



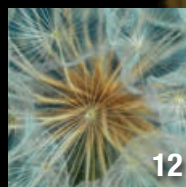
Interview with
Cytún General
Secretary Dr
Cynan Llwyd

4



Member
church profile:
Archdiocese of
Thyateira and
Great Britain

7



12

A Theology
of Gift



26

Prayer for
Season of
Creation
2024

Contents

HOME

Engagement at the Grassroots of Local Church Communities 4

Interview with Cytûn General Secretary
Dr Cynan Llwyd

Brave Spaces 6

Churches' Forum for Inter-Religious Relations:
Residential Meeting

CHURCH & SOCIETY

Member church profile 7

A century of faith: Honouring the Greek Orthodox
Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain's legacy

Journeying together as Christians in Ireland 10

New ICC toolkit: From Every Nation? 11

A Theology of Gift 12

Towards a Theological Appreciation of
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Visit to the Holy Land 16

Brendan Metcalfe, CEO of Friends of the Holy Land

ENVIRONMENT

A delicate balance 17

Learning from the experience of Climate Sunday

JUSTICE & INCLUSION

Synergy Network 18

We Will Repay 18

Racial Justice Advocacy Forum 19

Immigration is not a crime 20

Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal reflects on social justice

Churches' Refugee Network 21

RESOURCES

Do you believe this? 22

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025

Enriching the narrative 23

Grace Al-Zoughbi reflects on her ecumenical
journey, which is supported by the Pauline Webb
Ecumenical Fund

PRAYER

Prayer for Season of Creation 2024 26

NEWSLETTER

Subscribe to the monthly CTBI Newsletter to be
the first to find out the latest news, events, new
resources and webinars from CTBI and its member
networks. Sign up at bit.ly/3QQaDnn



Welcome

Significant anniversaries in the church calendar can provoke mixed reactions.

Sometimes they are regarded as a welcome stimulus and opportunity for reflection. Sometimes they are considered to add unhelpful pressure to create additional events or resources on top of the already demanding routine workload. In the case of the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which we will mark next year, the response amongst our members in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has been overwhelmingly the former. Perhaps because of the times we are living in, marked by deep divisions and violent conflict around the world on a scale unprecedented in recent times, this anniversary is being embraced as an opportunity for critical self-examination of our progress in the work of Christian unity and the contribution of that work to a wounded world.

The anniversary establishes a hopeful foundation for these reflections: the first Ecumenical Council is a moment of shared history for all Christians, despite the many ways in which the paths of different traditions may have diverged since then, and it is a reminder of the endurance of our faith in spite of persecution and challenge over the centuries.

At the heart of the first Ecumenical Council, and our contemporary examination of its significance, is our shared faith in Christ. The question that forms the central theme of the 2025 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – ‘Do you believe this?’ – is an invitation to dialogue about what it means to be disciples of Christ in our contemporary world. This is underpinned for many Christians by the confirmation of that unity in belonging through baptism. In this edition of the magazine, we explore what that means in practice through the example of an ecumenical synodal dialogue in Ireland. A theme that resonates strongly from this work is that the work of ecumenism cannot remain separate from the work of social justice and societal healing. They are deeply interconnected. The credibility of the Church in engaging with issues of social justice is undermined by divisions between Christians, and the work of overcoming those divisions inevitably calls us to engage with the many other barriers to relationships we encounter in our society and in the wider world.

Once again in the pages of this magazine you are invited to explore how CTBI, working in partnership with the National Ecumenical Instruments, our member churches, bodies in association and other partner organisations, is working to promote a vision of unity that reflects those values and builds on that experience.

Looking ahead to the Season of Creation we are reflecting strategically on how best to deepen ecumenical cooperation in the work of climate justice and care of creation. We are learning once again from the experience of one of our member churches on these islands in their ecumenical journey, with sincere thanks to the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain for sharing this reflection. We remain focused on the work of racial justice as a key priority in the work of unity, both in terms of what is needed for communities to feel safe, supported and respected on these islands, and globally in taking forward the work of reparations for slavery to help address the damaging legacy of past injustice and violence. The work of inter faith relations continues to come under pressure, and we take support from the particular encouragement from our member churches for CTBI’s engagement in this area.

In difficult times for our work on issues of justice and peace, we draw strength from our fellowship, and experience the benefits of the investment in relationships over many decades that allow us to face the complex and painful challenges together, not retreating from the hard questions, and yet still keeping a hopeful vision of unity at the heart of all that we do.

Dr Nicola Brady
General Secretary
Churches Together in
Britain and Ireland

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

CTBI serves the churches of Britain and Ireland on the shared journey towards full visible unity in Christ. It provides information and guidance to bridge understanding of issues in today’s society, and creates an ecumenical space for Christians to listen and work together for peace and reconciliation.

It develops publications and resources with other organisations and members to offer reflection, prayer and study materials to celebrate Christian events, as well as opportunities to learn and address key issues. It seeks to value the contribution of each church, respectful of relationships at all levels and recognising the diversity and difference within churches and nations.





Engagement at the Grassroots of Local Church Communities

Interview with Cytûn General Secretary Dr Cynan Llwyd

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) is delighted to welcome Dr Cynan Llwyd who took up the role of General Secretary of Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales) in July. In this interview he tells us about his background and his vision for ecumenism in Wales.

What attracted you to the role of Cytûn General Secretary?

I was born and raised in the middle of Wales in Aberystwyth. It's basically two hours from everywhere and a lovely place to grow up. My first language is Welsh, and I grew up steeped in that identity and culture. It's very important to me. Welsh is the language in which I pray, worship, read my Bible and sing hymns.

I grew up in a Welsh-speaking Free Evangelical Church before going to Cardiff University to study Welsh and theology. I initially moved back to Aberystwyth to work as an assistant

pastor in an Anglican Church. I then completed a PhD, through the medium of Welsh, looking at eschatology in the works of the Welsh puritans.

Since becoming a Christian at age sixteen it has been important for me to experience different types of churches, denominations and worship, seeing the breadth of the Christian Church and enjoying the richness of this diversity. My wife, Rachel, is from a Pentecostal background and together we joined Ebeneser Welsh Congregational Church on moving to Cardiff.

Today I'm a deacon leading a Welsh-speaking denomination in Grangetown,

which is one of the most diverse areas of the UK after London and Birmingham in terms of the number of languages spoken. Within that diversity and multiculturalism is a thriving Welsh-speaking community.

The Welsh-medium primary school that my sons attend brings together children who are speaking around a hundred different languages at home, but their common language is Welsh.

It has been a privilege for Rachel and I to serve that community by offering the opportunity for people to worship in Welsh. Alongside my ministry I have worked with a range of charities,



Main photo: Aberystwyth; Wales in all its diversity – from St David's Cathedral to Eglwys Cwyfan in Aberffraw, Anglesey

istock / Cytûn

is being done already by theologians from different backgrounds, and also make the most of the opportunities that are created by the conversations we convene. I think that would be a very worthwhile use of our structure.

The work of Christian unity itself requires constant attention and imagination and creativity. Because of my personal experience, I'm particularly excited about opportunities to bring together Christians from very different backgrounds who might not appreciate how much they have in common. I'm keen for us to explore whether we are making the most of our networks of relationships to maximise the opportunity for partnership with people from a wide range of different backgrounds.

One thing that clearly unites Christians of different denominations is the hunger for prayer, and I think Cytûn has a really important contribution to make to that by being really intentional about making coming together for prayer a clear priority at the heart of all we do.

Flowing from that work of Christian unity is how we are called together to serve the surrounding society. In Wales we have some of the poorest communities in Europe, let alone the UK, where the consequences of structural injustices are evident. We see hopeful signs in the way so many churches are stepping up and responding to those challenges. I think there is an important role for Cytûn in encouraging and helping churches to come together on initiatives and projects so that we can be a united witness to the world and to help amplify that prophetic voice, challenging the churches and the Senedd, drawing on the pastoral experience of grassroots engagement by local church communities.

As you can tell from these responses I'm the kind of person who much prefers to focus on the opportunities rather than the challenges!

the Church and at the heart of society in Wales. With every challenge there is an opportunity for the Church because we see God doing a new thing.

The increasing diversity of Welsh society has been wonderful to see. That requires us to rethink how we engage with people, and in response we have seen the member churches of Cytûn launching new initiatives, funding new projects, engaging in pioneer ministry.

"I'm the kind of person who much prefers to focus on the opportunities rather than the challenges!"

