

REPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2012

INTRODUCTION

Over this past year, it has become increasingly clear that the future of our country, in terms of economic growth, is inextricably linked to the economic situation within other key European countries. The global financial network ensures, through a ripple effect, that any disturbance in one section of the network will have an impact on the rest. Many ordinary people across Europe are being affected. The sight of a woman in desperation and hopelessness, about to jump from her apartment in Athens, must surely focus our minds on what our response as a Church should be. Our society needs hope - a hope that is seen and experienced through a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. The message of the gospel needs to be heard.

Within that context, what do the people in our society see? A Church which is divided and dividing, fragmented by theological dispute, historical division, and social misunderstanding at a time when a clear message of hope is required to help people address the emerging life issues that this significant global crisis is creating.

Was this what Jesus prayed for in the garden of Gethsemane?

"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

(John 17:22-23)

We have a responsibility to work towards diminishing the things that divide and promoting the issues that bind us, not for our own sake but for those outwith the Church, so that they can see Christ, and Christ only, in all the things that we do for the other person.

This work can take place in many situations but clearly lies at the heart of any ecumenical work we engage in. As Paul writes, our work proceeds *"until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:13)

That level of maturity is achieved through the development and deepening of our Christian relationships, within and across all boundaries. Such ecumenical work, ranging from grassroots to denominational level, is overseen by the Lund Principle 1952, which *"affirms that Churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."*

In Porte Alegre 2006, the World Council of Churches declared that all should *"continue to facilitate deep conversations among various churches [so that] the honest sharing of commonalities, divergences, and differences will help all churches to pursue the things that make for peace and build up the common life."*

We must therefore be prepared to engage in discussions with those who hold a different theological position, with an openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is when we engage with others, in an openness to change, that we exhibit the movement towards the unity that Christ desires. By doing so, the diversity of the Church truly becomes our strength and others will be inspired by the respect, understanding and love that we show to one another.

ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND (ACTS)

This past year has been a very turbulent but focussed year for ACTS. The journey since Swanwick has been very fruitful but it has become apparent that the current approach will not be able to produce the level of commitment that is needed to advance the ecumenical agenda in Scotland. There is a need to deepen our relationships, to explore the language that we use and to move on from the Inter-Church approach of the past. An outline of the key events is given below.

The 21st Anniversary of ACTS formation was marked with a Service of Reflection and Commitment on October 26th 2011. During the service, reflections on the past, present and future of ACTS were shared.

A Thanksgiving Service for the contribution of Scottish Churches House to the work of ecumenism in Scotland and beyond was held in Dunblane Cathedral on Sat 21 Jan 2012. It was a very moving occasion which reflected both the sadness and thanksgiving for all the work that was achieved at SCH.

Representatives of the Member Churches of ACTS met frequently during the year to discuss issues relevant to, and to make important decisions for, ecumenical development in Scotland. The overwhelming issue that was faced involved the future of Scottish Churches House. Following the decision to end the business activities of the House on July 15th 2011, the tendering process, set up by the Trustees, did not find a group that would take on a lease for the use of the House. The Members' Meeting then met to formulate a way forward for the buildings. It was decided that the main building be put up for lease/sale and Leighton House be retained and a 'visioning' process tried to formulate what form the conversion of Leighton House would take. However, after having a period of time to reflect on that decision, the Member Churches decided that the most prudent way forward, given the financial constraints on ACTS, was to put the whole Scottish Churches House complex up for lease/sale.

It should be noted that the journey ACTS has travelled in reaching this decision has been long and tiring. Much effort and emotion has been expended by the Churches, the ACTS staff and the wider ecumenical scene. A special mention should be given to Br Stephen Smyth (ACTS General Secretary) and Rev Lindsey Sanderson (Asst. General Secretary) for the dignified and respectful way in which they have moved this process forward.

