

REPORT OF ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2007

INTRODUCTION

The ecumenical movement is about “being church”. It will always remind the churches to fulfil their being and vocation in the context of changing times and circumstances.

Mainstream Western Christianity is ageing with numbers falling and Christianity is re-emerging with new faces and forms. Major changes are taking place inside the churches: the institutional church is losing much of its strength and impact on society; tensions and divisions in many churches on ethical, social and pastoral issues are creating confusion and estrangement; the divide between “belonging” and “believing” is growing; and we hear more and more in the mass media about the church in “confusion”, the “polarised” church and the “silent” church. Many people seem to be disappointed with what they perceive as the incapacity of the institutional church to respond to the challenges and problems of new times. They are looking for a church that is capable of meeting their spiritual yearnings; a church that can serve their pastoral needs; a church that can provide answers to their questions.

In the light of the above observations, working ecumenically, will continue to be the priority of the Ecumenical Relations Committee. Its Mission is made stronger by the involvement of people with diverse backgrounds, traditions, and affiliations. Greater support, more people served, and more people coming together to reach out in ministry means the love of God is spreading, the basic idea behind this mission.

THE COVENANT WITH THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

On Saturday, 16 September around 300 people gathered in Dunblane Cathedral to witness the signing of a Covenant between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland. The Covenant had been signed by the Moderators and Clerks of both Assemblies. By signing the Covenant the two churches were saying that ‘the time has come for us to put the divisions of the past behind us and to seek to journey onwards as companions on the way to ever closer unity’. We recognise it is more important to seek to work together for the good of Scotland and of the Scottish people, than to maintain divisions that are no longer relevant in today's society.

It was significant to have present representatives from all the major denominations in Scotland as well as the Lord Lieutenant of Stirlingshire and the Solicitor General who represented the First Minister. The cost of the day was £2,069 and we were responsible for half of this.

Implementation Group

It had been agreed there should be an Implementation Group with three from each denomination and it was agreed we would be represented by the Convener, Vice-convener and secretary. The Church of Scotland has appointed as their representatives the Convener of the Ecumenical relations Committee, Depute Clerk to the General Assembly and a lay member of the Ministries Council. This group would be responsible for monitoring developments both at local and national levels.

Working Ecumenically

The committee is aware that congregations are working together in a number of places and felt it would be helpful to have more information about what is going on. Session

Clerks were asked to give information on cooperation with neighbouring Church of Scotland congregations and with congregations of other denominations.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC) - NINTH ASSEMBLY

In last year's report to the General Assembly the Committee expressed its indebtedness to the Rev. Colin C Brown who was prepared to make the long journey to southern Brazil and to take his place in our name alongside the 1200 core participants and the many others who welcome the opportunity to share in such large and inspirational events.

The committee also expressed its desire that the challenging implications of such a theme of this Assembly which was appropriately cast in the form of a prayer - 'God in your grace transform the world' –should be explored by Presbyteries and congregations to discover how it should impinge upon our witness as Churches.

The committee enquired into what arrangements presbyteries were making to invite Mr Brown to report. It might be possible for the presbyteries to arrange an evening to focus on ecumenical matters. This could cover both global and local ecumenism. The Presbytery of the West had held a significant evening on the topic of Ecumenical matters and the committee would commend them for their interest and enthusiasm.

ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND (ACTS)

The Committee has continued to be actively involved in the various networks established by ACTS. Rev Ian A Boa has replaced Rev A Douglas Scrimgeour on the Scottish Churches Forum. The Forum expressed appreciation for the valuable contribution made by Mr Scrimgeour.

General Secretary

The Rev. Dr. Kevin Franz, General Secretary, resigned in early 2007 and has begun a new appointment, with the Religious Society of Friends. As a result, consideration required to be given to:

- a) the steps which would be necessary to recruit a new General Secretary; and
- b) the interim arrangement which would need put into place for the period when the General Secretary post would be vacant.

We would like to record our denomination's warm appreciation to Dr. Franz for his eight years of service as General Secretary of ACTS and his willingness to attend and participate in our General Assembly.

The Ecumenical Audit

The Ecumenical Audit was a significant paper which focussed on ecumenical activity in Inverness, Paisley and St Andrews. It distinguished between occasional joint acts of worship and working ecumenically which happens rarely. It was noted that city-wide groups do not really work and that such activity is better done in local areas. No congregation in the areas examined is involved in mission ecumenically. There had been problems in getting questionnaires to those involved in ecumenical initiatives and the sample was relatively small. There was nothing very surprising in what was reported but it did confirm what people had felt to be the case. A number of issues are raised which need to be addressed.

The Scottish Ecumenical Gathering

In addition to the many ongoing activities promoted and serviced by ACTS, a major event - the Scottish Ecumenical Gathering 2006 - took place in the Bells Sports' Centre on

Saturday, 17th June. The overall theme was 'Seeds of Hope'. An impressive array of keynote speakers was invited to explore different aspects of the theme and a wide ranging programme of supporting activities for young and old. The event went well but the numbers were disappointing with only about 800 attending. It was felt this was partly due to clashes of date, the fact it was in Perth and inadequate publicity. The loss was in the region of £20,000. It should be noted that in the ACTS budget for 2007 it had been agreed that it included £10,000 pa (for 3 years) towards a future Ecumenical Gathering.