That really excites me, and I look forward to exploring where the work of Cytûn fits and how we can help provide a structure and a vehicle that can help member churches make the most of all these new structures, new initiatives, new learning and experiences. By providing a safe, shared space for churches to come together and learn from each other and encourage each other, while also holding ourselves to account so that we don't become self-satisfied or inward-looking and we celebrate each other's successes. As Jesus says in John 17:21, he wants us to be as one so as to be a witness to the world. Being one, uniting, is actually an act of witness to which we are explicitly called, not an optional extra for Christians.

Another opportunity I see in Wales is in the contribution of ecumenism to the development of our public theology, and alongside that to consider the role of the Church in the public square in Wales in 2024. I am interested in exploring how Cytûn can build on the work that

beginning with Literature Wales, where I was the Youth and Children's Officer, organising festivals and writers' visits to schools. I worked with Christian Aid as the Regional Coordinator for South Wales and then Acting Head of Christian Aid Wales for a period of maternity cover. I really enjoyed the opportunity during my work for Christian Aid to experience the diversity of the Church across the whole of Wales, seeing people really putting their faith into action.

My next role as Head of Tearfund in Wales also made a significant contribution to that experience. As I begin this new role with Cytûn, I am so grateful for the way in which my upbringing in the Free Evangelical Church really grounded my faith in Scripture and the later experience of working in and with so many different denominations has really helped me to understand what it means to practice my faith and live out the understanding of that theology.

My role with Cytûn is an exciting opportunity to apply my experience in working with lots of different churches and Christian organisations to serve the Church in the work of ecumenism in Wales, and to serve Wales and its people – in all our diversity.

What do you see as being some of the greatest challenges and opportunities for the work of Cytûn as you begin this role?

I think the challenges for Cytûn are deeply connected to the challenges facing the wider society, because Cytûn strives to be at the heart of the life of



For more information:
www.cytun.co.uk



Above and left: Workshops of Interfaith Glasgow; below left: attendees at the CFIRR meeting.

and resources that they offer. These include Scriptural Reasoning (where the scriptures are read and studied together), the Festival's Exchange that encourage participation in each other's festivals, outdoor community events and work around food and climate justice. An important resource that they recently produced "Creating Brave Spaces" arose out of the conversations between Jews, Christians and Muslims on the Israel Palestine conflict.

Following on from that presentation we were able to hear from church representatives in Scotland about how they approach interfaith work more broadly, and some of the challenges they face. In particular we heard how the Scottish Government engages with other faiths and the importance of Scottish Interfaith Week.

There are many challenges in interfaith relations at the present time, not least the impact on community relations as a result of the Gaza/Israel war which makes interfaith work critical for community cohesion. It was unfortunate in this regard that earlier in the year the UK government ended all funding to the InterFaith Network for the UK, thus forcing it to close. This has left a huge gap and the implications of this have yet to be seen.

On the second day of the residential meeting, Peter Colwell, CTBI Deputy General Secretary, gave a presentation on his recently completed PhD thesis, the title of this presentation was "Inter-religious relations and the geo-politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: why we need to re-think some theological assumptions". This provided an opportunity for deeper discussion around some of the complex issues that religious communities are facing in the Holy Land.

It was agreed that the 2025 residential meeting will be held in Belfast and would be focused on inter faith work in the two jurisdictions of the island of Ireland.



Brave Spaces

Churches' Forum for Inter-Religious Relations: Residential Meeting 2024

Inter faith work is a key strategic priority for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). This is met in various ways including the work of the Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group and the Churches Forum for Inter-religious Relations (CFIRR). CFIRR is a four nations ecumenical group within CTBI which brings together church representatives who are responsible for relations with people of other faiths. It is one of the oldest CTBI forums, having its origins in the British Council of Churches and its Committee for Relations with People of Other Faiths, and was founded in the 1980s. CFIRR's Moderator is Archbishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church

and its Deputy Moderator is Rowena Lovernance of the Quakers.

Since the pandemic, CFIRR has held most of its meetings online but also holds an annual in-person residential meeting and in 2024 this took place in Glasgow. The residential meeting is an opportunity to look in greater detail at specific areas of inter faith work that cannot be covered in sufficient depth at a two-hour online meeting. It is also an opportunity to discover more about how inter faith work is approached in the context of where we are meeting. And so, it was important to begin the meeting with the presentation from Dr Rose Drew about the work of Interfaith Glasgow and in particular some of the initiatives



Member church profile

A century of faith: Honouring the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain's legacy

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain is an Archdiocese of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Re-established in the UK in 1922, it received its name from the city of Thyateira in Asia Minor, one of the seven cities mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Our community has always emphasised the importance of continuity, building our identity on the ongoing celebration and veneration of the Saints of the British Isles from the first millennium of undivided Christianity. Today, the Archdiocese of Thyateira is a thriving community and, according to our statistics, one of the few Christian Churches experiencing growth in the UK.

The Archdiocese of Thyateira today caters to a large and diverse group of faithful across the UK in more than 120 parishes. This diversity is evident in the international origins of its clergy, which includes individuals of Greek, Greek Cypriot, American, British,

Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Russian, and Ukrainian descent, to name a few. This diversity of our clergy is a living testimony to the dynamic changes and growth experienced within the parishes. The Archdiocese of Thyateira actively advocates against tribalism and nationalism, which have taken root in

Today, the Archdiocese of Thyateira is a thriving community and, according to our statistics, one of the few Christian Churches experiencing growth in the UK.

some other Orthodox Churches. Instead, it emphasizes the pastoral role of the priest as a father figure and promotes the idea of a Church that welcomes everyone.

The Archdiocese hosts various programs and events to promote re-evangelization, multicultural understanding and cooperation. These include educational programs for new

converts, interfaith dialogues, cultural festivals, and community service projects. These initiatives foster a sense of unity and mutual respect among people of different backgrounds and faiths.

His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas emphasises our diverse roots and the fact that the Archdiocese welcomes hundreds of converts from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in London alone. To support this, the Archdiocese has set up a program led by the Very Rev. Nephon Tsimalis, Protosyngellos, which works to educate people who have just come into contact with the Orthodox faith as well as those seeking to be baptised in the Orthodox Church. Among the manifold ministries present within the Archdiocese are the Archdiocesan chapel and the office for ecumenism.

In support of this vision, the Archdiocese has recently inaugurated Christian Orthodox Thyateira Youth (COTY) as an official Archdiocesan ministry. COTY gathers young adults of good will who seek a deeper



istock understanding and connection to church life. In the words of His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas: *“Already, COTY has proven a great success. COTY’s dedication to its mission involves a diverse array of activities, including special liturgical celebrations, prayer, group pilgrimages, educational events with guest speakers from all around the world, and social gatherings to simply provide a welcoming venue for fellowship and joy”*¹.

In 2023, Archbishop Nikitas was elected President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) by its General Assembly in Tallinn. Since his election, His Eminence has worked closely with other Christian leaders across Europe to ensure their voices are heard by EU decision-makers and individual countries. Among his notable visits was a recent trip to Ukraine by the CEC presidency and task force, where he witnessed the dire situation and spoke to various Church

leaders and news outlets in Europe and internationally. His mission as the President of the CEC has amplified the Orthodox voice in the heart of Europe as well as within the growing Orthodox community in the UK.

Archbishop Nikitas actively participated in the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III as one of the faith representatives, marking the first time in history that representatives of other religions were invited.

The Archdiocese of Thyateira also collaborates closely with the UK Government and decision-makers on questions of common interest and concern. Archbishop Nikitas actively participated in the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III as one of the faith representatives, marking the first time in history that representatives of other religions were invited. He attended several Lord Mayor of London

events and is one of the co-presidents of Churches Together in England and the Council of Christian and Jews.

One of the challenges the Archdiocese faces is a priest shortage. To address this, it focuses on finding and guiding young people who have a desire to minister to the people of God and who wish to study theology, pastoral psychology, and related fields. The message of the Church of the East, especially in today’s polarized and divided world, resonates with many, calling for peace with God and His creation.

Importance of commemorating 100 years of its existence

Commemorating 100 years of the Archdiocese’s existence is not only a celebration of its history but also an affirmation of its enduring mission and vision. It is a testament to the resilience, growth, and unwavering faith of its community. The centennial is an opportunity to honour the past, reflect on the present, and envision a future guided by unity in diversity and shared faith. In the words of Archbishop

¹ *Calendar*, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira, 2024, p.12



COURTESY: Royal Family



Opposite page: Ancient columns and arches of Thyateira ancient city. Above left: members of Christian Orthodox Thyateira Youth; left: Archbishop Nikitas participating in the coronation of His Majesty King Charles in 2023; Above: His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas.

