

## REPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

### GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2010

#### INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the ecumenical movement, is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, together with all Christians, so that the world may believe. This gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed by the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, so that a witnessing and serving community is created, which is the Church. The unity of love within the Church itself witnesses to its life as the one body of Christ, with many diverse members, with Christ as its head.

The challenge of the ecumenical movement, then, must be to enter into a persistent, loving, patient, and honest engagement with all those who proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, seeking visible unity. We are not at liberty to select only those partners with whom we are comfortable and with whom we find greatest agreement. Rather, we are called to the ecumenical engagement with all those companions in our pilgrimage whom God has called to accompany us.

We cannot know precisely what form and shape our life together may take, since we believe the Holy Spirit is continually at work among us, making all things new. We undertake this engagement, in obedience to the call of the Spirit, fervently hoping that our witness will be made more effective.

The following report highlights various areas of progress and change that have taken place in the work of ecumenical relations since our last General Assembly

#### THE COVENANT GROUP

The group of representatives from the United Free Church and Church of Scotland meet twice a year. The task of the group has developed from monitoring to encouraging initiatives. The group was also aware that many people had not heard about the Covenant particularly in certain presbyteries of the CofS. It was important to encourage presbyteries when reviewing or working on presbytery plans and readjustments to think ecumenically and to look at what might be possible in local situations. The aim would be to encourage them to consider again what is contained in the Covenant and recognise it as a releasing document which enables them to develop shared ministry in a number of ways.

The Canonbie DVD has been sent to all session clerks with copies of letters to ministers and pastors, including discussion questions which had been prepared.

#### LOCAL COOPERATION

A number of our congregations are currently exploring ways forward in developing a covenant relationship with neighbouring congregations.

- **Westray:** It was noted that with the decision of the UFC congregation in Westray to seek dissolution, the local covenant would come to an end.
- **Canonbie:** The Rev Steve Fulcher had been inducted at Canonbie and recently attended a meeting of the Presbytery of the East.
- **Lochwinnoch:** There are plans for a meeting of a small group representing both presbyteries along with the two ministers and session clerks to review their situation.
- **Cathcart:** It was noted that a meeting had taken place, which included members of the Ecumenical Relations Committee and representing both presbyteries along with the two

ministers and session clerks. There are distinct possibilities that there may be provision made for a shared ministry between, Cathcart United Free Church and Cathcart Trinity Church of Scotland. These congregations are working well together, enjoying being involved in something bigger. It was hoped that this might give encouragement to other congregations to think about similar covenant arrangements.

## **FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND**

Regular meetings are now taking place with three representatives of the Free Church of Scotland and three members of the United Free Church of Scotland. These have been very productive.

- **Assemblies:** Both General Assemblies have received reports on the talks and been supportive of what is taking place. Dr D Macdonald, as UF Moderator, had been welcomed at the opening session of the Free Church Assembly in 2009 and Rev A MacDonald had been welcomed to our Assembly and brought greetings on behalf of the ecumenical delegates.
- **Mission Work:** There was an exchange of information on the overseas mission work of both denominations and discussion on whether there is opportunity to cooperate on support for missionaries.
- **Youth work:** We would seek to establish links between those involved in youth work. Sample copies of the teenage magazine 'Free' were given to the United Free Church. Mention was made of events for young people in the Inverness area. There was an opportunity to share experience of youth work.
- **Church & Society:** There would be scope to exchange information between the FC Public Questions Committee and the UFC Church and Society Committee. There may be areas where we could work together or issue joint statements.

There are further meetings planned for the coming year.

## **ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND (ACTS)**

**Members Meeting:** The first AGM of ACTS (as a company limited by guarantee) took place on 4 June 2009 at Dunblane. Trustees were appointed, policies were accepted on membership, a finance report was received and information was given on the network reviews and Scottish Churches House. Since this had taken place immediately before our last General Assembly it could not be included in the 2009 volume of reports. The work of the Members Meeting this year has been significant in the light of all the changes.

The purpose of this meeting is

- To be a meeting place for the Members so that they may engage with the charitable purposes of ACTS, namely to further the mission and realise the unity of the Church Universal.
- To provide an opportunity for the Members to worship together.
- To provide a mechanism for inter-church counsel, education and action.
- To provide an opportunity for Members to promote, participate in, implement and engage with actions, projects, programmes and initiatives in the fulfilment of ACTS charitable purposes.
- To engage with the Trustees in discussion, leading to the setting of ACTS strategy and policy.
- To receive reports on the implementation of ACTS strategy and policy.
- To receive regular reports from the Trustees concerning finance, personnel, governance and day to day management of the company.
- To engage with wider ecumenical work in Britain and Ireland, Europe and the World.

