‘CALLED TO BE ONE – WHAT NOW?’

Report of a meeting in Bristol 12-13 November 2009
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'Called to be One – What Now?' was an informal meeting of individuals committed to the movement for Christian unity in Britain. It was convened on the initiative of Keith Clements who since returning to England on retirement as general secretary of the Conference of European Churches at the end of 2005 had several times in public expressed his deep concern for the ecumenical situation here, the apparent lack of enthusiasm in the churches generally and the evidently diminishing role of the ecumenical bodies which had been set up in 1990. Conversations with several friends encouraged him to believe there would be value in gathering together 20-25 people who have been, and are now, ecumenically involved for a 24-hour residential conference, to share experiences, questions and perceptions.

Keith Clements therefore sent out personal invitations in September 2009, to a number of people in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, to attend a residential meeting at Wesley College Conference Centre, Bristol, from lunchtime 12th to lunchtime 13th November. The letter of invitation indicated the main concerns behind it as outlined above, and the basis of participation which was as follows:

Those invited would be from a wide range of denominations and from different kinds of ecumenical organisation.
Participants would nevertheless attend in their personal capacities rather than necessarily representing the official viewpoints of their respective church or organisation, and the discussion would be as open as possible.
‘Chatham House Rule’ would operate, i.e. in any reportage statements would not be attributed to any named person.
There was no prior commitment to any particular outcome from the meeting.
Common prayer would be an integral part of the meeting.
The meeting would be self-financing.

Twenty-nine persons registered for the meeting, and over 12 more expressed strong interest with regrets that they were unable to attend due to prior commitments (and in several cases sending in valuable comments). Those who registered were:

Revd Gethin Abraham-Williams, [former general secretary, CYTÚN: Baptist]
Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, [secretary for Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs, CTE]
Revd Prof. Paul Ballard [Emeritus Professor of Theology & Religious Studies, Cardiff University: Baptist]
Mr Simon Barrow [associate director, Ekklesia]
Revd Myra Blyth [tutor and chaplain, Regent’s Park College, Oxford; former WCC staff: Baptist]
Mr David Bradwell [Methodist]
Dr David Carter [former ecumenical officer, Bristol: Methodist]
Revd Dr Keith Clements [former general secretary, CEC: Baptist]
Dr Martin Conway [former WSCF, BCC staff and President of the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham; Anglican]
Revd Dr David Cornick [general secretary, CTE]
Revd Bob Fyffe [general secretary, CTBI]
Rt Revd David Hawtin [former bishop of Repton: Church of England - Local Unity; former CTE Enabling Group/GLU]
Revd Gordon Holmes [former Christian Aid regional representative: Baptist]
Dr Judy Holyer [Quaker]
Mr Keith Jenkins [former director, CEC Church & Society Commission: Methodist]
Revd John Johansen-Berg [Fellowship of Reconciliation: URC]
Revd Dr Susan Helen Jones [Church in Wales]
Mrs Rhian Linecar [CYTÚN Faith, Order and Witness Officer: Church in Wales]
Revd Murdoch MacKenzie [URC, now living in Scotland]
Revd Dr Donald Norwood [URC, Oxford]
Revd Roger Nunn [former field officer, CTE: Baptist]
Revd Simon Oxley [former WCC staff: Baptist]
Revd Michael Robertson [ecumenical officer, Roman Catholic Diocese of Clifton]
Revd Graham Sparkes [Head of Department of Faith and Unity, Baptist Union]
Dame Mary Tanner [WCC President, former secretary of Council of Christian Unity: Church of England]
Hilary Topp [National Coordinator, SCM: Quaker]
Revd Elizabeth Welch [URC]
Mrs Carys Whelan [Wales Roman Catholic Ecumenical Committee]
Revd Nick Williams [former ecumenical officer, Diocese of Bath and Wells: Church of England]

In the event Susan Helen Jones and Mary Tanner were unable to attend due to family emergencies.

Abbreviations
See the list at the end of this report.

Preparatory material
Several preparatory papers were circulated prior to, or tabled at, the meeting, consisting mainly of observations and reflections by participants themselves, and also the paper ‘Reviewing the forgotten history of Local Ecumenical Partnerships’ by John Cole.

Programme
The meeting comprised five 1½ hour sessions, the moderating shared between Gethin Abraham-Williams, Keith Clements (in the absence of Mary Tanner) and Michael Robertson. These sessions were plenaries except that for the third session (Thursday evening) most of the time was spent in three groups. Three persons (David Hawtin, Carys Whelan and Myra Blyth) acted as ‘listeners’, who at the start of the fourth session (Friday morning) presented reflections on what they perceived to be the most significant issues raised thus far, or to be raised.