Nikitas: “Each of us is different, but united we weave the pattern of the fabric of the Church, each one with his unique gifts and capabilities”. Consequently, the Archdiocese values the different reflections of the Icon of God in every person, not only in the members of our community, leaving our doors open to everyone, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or any other human attribute. The Church is here for everyone. Precisely the experience of sharing human nature implores us to engage in dialogue with our brethren of different religious beliefs.

This is also why we bear the name Ecumenical Patriarchate, because we see our mission as a global reality. Only connected with our Christian and non-Christian brethren may we aspire to be truly ecumenical in this divided world.

Archbishop Nikitas has been instrumental in addressing global issues such as human trafficking. He plays a key role in the International Task Force of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, working to combat this grave violation of human rights. His

efforts have brought attention to the plight of victims and have mobilized resources to aid in their rescue and rehabilitation. The Archdiocese also helps endangered Christians in Gaza, Ukraine and other areas where they face persecution and war.

Thyateira's century-long legacy

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain has a rich and storied legacy spanning 100 years. From its re-establishment in 1922 to its current status as a vibrant and international Church, the Archdiocese has been a pillar of faith, tradition, and community. It has navigated numerous challenges, grown in diversity, and made significant contributions to advancing ecumenical relations and multicultural engagement.

To summarize, the Archdiocese of Thyateira today is a vibrant and cosmopolitan Church. We strive to preserve the faith passed down to us for 2,000 years by our ancestors and make it relevant and understandable to the people of the 21st century. This is why

our jubilee and 100th birthday remind us to always be a Church whose doors are open to everyone.

As the Archdiocese looks to the future, it remains committed to the values of unity, diversity, and shared faith. The celebration of its centennial is a reminder of the importance of these principles and a call to continue building a Church that is open to all, fostering understanding, cooperation, and peace in an increasingly interconnected but divided world.

*Revd Andreas Minic, PhD candidate
Secretary for Ecumenical and
Interreligious Dialogue
Advisor to the President of the CEC
(Conference of European Churches)*

*The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese
of Thyateira and Great Britain is a
member church of Churches Together
in Britain and Ireland.*



**For more information visit:
www.thyateira.org.uk**



Journeying together as Christians in Ireland

Exploring how synodality might strengthen our collective Christian contribution to reconciliation and the healing of our communities

On Thursday 25th April, the Archdiocese of Armagh and the Diocese of Dromore jointly hosted an inter-church dialogue event in the Drumcree Pastoral Centre, Portadown, with the theme: ‘Journeying together as Christians in Ireland’. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) was delighted to contribute to this event, alongside the Irish Council of Churches (ICC), the Irish School of Ecumenics and the Irish Bishops’ Council for Ecumenism and National Synodal Team.

The event aimed to explore how the synodal process currently underway in the Catholic Church, in Ireland and globally, can draw inspiration from the work of inter-church relations in Ireland, while also contributing to the strengthening of that work at both local and national level.

In a message of support and encouragement to the gathering Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops stated:

In the preparatory document for this synod of the global Catholic Church, with its theme ‘Communion, Participation, Mission’ we underlined that we cannot walk alone. We need to walk with everybody, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we share baptism, the cornerstone of our vocation and mission. In a world divided where, apparently, people are finding it difficult to come together, we Christians, together, have something to offer in service to humanity.

Opening the event, Archbishop Eamon Martin expressed appreciation

for the way in which the deepening friendship and fellowship between Christian churches on the island have strengthened their collective witness to the Good News of the Gospel:

I am convinced that we in the Christian churches here in Ireland have so much to learn from each other about the key themes that mark the Synod currently underway within the Catholic Church. The question of how we can be a Synodal church in mission has a particular resonance for us here in these islands, particularly given the backdrop of conflict which continues to impact our relationships.

Dr Damian Jackson, General Secretary of ICC and Irish Inter-Church Meeting reflected on the significance of this



CTBI

Opposite page: St Patrick, Patron Saint of Ireland; the audience at the event

gathering from the perspective of Ireland's national inter-church structures:

The title and emphasis for this event – Journeying together as Christians in Ireland – reflects the way in which our sense of identity and belonging increasingly transcends denominational boundaries. This unifying vision of Christians in Ireland has at its heart an appreciation for the significance of baptism which unites us in Christ and connects us to one another. In our national inter-church structures we seek to model unity in diversity by investing in the kind of respectful dialogue from which will flow the relationships of trust that support

and encourage the vital work that is done at the level of local communities by Christians working together to bring hope and healing to those who need it most.

Participants in the gathering, representing a wide range of local inter-church groups and projects, explored together two questions:

- How is our journeying together as Christians contributing to the work of healing and reconciliation in our community?
- How might the synodal process support us to go deeper in working together as Christians for the healing and well-being of our communities?

The discussion that followed conveyed a deep appreciation for the hopeful nature of the synodal process and the way in which it was both recognising the good work that has been done to date and also creating new opportunities for those who have not yet been reached in that work. Participants reflected on how much Christians have in common across the different traditions, facing similar challenges in a context of increasing secularisation, a deeply polarised society, stark divides of socio-economic inequality and decreasing youth participation in church life. There was a consensus that the synodal process offers an effective methodology of encounter, with deep listening leading to mutual understanding and providing a foundation for collaborative action. It requires a significant investment of time and effort, but it was considered that this event demonstrated the benefits of that investment in the fellowship, solidarity and prayerful engagement with the issues impacting our communities that will strengthen our collective witness to our Christian faith in the public square.



For more information on the work of the Irish Council of Churches:
www.irishchurches.org

New ICC toolkit: From Every Nation?

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI) Director for Social Justice and Inclusion, Richard Reddie, was delighted to launch the latest resources from the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Irish Inter-Church Meeting at the ICC Annual Meeting in April 2024.

Entitled 'From Every Nation: a handbook for a congregation's journey from welcome to belonging', the resource aims to equip church members with an understanding of diversity and inclusion, and to support actions at the local Church level to improve inclusion and work towards racial justice through faith. Congregations can use the handbook to:

- learn about racism, how to recognise it, and how it affects all of us and the society in which we live

- support learning discussions in your Church that bring people together in knowledge
- identify actions you can take in your Church to transform how you live as a community of faith that rejects racism in all its forms

Encouraging wide dissemination and engagement with this resource – across the island of Ireland and beyond, Richard said:

"Many Christians don't engage in these matters because they do not feel equipped to do so and because they don't want to say 'the wrong thing' and offend people, they steer clear of getting involved. If Christianity is for everyone it behoves us all to engage in this matter. As this handbook points out, the Bible can be translated into different languages and dialects so that it becomes accessible



to everyone. As Christians we need to learn from the Good Book and study the language of racial justice so that we can do likewise!"



For more information:
www.irishchurches.org/our-work/churches-belonging

A Theology of Gift

Towards a Theological Appreciation of
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

Revd Dr Callan Slipper, Chair of the Society for Ecumenical Studies,
a Body in Association of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI),
reflects on the vision of ecumenism that inspires and underpins the work of CTBI.

Tucked away in the Swanwick Declaration there is an expression that, it could be said, gives the rationale for every ecumenical endeavour. It says of reconciliation among Christians, ‘such unity is the gift of God.’ Christian unity is not merely a human activity. It is primarily the result of action that comes from the Love who transcends all creation, made present in the person of Jesus and made effective by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is thus a response to a grace given, a gift from God.

Living the gift is not simply the private joy of those who participate in it. It makes the Christian community itself become a *gift*, impacting upon the world. Thus, just as the gift of unity to humanity and welcomed by the Christian community is worked out through the concrete acts of mutual love that heal ruptures within the community, so it must also become a gift from the community to humanity, in a continuation of and a sharing in God’s unitive action in the world, in other words, in the *Missio Dei* expressed in concrete and practical ways.

Articulating the gift

It is this multidimensional gift that can be seen to be the source of the National Ecumenical Instruments at the service of Christian unity in Britain and Ireland, that is, the smaller instruments at work locally or at county level, those at work in the lands of Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and England and, across the islands, in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). Each of these instruments has its own characteristics and CTBI is no exception. It contributes in its unique way not just to healing the broken body of Christ in the Christian community but to the body of Christ’s effective unity at the service of the world.

The current ecumenical structures in Britain and Ireland grew out of the inter-church process ‘Not Strangers but Pilgrims’. In the 1989 book *The Next Steps for Churches Together in Pilgrimage* (the so-called Marigold Book)¹ which commended to the churches the process’s proposed shift in thinking, feeling, and action, it says that



the shift ‘needs to be effective at all levels and in all places in order to establish a radically new style of working’. This style was meant to stop ecumenism being an extra that absorbed energy and lead to its becoming a dimension of everything that the churches do and, as a result, release energy through the sharing of resources.