Having reached a consensus on the way forward for Scottish Churches House, the Member Churches decided that it is a fitting time to review the work of ACTS and to consider how best to support and encourage ecumenical developments for the future. The level of trust that exists between denominations is such that we can happily meet in each other's "backyard". Thus a "neutral" venue is no longer required. Since there will no longer be a "focal point" for ecumenical work in Scotland, the onus is now on the Member Churches to ensure that the space required for ecumenical dialogue is maintained. It is felt that this will best be achieved through the deepening of our commitment to each other at all levels of Church interaction, but particularly at the grassroots level.

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Covenant Group: Representatives from the United Free Church of Scotland and the Church of Scotland met during the year. The areas of the Covenant that would require review had previously been agreed. However, the subsequent decision of the 2011 United Free Church of Scotland General Assembly to suspend the review of the Covenant, was met with disappointment. It was felt that the review would need to be completed for the continued integrity and relevance of the Covenant for both denominations and it was hoped that a timetable for such a review could be agreed, otherwise there is a danger that the Covenant would fall.

LOCAL COOPERATION

It is encouraging to hear that the Local Ecumenical Partnerships at Canonbie and at Cathcart continue to go well. The Canonbie congregation is now part of the Presbytery of the West and their representatives are faithful in attending meetings. At Cathcart the joint Bible Study Groups have been going well and the Sunday Schools and Bible Classes are now working closely together.

It is disappointing that in some places where it was hoped local cooperation would develop further, little progress has been made and this has been generally due to circumstances beyond the control of the local congregation.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (CTBI)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland continue to resource the Churches across the United Kingdom. The new approach to working has now bedded in and any new developments and resources are posted up onto the CTBI web page (www.ctbi.org.uk). Focus is now upon the following 11 areas : Church and Public Issues; Theology and Unity; Mission; China Desk; Inter-Religious; International Students; Racial Justice; Action on Asylum and Refugees; Environment and Climate Change; Culture, Identity and the Public Square; Migration and Movements of People.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)

Work continues towards the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Korea from 30th October to 8th November 2013 under the theme 'God of life, lead us to justice and peace'. The Assembly Planning Committee considered the Korean concept of *madang* as a way to root the assembly in the host context and also give shape and meaning to the gathering. *Madang* is the traditional Korean "courtyard" connecting different parts of a house; a space for discussion, deliberation, celebration and fellowship; a traditional centre of family and community life.

The Planning Committee affirmed that the next Assembly should be prepared in a spirit of *madang*, inviting participants into a common space of discussion and celebration. The Planning Committee will meet again in July 2012 to finalise its proposals to the WCC Central Committee which meets in August 2012.

The Committee is delighted that the United Free Church of Scotland will be represented by Mr Nathan Owens, who will shortly complete his studies for the Ministry.

THE WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)

Following the Uniting Council in June 2010, work within the WCRC has been progressing. The current economic climate has driven the need to cut down expenses so that the organisation can live within its means. A variety of options are currently being assessed. Views have been taken on the proposal to move the Head Office out of the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and to relocate to a less expensive location.

The European Council met during March 2011 in Vienna, but it was felt by the Committee that the expense for such a trip outweighed the benefits of attendance.

VISITS TO OTHER CHURCHES

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the visits undertaken by the Moderator, Mr George McRobb, to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Methodist Synod and the Assembly of the Congregational Federation. Rev M C Keane was our representative to the Assembly of the Baptist Union of Scotland.

Rev J P Coltman represented the denomination at the Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church and Rev I A Boa represented the denomination at the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland.

CONCLUSION

The changing Ecumenical situation in Scotland gives us the opportunity to grasp the nettles that have tended to grow in the cracks that divide us. We need to be actively involved in helping to shape the future of Ecumenism in Scotland. Otherwise, others will move forward without us and our voice and influence will be lost. The path we travel is more fruitful if we journey with others who hold a different viewpoint. We learn from each other and, through the action of the Holy Spirit, grow in faith and understanding.

The Committee would like to thank all who have represented the denomination on ecumenical committees and as delegates to the other denominations' Assemblies.

