity in our unity**

Drawing on the diverse working of the Holy Spirit,

our provisional perception of God's truth,

the way in which context and vocation shape church life, our insight into 'complementarity', what we give and what we receive,

the necessity for porous boundaries (not impermeable barriers) for healthy living, coherent relationships and common purpose – thus facilitating interplay,

recognising that people's expectations and experiences of church may differ from our own,

experiencing a living dialogue leading to transformation and renewal.

## **Change of Editor**

This is the last edition of CIRcular which I will edit. It has been a pleasure to hear from readers about the work of local groups in the fields of Interfaith and Interchurch. I hope that people will continue to send news in to the new editor.

She is Linda Pegler, 15 Wakefield Close, Sutton Coldfield B73 5UT, email: pegler@blueyonder.co.uk; the new sub-editor is Mary Cook.

Linda wants to begin by exploring the limits of Interchurch and Interfaith work. There has been, for example, much discussion in some areas about the inclusion of Paganism in Interfaith groups. In some local ecumenical partnerships, Friends have found themselves excluded for being unacceptable to the beliefs of other churches.

She would be glad to have contributions from readers about their experience of working "on the margins". Edition number 20 is likely to come out in early November.