The ecumenical instruments seek less to be the means by which the churches cooperate on common activities and concerns but more to enhance ecumenically what the churches are already doing. This humble stance can be seen in the work of CTBI.

Putting ecumenism at the heart of church life has been fundamental in inspiring all subsequent ecumenical work. How successful it has been, sadly, may be doubted because the churches have not managed to take up the challenge, but this basic aspiration guided the formation of the ecumenical structures set up in 1990. There has been a subtle and, it could be argued, a significant shift in how the ecumenical instruments actually work, given that in the last decades the churches’ attention has in fact moved consistently away from ecumenism. The ecumenical instruments seek less to be the means by which the churches cooperate on common activities and concerns but more to enhance ecumenically what the churches are already doing. This humble stance can be seen in the work of CTBI.

The Vision of CTBI

On its website CTBI proclaims its vision in terms of what it is set up to achieve:

The mission of CTBI is to support the churches of Britain and Ireland on our shared journey towards full visible unity in Christ. The vision for this work is inspired by Christ’s prayer ‘that they may all be one’ [John 17:21.]²

The remarkable thing about this is that it appears to say nothing about the majority of CTBI’s activities which are in the sphere of work for the common good of humanity, issues to do with justice and peace for a better world. But this, in fact, would be a misreading, if the gift of unity prayed for by Jesus in John 17 is understood as necessarily implying an effective gift of transformation in society. Moving towards full visible unity, because it is an outworking of the gift of living unity in God, is both an end in itself and at the service of God’s love for the world.

The Strategic Plan 2024-2027

On the CTBI website can be found the beautifully produced Strategic Plan for 2024-2027, entitled *Endurance Inspired by Hope*.³

It could be said to exemplify the theology of gift briefly explored so far, because the approach it offers demonstrates the same underlying structure.

² www.tbi.org.uk/our-vision/

³ *Endurance Inspired by Hope*. CTBI Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

¹ *The Next Steps for Churches Together in Pilgrimage – Including Definitive Proposals for Ecumenical Instruments* (London: the British Council of Churches and the Catholic Truth Society, 1989), p.3.



This is seen most clearly in the five Strategic Priorities:

- Strengthening ecumenical engagement in Britain and Ireland
- Working together for mission and the common good
- Healing society's fractures: identities, borders and nationalities
- Working for global peace and justice
- Promoting ethical and inclusive leadership

The first of these covers the gift of unity welcomed by the Christian community. It contains several specific ways for growing deeper in that unity among the churches, perhaps most visibly by promoting the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, providing Lent materials, resourcing Racial Justice Sunday, Sanctuary Sunday and other significant dates, and the commitment to work with the National Ecumenical Instruments in each of the lands where they operate. Behind this is a recognition both of the contribution through its prophetic voice that Christian reconciliation brings to healing other divisions within society and of the value of the ecumenical experience in learning about dialogue.

As the strategic plan says:

The work of Christian unity that finds expression in CTBI and the other ecumenical bodies on these islands calls us to bring a prophetic voice to these divides that wound our society, drawing on the learning from our journey of reconciliation. In our work we model a respectful dialogue that values diversity and seeks to provide sanctuary for all. We do so with humility, conscious that divisions between Christians have been and remain a cause of suffering and undermine the Good News we seek to share. (p.12)

The inner unity of the Christian community serves the outer unity of society, the life of the churches where the gift of Jesus is explicitly welcomed at the service of the needs of the wider community. In this context, despite the increasing secularization that they face, the churches are also recognized as bringing the particular gift of having convening authority to bring people, and especially leaders, to work together on matters of shared concern. They can do this effectively when cooperating ecumenically and

especially, given the presence of other faiths in lands once almost exclusively Christian, when they act according to circumstances in appropriate ways together with other faith communities. In this way an increasingly reconciled Christian community can speak and act effectively within the public square with all its variety of belief and scepticism.

CTBI's ecumenism in action focuses, then, on four broad areas, each one containing specific practical proposals by which the Christian community becomes a gift to society where it is. The list of them is almost dizzying; shown each within its particular Strategic Priority, they are:

- a) Working together for mission and the common good** – mission; racial justice; interfaith dialogue; social inclusion and a healthy society;
- b) Healing society's fractures: identities, borders and nationalities** – theological reflection; British-Irish relations; re-imagining borders; state engagement with faith communities;
- c) Working for global peace and justice** – climate justice;



All photos stock except top left this page (CTBI)

Rooted in relationship

In his introduction to the Marigold Book, Alastair Haggart says, 'The ecumenical movement is not about some contrived, technical or theological alignment of doctrine and practice between churches, carried out by some group of remote ecclesiastical managers; it must have an experiential, personal, even emotional side to it.'⁴ He is pointing here to the relational heart of ecumenism. The work for Christian unity regularly fails when it loses this heart to become a predominantly bureaucratic exercise. It ceases to inspire. The Strategic Plan, however, before entering into discussion of what is to be done outlines the values applied in how it is to be done. These centre upon 'an approach founded on loving relationships' (p.8) that is articulated according to the three theological virtues plus four that have emerged strongly in the contemporary world, hence: faith, hope, love, followed by respect, justice, humility, partnership. Love, however, as for the apostle Paul, remains the greatest; it brings about respect, justice, humility, and partnership, gives substance to hope and makes faith effective.

The Strategic Plan thus relies heavily upon love for it to function. This is entirely realistic. Experience shows that when love diminishes, ecumenism dwindles and eventually disappears. But this is more than simply a pragmatic observation; love is the core of the theology of gift that can be seen to be at work in CTBI.

One effect of love is to be attentive to the actual needs of the beloved. Such attentiveness can be seen in CTBI's explicit recognition of those elements it brings specifically to its ecumenical work, which the Strategic Plan indicates when it asserts that CTBI undertakes work that:

- Meets unmet needs
- Adds value (amplifying or increasing the impact of work done by member churches)
- Is only possible if done ecumenically
- Adds a British-Irish focus
- Draws on or enables partnership
- Promotes equity and inclusion (p.8)

Conclusion

CTBI brings a unique set of vital contributions to the churches. It encourages greater ecumenism, which is essential for effective witness, in ways similar to but distinct from the other ecumenical instruments. Like those instruments, it lives a theology of gift, both as assisting the churches to receive the unity Jesus died to bring into the world and as assisting this unity to be effective in the Christian community's service to the world. But it does this in ways particular to its own way of working, partly through its transnational and British-Irish focus, partly and very strongly through the specific focuses of its work. It could be said to be a prime example of not only doing ecumenical things but of doing things ecumenically as it stimulates, enhances, facilitates the churches working in cooperation. Until such time as ecumenical working truly becomes the default mode of operation of all the churches, bodies such as CTBI remain essential to the Christian community's effective service to God's mission to humanity and, indeed, to creation.

international ecumenical peace networks; religion, violence and human rights; freedom of religion and belief;

d) Promoting ethical and inclusive leadership – ethical leadership; support for the next generation of leaders; gender justice and women's leadership; developing and resourcing collective advocacy.

The lexicon of these practical proposals is significant. It revolves around CTBI's role of assisting greater ecumenical cooperation among the churches in a way that frequently speaks of partnership with other bodies and, in particular, the National Ecumenical Instruments.

Hence, terms to do with service and cooperation dominate: develop, promote, resource, contribute, facilitate, participate, highlight, support, consult, coordinate, convene, engage with, work with, build on. This is significant. It foregrounds assisting the work of the churches with the added value of ecumenical praxis, but CTBI never seeks to take control. Rather CTBI is an ecumenical ferment stimulating the churches in their work for God's reign.

⁴ *The Next Steps for Churches Together in Pilgrimage – Including Definitive Proposals for Ecumenical Instruments* (London: the British Council of Churches and the Catholic Truth Society, 1989), p.4



Friends of the Holy Land

Visit to the Holy Land

Brendan Metcalfe, CEO of Friends of the Holy Land, reports on a recent visit

In May, I took part in a 10-day visit to the Holy Land to see how our projects were coping, to visit and listen to our team and our contacts in the local community, but, most importantly, to be a representative of Friend of the Holy Land showing that we stand with them all. This was by far the most difficult visit I have made to the Holy Land from the many I have made in the past five years as CEO.

I started my trip in Amman, Jordan participating in the General Synod (Majma) of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and visiting our projects there. The mood among Christians in Amman was subdued. Tourism and trade were hugely decreased despite being outside the war zone. Due to the high number of Palestinian refugees living in Jordan, many were upset and concerned for their relatives living in Gaza and the West Bank.