The time was allocated in the five sessions thus:

1. Self-introductions and sharing of immediate perceptions and concerns.
2. Further discussion on major concerns
3. Group discussions on three major concerns that had arisen in the previous two sessions: ‘Context’, ‘Relations between Roman Catholics and others’, and ‘Power’, followed by brief reports from these groups in plenary.
4. Presentations by the three ‘listeners’ and discussion of these.
5. Attempts to identify ways ahead, especially considering the relations between the churches and the ecumenical instruments.

Devotional sessions at the start and close of work each day were led by Gethin Abraham-Williams, Michael Robertson, Elizabeth Welch and Murdoch MacKenzie.

This report, based upon the full notes taken by David Carter and Gordon Holmes, does not present a chronological, detailed narrative of the course of the discussions, but rather records the main points made, the issues identified (including where there is not complete agreement) and suggestions for future action.
A comment by one participant

*I like parties and this invitation sounded like an invitation to one! It is a great joy to meet people and to be changed by them. We need to be able to look back to the past and see where things were exciting – and where we were deluded. Can we read our current situation with this hindsight?*

Basic perspectives on the ecumenical scene: negative or positive?

A number of us are depressed by the current scene, speaking of ‘a hardening of the arteries’ in the churches, new divisions within the churches and a ‘hardening of denominationalism’. For some who have given much of their life to ecumenism it is now especially depressing – if one believed that the Spirit was at work in the 1960s and ’70s why is there no life in it now? It is interesting how memories of the 1982 Covenant (Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed) have faded, and even the present Anglican-Methodist Covenant is described as ‘dead in the water’ in many places. We are struggling with the effect of the dominant culture on our churches – a consumerist, competitive culture with churches seeking variety in order to fill different congregational niches – and in many ways the media are our chief enemy in the ecumenical movement.

Others however are less pessimistic. ‘Ecumenism is not becalmed, it is just different.’ (In the view of some this raises the question of when does ecumenism cease to be ecumenism?) It is important to discern where the ‘energy’ actually is at the moment and to build upon it, to see where hope lies and where enthusiasm can be unleashed in the life of the churches. Black majority and Pentecostal churches advocate a less anxious and more relaxed attitude to unity. Father Timothy Radcliffe OP was cited as recently saying that if it took the Church a hundred years to discover what the Spirit was saying to us we should not get overly worried. In some cases it is a matter of getting theology to catch up with the practical, local experience of unity such as mutual ministerial recognition, which is not yet officially and theologically recognised.

It is evident that some of us are simultaneously both pessimists and optimists. The need is to renew ecumenical consciousness in all the churches, shifting the emphasis from accommodating denominational differences to the renewal of all the churches together. True ecumenism has always been about changing the churches, not just uniting them. We need new or different models for unity negotiations and indeed for unity itself: for example, as a recent Quaker statement puts it, unity should be based on love rather than on intellectual agreement. Prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit are central, as is the practice of the Christian virtues of love, patience and ‘preferring in honour’ at inter-church level as well as in personal relationships. What is crucial is that ecumenism should connect with the whole created order within the great reconciling plan of God (Ephesians 1:10) and thus appeal more widely than to the narrow churchly sphere. When the church is in solidarity with the world then we can get excited. Where is the movement in the ecumenical movement?

Critical issues arising in the discussions

1. ‘Effortless superiority’ and ‘I have no need of you’

Problems are created by the ‘effortless superiority’ of the Church of England and especially by some bishops. This is an opinion expressed at the meeting by some Anglican voices themselves! ‘Methodists feared they would be gobbled up, Anglicans assumed it.’ Equally, however, non-Anglicans wish to acknowledge the immense contribution that the Church of England has made in terms of commitment, human resources and finance to ecumenical work – not least Local Ecumenical Partnerships, many of which would not have been possible without provision by the Church of England – and the leadership of ecumenically committed bishops. All denominations can exhibit some ‘successful churches’ which do not want to know anything else. There is a need to recover a proper sense of mutual relating and
interdependence – including at four-nation level where we ought to be listening to one another. We need to be reminded of Mary Tanner’s dictum that we should never say to another tradition, ‘I have no need of you.’ The conviction of ecclesial self-sufficiency is so strong that it prevails even when people theoretically deplore division.

For the black-led churches however there was a problem not just with the ‘effortless superiority’ on the part of the Church of England but also with the ‘group think’ of some white churches that are benevolent towards black-led churches in a way that implies ecumenism is just about unity for their particular group.