## **SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSE**

**Scottish Friends of Ecumenism:** SFOE agreed to become members of the new company. They will take over full responsibility for Scottish Churches House. It is hoped to have this completed by summer 2010. The committee was disappointed to hear of the resignation for personal reasons of the Director, Carol Stobie. A new full time Assistant Director was appointed during the year and the person who filled this position temporarily is now carrying out a review of marketing. 'Visit Scotland' inspected the House and there has been a positive response although there are one or two unresolved issues about the main house. Leighton House will probably be listed as self-catering hostel accommodation.

## **CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND – CTBI**

Changes were agreed for CTBI at a special meeting of representatives of member Churches. Rev Paul Conroy and Very Rev Dr Sheilagh Kesting are the members of the trustee body representing Scotland. CTBI now has a staff of 7 and the budget is now 30% of what it was previously. There are still issues to be considered regarding the future direction of CTBI. What is clear is CTBI will have a more consultative role.

'Churches Together' means more than that. It means commitment by each Church to deepen its fellowship with the others without compromising its identity while still working towards a greater visible unity.

However, there are many areas of work that are best tackled for Britain and Ireland as a whole, rather than in the separate nations. It is important for those involved in similar activities in different parts of Britain and Ireland to keep in touch even when working separately. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland is the instrument that facilitates that process.

## **EDINBURGH 2010**

This year the world Church celebrates the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh in 1910. Christians from all over the world will join in unity and explore different ways of *Witnessing to Christ Today*.

Edinburgh 2010 is a multi-denominational and international project set up to commemorate the 1910 World Missionary Conference, and to provide new perspectives on mission for the 21st century. At the heart of the project is a decentralised study process, which looks at mission-related topics from many different angles. Research and conferences are going on all over the world, stimulating a great deal of resources for reflection on mission and World Christianity.

## **WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES – WCC**

A meeting with a delegation of representatives of the World Council of Churches took place on 2 December 2009 in the International Christian College Glasgow. We were well represented by all conveners and vice conveners of our Assembly committees and a representative of the Women's Home and Overseas Committee. Representatives of our denomination and members of the WCC made presentations which were followed by small group discussion. It had been a helpful and enjoyable experience in which the WCC representatives expressed appreciation of the contribution and participation of our small denomination within the World Council of Churches over the years.

## **WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES – WARC**

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) are uniting to form a new body representing more than 80 million Reformed Christians worldwide. The Uniting General Council will gather an estimated 1,000 people from 108 countries. More than half will be delegates from WARC and REC member churches. This united body will be called the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

The historic Uniting General Council to launch this new Reformed organisation will be held on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a community in the United States, from June 18 - 28 2010. The Rev Ian Boa will be representing the United Free Church of Scotland and be part of a Scottish and European delegation. He goes with our prayerful support to be part of a significant development for the world-wide Reformed Church.

## **VISITS TO OTHER CHURCHES**

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the visits undertaken by the Moderator, Rev Martin Keane to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Assembly of the Baptist Union of Scotland and the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland.

Rev Patrick Coltman represented the denomination at the Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Rev Andrew McMillan represented the denomination at the Scottish Area Assembly of the Congregation Federation and attended the Scottish Methodist Synod.

## **OTHER VISITS**

We are delighted that Rev Martin Keane took part in a meeting of Church leaders with the First Minister, Mr Alex Salmond MSP. He also attended a Reception hosted by the Prime Minister and a Reception hosted by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

## **CONCLUSION**

What of the future of our Ecumenical Relations Committee? It is our mandate to discover through prayer and the study of the scriptures what is the will of God. The scriptures tell us that the reign of Christ is a reign of unity, of peace and love, but also of justice, of wholeness for the entire restored creation. The modern ecumenical movement, bringing together the movements toward unity from "faith and order" and "life and work," calls for a profound renewal of the church and its message for the world.

The Reformed Church has come to prize the seventeenth-century dictum *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* "The Church reformed (according to the word of God) is always in need of reformation." This reminder of the fallibility of our institutions does not necessarily make us more eager to change than others! However it shapes our perspective on the future and growth of the ecumenical movement.

In the name of the Committee

ANDREW McMILLAN

IAN A BOA

JOHN O FULTON

Convener

Vice Convener

Secretary