Crossing to Jerusalem, I entered a ghost town. Walking around the old city, I saw very few visitors other than aid and security workers. I was told by a hotel manager that most pilgrims were from Asia, and many were visiting from

Jordan for the day. As a result, many hotels were either closed or relying on government business to house refugees from the north and south of Israel. Most of the shops were open, but the souvenir shops weren't making any sales, just opening for something to do.

Despite the fears they all expressed, it was most encouraging to hear of their ideas and desire to get involved in social programmes to make a difference now in their communities.

Having spent time with the Anglican community, I met with the Latin and Orthodox Patriarchs and our charity partners in Jerusalem. I heard the same message. The general fear, uncertainty and financial stresses felt now were the worst in living memory. Most families were exploring options to emigrate, some already leaving.

My sadness deepened when I arrived in Bethlehem. The usually bustling Manger Square and Star Street area were

empty. The shops supplying locals with groceries and essential supplies were open but not busy. All the gift shops closed. As I drove around the area, I noticed for the first time a multitude of roadside car boot sales and stands selling fresh vegetables from the garden, home-made snacks and second-hand goods to generate some cash. Compared to my visit last year, it was heartbreaking to see.

I stayed in the Casa Nova Hotel, kept open by the Franciscans to support their staff with 50% of their usual salary. I stayed two nights and was the only guest to stay in May in the 150-room hotel. What's more, the hotel did not have any bookings confirmed for June. The tourism, which 80% of the people of Bethlehem rely on, is gone, again. This time it's worse than the pandemic.

Our existing projects were coping well. However, with the war, the cost of food and other supplies have increased by at least 10% since October. I spent most of one day discussing with our office team and committee how much further we could take our existing projects (which all have expanding waiting lists); the feedback they were receiving from their communities; and the many project ideas that were emerging.

I also made a point to meet with several youth groups. Despite the fears they all expressed, it was most encouraging to hear of their ideas and desire to get involved in social programmes to make a difference now in their communities.

Overall, as well as identifying the increasing needs for the year ahead, the visit reinforced the unique position of Friends of the Holy Land to provide that help now. We are embedded in the local Christian community in the Holy Land and our projects are guided and monitored by leaders of that community.

Our impact is valued and endorsed by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem as a local partner and, with a HQ and Trustee Board in the UK, our governance is world standard. In the face of the complex international and UK legislation governing operations in the Holy Land, we are a safe pair of hands.

Friends of the Holy Land is a Bodies in Association of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).



For more information, visit:
www.friendsoftheholylan.org.uk



CTBI's membership is rich in diversity, representing various traditions, priorities and perspectives.

within our membership. This has been a helpful challenge to us, prompting us to consider in the future who might be absent from the table when this type of resource is being prepared. At the same time, we heard that the flexibility of the programme, with the many different ways to get involved and flexibility around the timings of that engagement, was very helpful. It allowed churches to engage in ways that were meaningful in their local context, building on existing work where appropriate, and avoiding unhelpful pressure on people who are already struggling with their routine workloads. Another challenge was that the resources for advocacy work needed to be more clearly adapted to the different political jurisdictions within CTBI's membership so that all feel equally included and supported. This was a very helpful reminder and one we will be examining in greater depth.

Strengthening ecumenical relations

We heard many good news stories about the strengthening of ecumenical relations through collaboration on the Climate Sunday initiative. Often local churches were making a clear and intentional link between the work of Christian Unity and the work of climate justice in a way that strengthened the work in all areas. We saw churches that would not normally engage with CTBI's work get involved because the issue of climate justice was important to their congregations and the Climate Sunday partnership was considered to be a credible provider of high-quality resources from a Christian perspective. There is an opportunity here where more could perhaps be done to build on these new connections.



For more information on Climate Sunday resources:
www.climatesunday.org/service-resources

A delicate balance

Learning from the experience of Climate Sunday

In 2021, CTBI worked with a range of other partner organisations to develop and facilitate the Climate Sunday initiative in the lead up to the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow. The planned evaluation was delayed by COVID-19 and only took place this year. That delay created a new and ultimately helpful context for this research because the focus became less about the immediate impact of the initiative and more about the long-term legacy of this piece of work. This is important because the Climate Sunday partnership represented a significant investment of time and other resources from the participating organisations and knowing how this was experienced in the local church context will help future planning. This article highlights a number of key themes that will be examined by the CTBI Environmental Issues Network (EIN) to explore how this learning might be integrated into our work going forward.

Engagement and resistance

As might be expected, a mixed picture emerges from the feedback received. On the one hand we can say that there is a growing interest in issues of climate justice and care of creation among churches, and for some that were looking for a way in or a place to start the Climate Sunday initiative was immensely

helpful. However, there is still significant resistance in some churches. It would be helpful to understand this better, but there is a delicate balance to be struck here. It is not for CTBI or any other ecumenical body to be dictating to local churches what they should be doing and talking about, we can only invite

It is not for CTBI or any other ecumenical body to be dictating to local churches what they should be doing and talking about, we can only invite them to get involved in our work.

them to get involved in our work. At the same time, it is worth exploring whether there is anything we could do in terms of language or approaches that would strengthen that invitation and make it more accessible to a wider range of participants.

Diversity and inclusion

The Climate Sunday initiative promoted various forms of engagement, notably in the form of climate-themed prayer and worship, and advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives. We have heard feedback that the worship resources did not respond to the needs of all traditions



istock

on a Saturday afternoon (29 June 2024) was aimed at young people and was an opportunity for the churches and parachurch groups to hear from them about SYV-related trauma. The conference again saw around 40 young people and their practitioner colleagues, gather at the London City Mission headquarters, next door to Tower Bridge, in central London. The session was led by Dez Brown, the CEO and founder of Spark2Life. Dez, who is a reformed offender, and is now an ordained minister and qualified therapist, spoke about the 'cycle of trauma' on young people, both those who had lost loved ones to SYV or were caught up in gang-related activities. The young attendees also spoke about how they invariably sought to handle trauma and pointed out that they often felt unsupported in this area. They noted that the "Church often spoke a lot about praying" but was not doing enough "practical work to change the situation". Most also called on the Church to "step up" and establish support networks that could provide young people with the necessary counselling and guidance.

At the meeting the Synergy Network encouraged all attendees to mark '**Standing Together Sunday**' on 14 July, which is an apt moment for churches to redouble their efforts to provide the support required to help address all the issues related to SYV.



For more information, visit:
www.wearesynergy.org.uk

Synergy Network

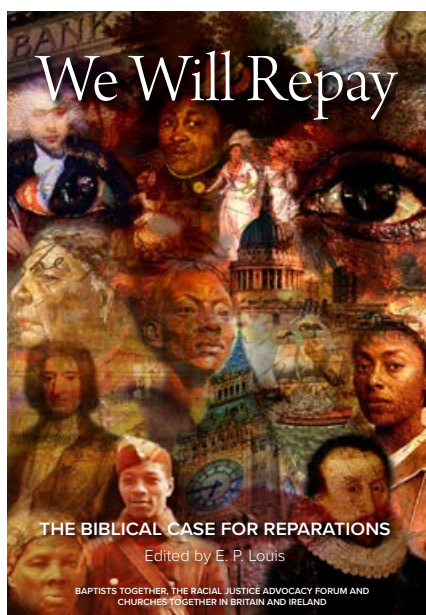
It is difficult to avoid the plethora of news about serious youth violence (SYV) on our shores.

Television, radio and social media are replete with stories of death and life-transforming injuries related to this terrible scourge. What often goes unreported is the trauma-related damage linked to this tragic activity; the lingering, ripple effect of a violent death often impacts families, friends and communities for a number of years.

With this in mind, the Synergy Network organised two events, in March and June 2024, to explore what help was available (and required) regarding

SYV-related trauma. The first event, which was held at Montgomery Hall in Kennington, south London, on 19 March 2024, saw around 40 practitioners gather to discuss how churches could assist young people who were experiencing trauma as a result of losing a family member or friend to SYV. As this event was aimed at churches and parachurch groups, attendees also heard from experts who provided insights into how lives blighted by SYV can be turned around. (Two of the presenters on the day were themselves former perpetrators of SYV.)

The June event, which took place



We Will Repay

The '*We Will Repay*' Bible study, which helps churches and Christians delve into the **discussions on reparations for Transatlantic African Chattel Enslavement on biblical terms**, is now available in a printed format, and as a downloadable PDF from the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) website. This resource takes up the challenge of helping Christians discern God's heart on reparatory justice as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

This ecumenical Bible study specifically concerns the responsibility of particular churches to enact reparatory justice,

and is not a call to individual responsibility (*the churches in question are those historical denominations that engaged in and/or profited – or even continue to do so – from enslaving people of African descent.*)

The resource features four Bible studies and reflections exploring different aspects of reparations, and also includes additional contributions from some of the key figures within the churches on these shores.