‘Churches together’ has become a convenient slogan, but what is actually required of the churches in order actually to ‘be together’ in a meaningful way? How do churches need to change in order to relate as ‘churches together’? What are the basics of mutuality to which they should sign up? What is the deal of ‘being together’ – do we need a paper setting out ‘Rules of Good Practice’ and which should include mutual accountability?

There is also the example of the recently established Global Christian Forum which embraces all traditions and in its methodology offers a counter-example to the tendencies described above, thanks to its insistence on speaking and listening to one another in the first instance as persons, and only going on to any sort of plans once there has grown up a deep respect for one another all round the room as fellow-Christians and fellow-followers of Jesus.

2. Unity, diversity and the goal

Underlying the differing views on unity and ecumenism are different assumptions about the nature of community and its relation to organisation. Black-led churches are often less bureaucratic and dogmatic and are keen for a more ‘relational’ ecumenism, a kind of widespread family that can accept living in very different contexts yet bound by a common loyalty and identity. The question is, ‘How can we all sit together at the foot of the cross?’ From this viewpoint, the three necessary emphases are: the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives; mission, which prioritises freeing the oppressed; and unity in prayer. Unity is not created, but celebrated.

However, it is exactly at the point of ‘praying together’ that some of the most acute practical dilemmas are being experienced by those who are involved at local level in building relationships between the Pentecostal and other churches, where joint worship can mean encounter with radically different styles of prayer – a challenge on all sides. Many people have no experience of differing forms of prayer. There can be resistance within a congregation when it is invited to become acquainted with differing styles (for example when a Pentecostal pastor tries to accustom the people to a greater variety of forms of prayer); and Methodists have been known to declare ‘This is not Methodism!’ when invited to use a form of worship from another tradition. Indeed, we should be able to find ecumenism in some of the classical thinkers in our own confessional roots.

In the light of this, it is suggested or asked:

The actual experiential dimension of our being together must be affirmed.
The Christian Meditation Group can play a key role.
We should be trying to put flesh on our common life (cf. the CTE publication Together in a Common Life).
Why do we not have the Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment in every church, as an honest reflection of where we are and which would in effect transform every church into an LEP overnight??
Churches could pray for each other every Sunday – few do so at the moment, usually keeping their praying to prayer for other sections of their own communion.

All this raises the question about goals, which is the most important point of all. Is there no particular model of what we are aiming at? We might know we are together and talk unceasingly about ‘our invisible unity in Christ’ but THE WORLD does not see it and so will never believe. In what sense are we still ‘called to be one’? Faith and Order issues remain real: basically, the meaning of Church, unity, visible unity.
3. Our context and its influence

Both the religious and social changes of the recent past and the present must be faced. The increasing diversity of CTE membership for example reflects the growing significance of the Pentecostal churches as well as the participation of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches since the formation of the new instruments in 1990 – ecumenical encounter is no longer pan-Protestant. It is tremendously exciting as a Christian disciple to get the full range of expressions of worship and theology. Moreover there is a vast world of Christian witness that is not even in touch with the ‘ecumenical movement’ but a lot of informal collaboration goes on. Might it not even be asked whether some good things have come out of ‘schism’, of which some of us are the inheritors in our respective denominations?

In addition, however, there is the questionable influence of our social and cultural context, especially in its consumerist and pragmatist features, into which our churches seem to have bought. Losing sight of the ‘traditional’ goal of unity could be dangerous if it simply led us into a cosy being-at-home in the modern world and its ways of ‘going it alone’.

We need therefore to identify just what are the critical points in our context. Is it the rise of spin doctors or consumerism? Or being honest, is it the uncomfortable fact of the numerical decline in many of our denominations, and the accompanying entrenched defensiveness of the churches, with fewer financial and other resources? Some of our Free Churches belong to a past age. What is the meaning of decline?

We readily identify problems in our context – the fact of many different cultures, the way the media set the context, the challenge of engaging with Islam and so on. But there are real or potential strengths too: events and movements like Greenbelt, Ekklesia, SCM, peace movements, local grass root projects – not to mention Christians who do not actually go to church!

4. Denominationalism and local ecumenism

Denominational allegiance occupies a somewhat ambiguous place in the current scene. On the one hand there are many congregations formally belonging to a particular denomination but where many if not most of the individual members come from a wide variety of traditions and do not feel any compelling loyalty to one at the expense of another (‘I am one of the few “conviction Baptists” in my local Baptist church’). Some welcome this, or at least call for its recognition as an inescapable fact of our time, a manifestation of the rapid social change we are in. Denominationalism should never take precedence over our primary Christian allegiance. We need ‘impure denominations’ i.e. those that have begun to exchange across denominational boundaries. The ecumenical movement has to grow from the bottom up and the hierarchies should acknowledge this.