In the name of the Committee

IAN A BOA	Convener
MARGERY P COLLIN	Vice-Convener
JOHN O FULTON	Secretary

Appendix 1

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS ON WHICH OUR CHURCH IS REPRESENTED

ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland)

Members Meeting.....	Rev I A Boa
(Alternate).....	Rev M Collin
Churches Agency for Inter-Faith Relations in Scotland	Rev C McAulay
Church Life Network.....	Rev J D Neil
Church & Society Network.....	Dr I Smith
Faith Studies Network.....	
Mission Network	Rev J O Fulton
National Sponsoring Body.....	Rev C C Brown Rev J O Fulton
Christian Aid Scottish Churches Committee.....	Rev R Thomson
Church of Scotland Committee on Ecumenical Relations.....	Rev I A Boa
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Assembly.....	Rev I A Boa
Churches Parliamentary Office Support Group.....	Dr D Macdonald
Pollock Memorial Missionary Trust.....	Rev J G Marshall
Scottish Bible Society	Rev J O Fulton
Scottish Churches Agency for Racial Justice.....	
Scottish Churches Committee.....	Rev J O Fulton
Scottish Churches China Group.....	Mr G Banks
Scottish Churches Housing Agency.....	Rev R Thomson
Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education.....	Rev A D Scrimgeour
Workplace Chaplaincy Scotland.....	Mr G Banks
World Day of Prayer Scottish National Committee.....	Mrs M Robertson

Appendix 2

The Scottish Churches' National Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) Annual Review 2011

The National Sponsoring Body, which is facilitated by ACTS exists

1. to provide a means whereby those involved in LEPs across Scotland can share their stories and learn from each other
2. to act as a reference and support body providing advice and guidance to those who seek to develop as LEPs in Scotland.
3. to act as a bridge builder between national and local expressions of ecumenism.

During 2011 the Sponsoring Body met twice, on each occasions within a Local Ecumenical Partnership. In March the meeting was held in St. John's SEC in Dumfries which is the focal point of the partnership between the SEC Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway and the Glasgow Circuit of the Methodist Church. The conversation in Dumfries raised new challenges and opportunities for thinking about the recognition of ministry across our denominations.

In September, the Sponsoring Body met in The Local Church LEP (SEC, URC, CofS) in Edinburgh's Old Town. This was the first of the Sponsoring Body's new style of meeting with a mini-conference in the morning and a business meeting in the afternoon. It was encouraging that over 35 people come from Edinburgh and beyond to share in the mini-conference which had the theme, 'Developing Local Partnerships'. After hearing about the experience of how the Local Church had developed their partnership people broke into groups thinking how partnerships can be developed through worship, mission and outreach, ministry teams, youth and children's work and how denominations can support local groups.

The change to have mini-conference sessions at Sponsoring Body meetings was one outcome of a review of the NSB's strategy document. As part of the review each member church of the Sponsoring Body was asked to submit a position paper on LEPs. Two themes emerged from the documents – the need to address questions concerning the recognition of ministry and further work to ensure ecumenical processes to be delivered through the NSB are sufficiently robust to satisfy denominational requirements. From the review of the previous strategy document it was agreed to carry out some additional work on communications; to restyle the NSB meetings in the mini-conference format; to hold all NSB meetings in LEPs so that the NSB has more opportunities to hear the stories of LEPs directly; to continue to hold the LEP Gatherings every two years; to continue to work and promote resource material for use in LEPs as it becomes available.

During the latter part of the year the NSB Constitutions Working Group have carried out detailed work on the Model Constitution for Single Congregation LEPs which has been accepted by the Charity Commission in England and Wales. Initial conversations with OSCR suggest that this document will be acceptable in Scotland and the churches have undertaken work to ensure it meets the needs of denominations in Scotland. It is hoped this document will go through formal decision-making processes in the member churches during 2012. Responding to a request from an LEP the Sponsoring Body is also looking at whether a common denominational statistical return can be produced for LEPs to use. All Sponsoring Body resources are available on the ACTS website www.acts-scotland.org and a new LEPs in Scotland group has been created on the CTBI social networking website <http://www.churchestogetherconnect.org>

Further information about the Scottish Churches' National Sponsoring Body may be obtained from denominational Ecumenical Officers or their equivalents, or Revd. Lindsey Sanderson, ACTS, 7 Forrester Lodge, Inglewood, Alloa FK10 2HU.

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