For more information, visit:
www.ctbi.org.uk/wewillrepay

Racial Justice Advocacy Forum

The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) successfully hosted its 'Hope for Justice' conference at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church (BBC), in central London, on Saturday, 13 April 2024.

The event, which brought together the RJAF, the National Church Leaders Forum (NCLF), the University of East London (UEL), and Premier Christian Radio, explored how churches and individuals in Britain and Ireland can better engage with the current Criminal Justice System.

The conference built on the previous 'In Pursuit of Justice' roundtable, which took place at the University of East London in March 2024, that saw a number of key church leaders, academics, and community activists, discuss how Christians and churches could better hold the police to account, as well as be conduits between diverse communities and the police service.

On an unseasonably warm and sunny spring day, over 100 people attended the April conference from as far away as Dublin and Belfast to hear speakers such as Mina Smallman, a retired Anglican priest and former high school teacher, the Revd Emmanuel King, who heads the Prison Outreach Network, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, the Labour MP, and Charles Critchlow, senior lecturer and programme leader for

Policing Studies at the University of East London, all of whom discussed disproportionality of 'stop and search', 'taser', 'incarceration' and the 'level of sentencing' experienced by minority ethnic communities. The speakers also noted that the system was in desperate need for reform, if it was to be truly equitable to all the populace.

The speakers also noted that the system was in desperate need for reform, if it was to be truly equitable to all the populace.

In the afternoon, Charmaine Noble-McLean, Director of Content at Premier Christian Radio, gave a presentation on Premier's survey on their listeners' attitude toward the police and the Criminal Justice System. The survey, which garnered over 500 views and opinions of a cross-section of Premier listeners, provided enlightening reading for all attendees. This talk was followed by workshops led by Dr Leroy Logan MBE, the former police superintendent in the UK, and a founding member of the National Black Police Association (NBPA), and the Ascension Trust's CEO, Bejoy Pal, and BBC's minister, Revd Dr Simon Woodman who led the 'Listening Space', which was an opportunity for attendees



to speak about their experiences – good and bad – of the police.

A further panel discussion chaired by Richard Reddie, Director of Justice and Inclusion at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), and a RJAF member, saw panellists envision what 'the Criminal Justice System should look like'. The speakers included Andy George, the Northern Ireland-born head of the National Black Police Association (NBPA), Lee Jasper from Operation Black Vote (OBV), Dr Nadia Habashi, the Deputy Cluster Lead for Criminology, Justice and Policing, and Senior Lecturer at the University of East London, and Selina Sharpe, a retired executive headteacher and Ofsted Inspector, now working as an education consultant.

The final session saw Revd Wale Hudson Roberts, the Justice Enabler for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and RJAF member, speak about shaping the vision of the work, and next steps. Revd Dr Simon Woodman closed proceedings with a prayer.



For more information visit:
www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/365504/Racial_Justice_Advocacy.aspx

Racial Justice Sunday

Next year marks the 30th anniversary of Racial Justice Sunday (RJS) in Britain and Ireland. RJS was established in 1995, two years after the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence, in Eltham, southeast London, as a way of encouraging churches in Britain and Ireland to address the forms of racism that cost the Black teenager his life. Since that time, CTBI has produced a range of resources that enable churches to

'remember', 'reflect' and 'respond' to bigotry, inequality and injustice in Church and society.

In 2025, RJS falls on 9 February, and the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI) 'Racial Justice Writers' Group' met several times in early 2024 to discuss the resources to mark this special Sunday. The group agreed that next year's materials will have the theme 'Coat of many colours', and will explore diversity, equality

and inclusion within the context of RJS in British and Irish churches. Given the aforementioned anniversary, the resources will also provide an opportunity to assess the progress made by the churches on their journey to racial justice over the last three decades.

These ecumenical resources will be available in the late autumn, in both English and Welsh, on the CTBI website.



For more information on the Racial Justice resources, visit:
www.ctbi.org.uk/racialjustice



Immigration is not a crime

Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal reflects on social justice

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recorded that over 100 million people have fled their homes because of the danger to their lives, and many are separated from families and friends in the process. Ninety percent of the world's refugees are from countries in or close to war and conflict, like Afghanistan, Gaza, Myanmar, Syria, Sudan, Yemen and Ukraine.

Around seventy percent of them are displaced, trapped in their own countries. Approximately ninety percent of those who manage to get out take sanctuary in a neighbouring country. People from Afghanistan go to Pakistan; people from Myanmar go to Bangladesh; people from Sudan go to

Uganda and Egypt; people from Syria go to Lebanon.

Those who manage to escape and go in search of safety face horrendous hardships, dangers and obstacles, crossing the wilderness of deserts, treacherous sea waters, unscrupulous smugglers and water-tight borders, and horrific sufferings.

Those who manage to cross deserts, Mediterranean Sea, many borders, then the English Channel, face what the government has called “a hostile environment”, detention and deportation, with the threat to be sent to Rwanda. The message is: “you are not welcome here”.

Deterring people coming to the UK is not going to stop people coming here for sanctuary. Long term, the solution

lies in eradicating war, ending poverty, tackling global warming, and being at ease with those who are different.

More immediately people coming here seeking sanctuary require hospitality, not hostility. This is the context in which we do our work of challenging hostility with hospitality, by building cultures of welcome, hospitality and sanctuary.

Migration made us who we are and defines us, migration is in our blood and bones and being. Roman Catholic Theologian, Gemma Tulud, from the Philippines, makes a strong, coherent, cohesive and compassionate case for theological reflection on migration, exploring the positive dimensions of migration and migrants. Working from a theology of “one bread, one body, one

people” she argues for social justice in immigration. What would social justice in immigration look like? Here are a few reflections from me.

Social justice in immigration

The UK approach to borders and nationality, and the Rwanda deportation scheme, is a monstrous response to a human catastrophe. You cannot fix a “broken” system with a broken thread. Any attempt by the UK to control its border alone, as an Island, is doomed to be a failure. We need to work across borders and divides. Britain needs migrants and the skills they bring.

Most UK “migrants” last year came here legitimately on work, student and

Any attempt by the UK to control its border alone, as an Island, is doomed to be a failure.

holiday visas, and as refugees (eg from Ukraine). A much smaller number came through the tortuous route of the English Channel on unseaworthy vessels because there are not safe routes for people to come to the UK and apply for refugee status. Stopping migration is like trying to stop glaciers melting in global warming.

There is an urgent need for global cooperation to manage the global movement of people and immigration in the broadest understanding of its meaning. What this means minimally for me is:

- Processes to manage not prevent immigration.
- Distinguishing between people who travel on work, student and holiday visas, those who apply for refugee status, and those who come here as refugees.
- Broadening the definition of who is a refugee.
- Creating safe passage for people seeking sanctuary and refugees, not reducing or shutting them.
- Supporting search and rescue of those in danger.
- Care and speed in asylum decision and ending detention of already hurting people.
- Establishing the right for asylum seekers to work.
- Investing in instruments of peace, not war, healing not harming, mercy and compassion, not cruelty.
- Building cultures of welcome, hospitality and sanctuary.

It is possible to protect borders and provide reformed immigration and

asylum policies that are based on justice, mercy and humility.

Resettlement Schemes can be expanded and enhanced with quality inclusion and integration support of refugees and people seeking sanctuary.

As a member of the United Nations and a signatory of the UN Refugee Convention, the UK should share the responsibility for the protection of refugees globally.



For more information on the Church of Sanctuary:
www.churchofsanctuary.org

Churches' Refugee Network

The joint Churches' Refugee Network (CRN) and Church of Sanctuary conference was held at the Church at Carrs Lane, Birmingham, on Saturday 8 June 2024, and brought together churches, parachurch groups and Christian organisations working with asylum seekers, refugees, and those who provide some form of 'hospitality' or 'sanctuary' to those in need.

The conference showcased the excellent work taking place in Birmingham, the West Midlands, and further afield to resolve many of the issues impacting people seeking asylum and refuge. The day itself saw around 130 people listen to such luminaries as Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, the head of Church of Sanctuary (COS), and

Churches Together in England's Bishop Mike Royal, the conference Chair for the first session. The keynote speakers in the first session, Prof. Robert Beckford and Dr Jayme Reaves, provided a socio-cultural and theological understanding of 'sanctuary', exploring what the Bible has to say on the matter. Their presentations were followed by a Q&A session involving attendees.