Future Ecumenical Event

'Towards 2010' was mentioned and events are being planned to mark the centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference. There will be a Scottish dimension to this which Rev Douglas Nicol is coordinating and it is anticipated we will be asked to appoint a representative to a planning group.

Funding of Ministry in Local Ecumenical Partnerships

The ACTS National Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships set up a small working group to devise a common system for meeting the cost of Ministry in Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships where a minister is serving in a congregation or congregations of more than one denomination. With each denomination handling matters in a slightly different way, it was recognised it would be helpful to devise an agreed approach which would assist when any new arrangement is being set up.

The following principles were agreed by the National Sponsoring Body for congregations involved in such LEP's:

- a. Allocations for single congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) should be treated separately from allocations for other congregations in the various denominations.
- b. There should be no unfair advantage or disadvantage over congregations in the denomination which are not part of a single congregation LEP.
- c. Payment of stipend, national insurance and pension costs to the denomination(s) providing the minister(s) should be the priority in determining allocations for single congregation LEPs, but not necessarily at 100% of costs.
- d. The total payment to the denominations involved in the single congregation LEP for work funded centrally/regionally, over and above the costs of local ministry, should be divided equally among the denominations concerned.
- e. The total amount of contribution to ministry/ central/ regional costs made by the LEP should be the same irrespective of the denomination(s) supplying the ministry.
- f. There should in all cases be provisions agreed in the event of dissolution of the LEP.
- g. The arrangements above should be reviewed on the fifth anniversary of their first implementation.

In the light of these principles, the following proposals were agreed by by the National Sponsoring Body:

1. Ministers in LEPs should be paid by the denomination(s) providing the minister(s) from central payroll at the rates applicable in that denomination(s);

2. Funding allocations should be calculated by formula based on the average income of the LEP over the previous three financial years;
3. The proportion of income to be included in this payment should be set at 67% with the remaining income of the congregation (s) covering the cost of local working expenses;
4. Grants to support the costs of ministry in a LEP should be given where required; and
5. The remainder of the (67%) allocation, after deduction of the costs of ministry should be divided equally among the denominations participating in the LEP to support central and regional work undertaken by each denomination.

These proposals are being brought for approval to the General Assemblies etc of the member Churches of ACTS.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSE

In addition to the regular ongoing activities of the House an Interim Management Group continues to explore what can be done to secure the future viability of the House and its continuing contribution to the ecumenical dimension of the Churches' work and witness.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (CTBI)

It has been a challenging year for CTBI, however it is felt that the situation at CTBI is moving forward and this is largely due to the strong working relationship and leadership of Rev Bob Fyffe and Rev Stephen Cutler. Governance issues continue to be a major item of work as relationships with the Networks and Commissions are clarified and the question of who people represent when they are CTBI trustees is worked through. The first AGM and Senior Representatives Forum took place in May when Rev Dr Sam Kobia was the keynote speaker. The CTBI staff have discerned three key themes for programmatic work in the next period, these are Climate change/environment; Migration and movement of people; Culture identity and the public space and a process will be put in place to ensure these themes are owned by the National Ecumenical Instruments and member churches. Work continues with the General Secretaries meeting clarifying the nature of the new relationships between the ecumenical instruments.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES NATIONAL SPONSORING BODY FOR LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS

While the national body continues to examine some of the complex practical issues associated with the development of LEPS, it has also been concerned in recent months to set up nine geographically determined Regional Advisory Groups whose function will be to give guidance and support to existing LEPS in their area and to assist congregations contemplating action along those lines. Presbyteries have been invited to nominate representatives to those Advisory Groups where appropriate. The committee congratulate the Rev Colin Brown on his appointment as Convener of the National Sponsoring Body.

VISIT TO GENEVA

Representatives of Scottish Churches are visiting Geneva from 20 – 25 April and will visit WCC, WARC and CEC offices. It was agreed Rev I Boa should represent us.

3RD EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL ASSEMBLY

This Assembly, organised by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops Conferences takes place at Sibiu, Romania from 4 – 9 September. The committee agreed it would be good to be represented and it was agreed to appoint Rev I A Boa.

VISITS TO OTHER CHURCHES

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the visits undertaken by the Moderator of the General Assembly to the Methodist Church of Great Britain Conference, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Synod of the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland. Rev A McMillan also attended a meeting of Church leaders with Mr J McConnell, First Minister. Rev J Marshall represented the church at the Scottish Baptist Assembly, Rev S J W Matthews represented the Church at the Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church and at the Assembly of the United Reformed Church held in Exeter.

CONCLUSION

The Committee wishes to express its sincere appreciation of the time and effort expended by so many at both local and national levels in the development and maintenance of inter-church understanding and activities. We are grateful to all those who, in this ecumenical journey, strengthen our faith, nurture our reflection, supported our actions and enrich our service.

In the name of the Committee

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| ANDREW McMILLAN | Convener |
| IAN A BOA | Vice -convener |
| JOHN O FULTON | Secretary |