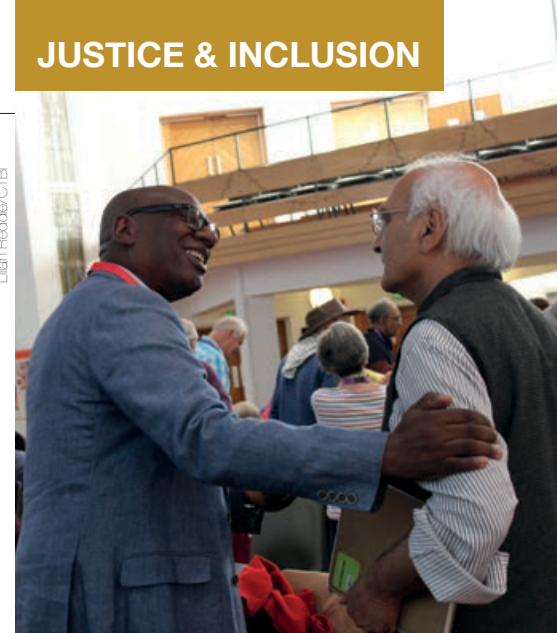
The afternoon session featured Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's (CTBI) General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady, and Rt Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover, the afternoon Chair. The keynote speakers in the second session included Vanessa Baker, Assistant Head at St Dunstan's Catholic Primary School in Birmingham, and testimonies from personnel linked to 'Stories of Hope

and Home', a local organisation based at Carrs Lane Church, which provides safe spaces for people with experience of seeking sanctuary.

Dr Brady then chaired the second Q&A involving Revd Dr Inderjit Bhogal, Richard Reddie, and the two personnel from 'Stories of Hope and Home'. Finally, Bishop Rose Hudson-Wilkin wrapped up proceedings by speaking about her work in Dover, and the county of Kent, which has become a flashpoint for immigration/asylum matters. She noted the hostility she faced over her stance on this issue, especially from those who called themselves Christians. Bishop Rose ended the conference by reciting the Franciscan Blessing 'of discomfort'.



Read the full report:
www.ctbi.org.uk/sanctuary2024



Do you believe this?

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2025

The ecumenical movement has committed itself to praying for the visible unity of the church



The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (WPCU) is an important time to offer this prayer and in 2025 it comes at the start of a very significant ecumenical anniversary.

1700 years ago, the churches across the Roman Empire gathered at Nicaea for the first Ecumenical Council. It took place at a time when Christianity was emerging from a period of persecution and into a period when it would become the official religion of the Roman Empire. Out of the Council came the Nicene Creed, an important part of the liturgical traditions of a great many churches.

2025 will be an important opportunity for the churches to reflect together on our shared faith and what it means to confess the Christian faith and witness to it in the 21st century.

The resources for WPCU come from the ecumenical community at Bose in Northern Italy with a focused reflection on the story of Martha's confession of faith in Jesus in John 11:17-27.

The resources, available in September, will be free to download from the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland website in the following versions: English Booklet (with large print version option); Welsh-English bilingual; Irish Gaelic and Scots Gaelic.

As well as the worship service, there are also resources for each of the eight days of the "Octave" for use in small groups or for person reflection. Each of the "days" include Bible readings, a reflection, questions for discussion, a prayer and some suggested "go and do's" that ground our prayer for unity in mission and service. The English and Welsh booklets are also available in hardcopy to purchase from Norwich Books and Music and there will also be All Age Worship materials available in due course.

Dates

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is traditionally held on 18-25 January each year although it can also be held during the Season of Pentecost (which is the practice in much of the Global South).



For more information visit: www.ctbi.org.uk/wpcu25



Enriching the narrative

Grace Al-Zoughbi reflects on her ecumenical journey, supported by the Pauline Webb Ecumenical Fund

Through the Pauline Webb fund, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) awards grants to support women's participation in ecumenical work. One of the recipients of this fund, Grace Al-Zoughbi, reflects on her time undertaking field research in the Middle East as part of her PhD degree exploring Arab Christian women in the contemporary Middle East and its ecumenical implications.

"My doctoral work is a study of Arab Christian women in the contemporary Middle East. It is an original exploration of Christianity in the Middle East, examining particularly the roles and experiences of Arab Christian women

in theological education. It takes into consideration the modern history of Western missionary presence, Eastern Christian perspective of the Middle East, and the Islamic context.

Whilst there are numerous studies on Muslim women in the region from the perspective of culture, society, and anthropology, there is a real lacuna in work on Arab Christian women.

Whilst there are numerous studies on Muslim women in the region from the perspective of culture, society, and anthropology, there is a real lacuna in work on Arab Christian women. The contribution of Arab Christian

women to theological education in the Middle East is also under researched. My work seeks to address these gaps within the wider context of the study of Christianity in the Middle East today.

My research is based on extensive field work in the contemporary context, however, also engages with existing literature, particularly on the modern history of Protestant missions in the Middle East and influential historical figures in Eastern Christianity in the Middle East, and also contemporary female religious and theological thinkers. Most of my ethnographic field work was conducted in Palestine, Egypt, and Lebanon, due to the size and influence of Christianity in those countries. In Lebanon, Christianity is the religious affiliation of 20%-30% of

complex and highly contentious cultural, political, and religious context of the modern Middle East.

My work describes how emerging roles for women are being configured for the future, particularly the emergence of a lay theological community of women scholars. This community of women scholars offers the opportunity to reflect on the characters of Christianity in the Middle East, particularly by developing an academy of women scholars from a variety of ecclesial traditions, thus creating a rich exchange of ideas. My work seeks to describe, but also frame the emergence of this lay theological community of women scholars in the Middle East, and in a sense, it is endeavouring to chronicle what is occurring in the contemporary Middle East, and its wider implications for society and culture.

Although Christianity in the Middle East is a highly contested and dynamic field of study, it is an indispensable element of understanding Christianity in a global context.

As a Palestinian Arab Christian woman who was born, raised, and educated in Bethlehem but who studied abroad, I bring to my subject an uncommon cultural and religious understanding and perspectives of the subjects with which I engage both scholarly and theologically. My position allowed me to discern significant connections with a broad range of Arab Christian women thinkers and writers."

Grace Al-Zoughbi (PhD, London School of Theology) is a Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem. She is an assistant professor of theological education at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, in Beirut, and serves as an accreditation officer with the Middle East and North Africa Association for Theological Education.



Read more: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/june-web-only/women-theologians-middle-east-desert-mothers-hindiyya-irini.html

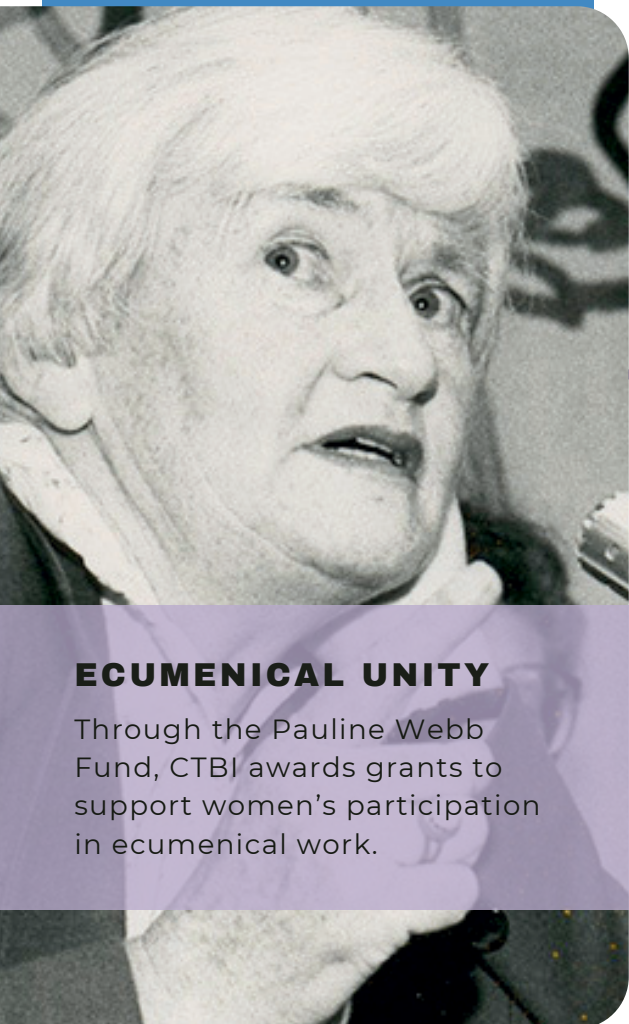


the population, in Egypt 11%, and in Palestine less than 1%. I interviewed a total of 53 women in theological education and 11 male leaders associated with various theological institutions in the Middle East.

Although Christianity in the Middle East is a highly contested and dynamic field of study, it is an indispensable element of understanding Christianity in a global context. Within the Middle Eastern context there is an interreligious element, a constant awareness of engaging with other religious traditions that have their own understanding of religion and education. There is an opportunity for women to contribute a distinct voice and a leading role within Middle Eastern Christian theological education within awareness of dialogue between the various religious traditions which constitute a distinct character of the Middle East in its plurality.

The main themes of my research are: Middle Eastern Christianity; Arab Christian Women in Theological Education; and the Contribution of Eastern Christian Women to the Church, Academy and Society.

Arab Palestinian Christian women tend to maintain their belonging and roots to the Eastern churches, even as they engage with Protestant or other Christian expressions. Elements of this 'interdenominational mobility' for Christian women enrich the narrative which sketches a more actual lived reality. Therefore, encounter and dialogue with Eastern Christianity as a religion and culture, particularly with women who maintain that narrative, is an ecclesial distinctive of the region. As a researcher, I am cognisant of the modern historical context; however, my work is contemporary as it seeks to engage and dialogue with the many current debates. The background of my study is the



THE PAULINE WEBB FUND

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

BACKGROUND

This programme was established with the support of the late Dr Pauline Webb of the Methodist Church in honour of her leadership in ecumenism, internationally and closer to home. Throughout her career Dr Webb held a series of significant leadership roles in the World Council of Churches and the Methodist Conference of Great Britain. She played a key role in significant ecumenical dialogues and campaigns and in the world of religious affairs broadcasting. She was a powerful advocate for women's rights and leadership through her speeches and publications, but above all through her example.

Pauline was keen to support and encourage the participation of women in the ecumenical movement, especially through support for younger leaders to gain ecumenical experience early in their careers. The Fund was established before her death in 2017 and since then has continued in her memory. CTBI wishes to acknowledge with deep appreciation the personal contribution of Dr Webb to this fund through a legacy donation.

ECUMENICAL UNITY

Through the Pauline Webb Fund, CTBI awards grants to support women's participation in ecumenical work.

WHO CAN APPLY?

The fund is open to people who meet the following criteria:

- Women, normally resident in Britain or Ireland, and
- Members of a church that is in membership of CTBI, or one of the national ecumenical instruments. (Evidence of support from a sponsoring church or ecumenical body is required as part of the application process.)
- In accordance with the focus of this fund on enabling early career leaders to have an experience of ecumenical engagement, preference is given to women under forty years old.
- We particularly encourage applications from women from minority ethnic communities in Britain and Ireland, and those working in areas where access to funding and other resources limits opportunities for engagement.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

- The fund awards grants of up to £1000 as a contribution towards travel or other costs to enable women to:
 - Attend an intentionally ecumenical event
 - Undertake a course or study visit in the area of ecumenism
 - Conduct research in the area of ecumenism
- As part of the application process participants are asked to provide details of how they will use the experience gained to contribute to the promotion of ecumenism.
- Please note that grants are only awarded where other financial support for this activity is unavailable.
- Grants do not normally cover more than 75% of the total cost.

HOW TO APPLY

For more information, or to request an application pack and confirmation of the deadline for the next funding round:

visit ctbi.org.uk/pauline-webb-ecumenical-fund

email: info@ctbi.org.uk

DEADLINE

Please check the CTBI website for details.

Prayer for Season of Creation 2024

CREATOR GOD, thank you for the precious gift of the earth.

For land and sea and sky – for mountains and valleys; for lakes, rivers and oceans, for the sun, moon and stars. We thank you for all the creatures you created; from the smallest ant to the largest whale and all that's in between. For the birds of the sky, the insects of the crevices, the fish of the seas.

For seasons of the year and cycles of nature – a time to sow, a time to grow, and a time to harvest and rest. Thank you for the peace and restoration we find in the natural world and the many ways it gives us refuge, solace, comfort and inspiration.

You set us apart to tend and look after your earth, to steward it and help it flourish. You gave us the will and the mind to learn and to act, but we have taken it for granted and have exploited it for our own needs. As humans, we have been greedy, selfish, and destructive. We have harmed people, animals, and the earth itself. We lament the levels of biodiversity loss brought on by our need for more buildings, infrastructure, and more production of all kinds.

LOVING GOD, we pray now for justice for those affected by climate change, especially in poorer countries.

Often, they have contributed the least to its causes, but are suffering the most and more severely. Help us remember the families that have been driven away from their homes, communities and livelihoods due to extreme weathers like wildfires, floods or droughts – the many thousands who are now elsewhere, apart, and separate from where they used to call home.

Teach us to appreciate all that we have and be mindful of those who have less – especially the basics of life like food, clean water, and shelter. We pray for knowledge and understanding for world leaders in their roles as facilitators and decision-makers – that you will grant them the courage to act for the good of all mankind and the planet.

Equip us to live more thoughtfully, kindly and to tread lightly on this planet. We pray for individual and collective wisdom and boldness to act in more meaningful ways, and to speak up when we need to.

Amen

*This prayer has been kindly offered by Eco Church Wales,
a programme of A Rocha UK: www.arocha.org.uk*

DUW Y CREAWDWR, diolchwn am y ddaear hon, a roddaist i ni.

Diolchwn am y mioroedd, y tir a'r awyr- y mynyddoedd a'r dyffrynnoedd, yr afonydd a'r llynnoedd, y nos, y sêr a'r lleuad. Diolchwn am yr holl greaduriaid a greaist ti – o'r lleiaf i'r mwyaf.

Am dymhorau'r flwyddyn ac am beth maent yn ei ddysgu i ni – bod amser i hau, amser i dyfu, i gynaeafu ac i orffwys. Mae natur yn creu lle i ni orfoleddu a chael ysbrydoliaeth ond hefyd cyfleoedd i ddarganfod heddwch, cysur ac adnewyddiad.

Cofiwn i ti ein gosod ar wahân i ofalu am y greadigaeth, i'w stiwardio a'i hadfer, ond rydym wedi ei defnyddio ar gyfer ein dibenion ein hun – rydym wedi bod yn hunanol ac wedi ei chymryd yn ganiataol. Galarwn yn awr am y colledion i fioamrywiaeth y byd- y planhigion, yr anifeiliad a'r adar sy'n dioddef ac yn diflannu. Erfyniwn am dy faddeuant.

DUW Y CARIAD, gweddiwn dros y rheiny sy'n dioddef fwyaf o achos newid hinsawdd – yn aml y tlotaf sydd wedi cyfrannu cyn lleied iddo. Cofiwn am y niferoedd sydd wedi gorfod gadael eu cartrefi, eu cymunedau a'u bywoliaeth oherwydd tywydd eithafol fel llifogydd, tanau gwyllt neu sychder.

Gwna ni yn fwy ymwybodol o beth sydd gennym ni ac o'r rheiny sy'n llai ffodus – yn enwedig o ran pethau sylfaenol fel bwyd, dŵr glan a tho uwch eu pennau. Gweddiwn am wybodaeth a deallusrwydd i arweinwyr ein byd wrth iddyn nhw hwyluso a chymryd penderfyniadau mawr – y byddant yn gweithredu er lles pennaf y ddynoliaeth a'r blaned.

Cynorthwya ni i fyw yn fwy ymwybodol, yn fwy caredig ac yn fwy 'ysgafn' yn ein bywyd bob dydd. Gweddiwn am ddoethineb a dewrder i ni fel unigolion ac fel cymdeithas weithredu mewn modd fwy meddylgar a chodi llais pan fydd angen.

Amen

CTBI STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland believes that Ecumenism is an urgent evangelical imperative. It is time we cease projecting the image of a dismembered Body of Christ, which is a counter-witness to the Good News we proclaim.

The ecumenism we seek is dynamic and responsive not a monolith resulting from one powerful church swallowing the others, but a mega community composed of churches (local, national and international) that complement one another, each with its own historical identity, its unique tradition, its own doctrinal emphasis, and its particular worship form; in short, a pentecostal communion of communities that understand and speak one another's language.



CTBI

A magazine of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
Issue 10 • Autumn 2024



Interview with
Cytin General
Secretary Dr
Gynan Llwyd



Member
church profile:
Archdiocese of
Thyatira and
Great Britain



A Theology
of Gift



Prayer for
Season of
Creation
2024