On the other hand there is a warning that talking about post-denominationalism makes no sense in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox contexts. A different kind of anxiety points to the possibility that some forms of unity might develop into a scenario of ‘Christians versus others.’

In this respect the story of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs), of which there are now 900 in England alone, needs re-telling, endorsing and celebrating (see the paper by John Cole). From their context there is a need especially to challenge the habitually critical remarks about ‘ecumenical bureaucracy’ – it is in fact the denominational machinery which those in LEPs typically find a cause of frustration. It is sad that after so many years LEPs are still regarded as somewhat odd and exotic, and that many people who are involved in them feel isolated and even looked upon as freakish by the denominations at large.

5. Power

The exercise of power by the churches is a depressing phenomenon – whether by the ‘effortless superiority’ of Church of England bishops or the leadership more generally. It must be asked how the whole people of God can be involved together in decision-making and the mutual accountability of the churches. A striking illustration of what the churches can do by working together is the inclusion in the new EU
Constitution of the clause requiring there to be regular dialogue between the EU authorities and the churches. There is a danger however that some churches will want to use this achievement of ecumenical collaboration for their own particular interests.

Church of England episcopal power, because of its established position, is a huge pressure, but precisely how, for example, bishops in the House of Lords operate, on whose behalf (what about Scotland, Wales and Northen Ireland for example?) and with what resources of expertise, is far from clear. ‘Effortless superiority’, however, is not found only among Anglicans. There is a European global arrogance in our churches and in our culture, and found wherever the concept operates: ‘We are the winners and others will catch up’.

There are also power relationships among and between churches, which need to be examined. There is a conflict between the persistent tendency towards inappropriate paternalism on the one hand and the wish for more collaborative ministry on the other hand, which is becoming acute in the context of ‘the explosion of knowledge’ today, and is manifest in our proneness to talk among ourselves about such issues rather than with outsiders.

Too often, moreover, it is the human dimension of power which is discussed rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. ‘The ecumenical task is to help the churches operate from a powerless base.’

6. Leaders and the whole people of God

The capacity of church leaders, in general, to give effective ecumenical leadership is under question. There is a lack of professionalism, knowledge and discipline. For one thing, they should be seen to be together, and acting together, as a rule and not on occasion. But too often they seem ill-prepared for ecumenical leadership and need ‘training’ for this – not so much in formal ‘courses’ but rather some kind of guided exposure experience and reflection. One of the ecumenical instruments has in fact been offering training to new leaders but the reply comes: ‘No thanks, we are fine’. In fact, is the training of leaders possible without their having ecumenical conviction? Where are the new ecumenically oriented leaders to come from?

Crucially important is the need for proper accountability in decision-making with as much involvement as possible of the whole people of God. Decision-makers must be in close proximity to each other and to their people. There is a lack at present of large-scale four-nation ecumenical events wider than delegated representatives and involving people at all levels (compare for instance the German Kirchentag), and representative meetings of the whole people of God as well as leaders and functionaries.

7. Life in the Spirit and the whole of creation

Ecumenism reflects acceptance of ‘I have need of you’ in solidarity with the whole of creation. The whole world needs the gospel, and for this only a life in the Spirit is adequate, which comes via prayer. Strongly commended are the two recent works by Cardinal Walter Kasper A Handbook for Spiritual Ecumenism and Harvesting the Fruits. We can all pray together but it must admitted, for example, that it has left our children and young people disconnected – few of them are talking about these ecumenical issues. Roman Catholics, for their part, are conscious of the hope that their participation in the post-BCC instruments would supply the ‘something missing’ from the earlier models – but what?

As we enter more deeply into the spiritual dimension, prayer makes explicit our different approaches. We need to wait on God and slow down – a form of counter-culture our in present context, and which should come to the fore.

8. Ecclesiastical and ecumenical ambiguity

Some of us manifest a kind of nostalgia for the ecumenical past, while trying to be faithful to the ‘new instruments’ which require us to be more inclusive than the ‘pre-Marigold’ days (i.e. prior to the
inauguration in 1990 of the new ‘instruments’ along the lines set out in the ‘Marigold book’: Churches Together in Pilgrimage (1989)), more honest and more realistic. To a degree this has happened. But we have also as churches become more distant from one another. Courtesy enables but it can also create distance. Pragmatism operates. We hear it said that ecumenism, far from being an essential, is a ‘luxury’ we cannot afford (out of a concern for ‘efficiency’). Distance legitimises theological difference and in turn we become comfortable with theological difference. Theological difference in turn legitimises distance and the end result is complacency.

9. Protestantism and cultural disorientation

Pan-Protestantism – is it a gift or part of the problem? Those of us who are Protestants need to ask ourselves some searching questions in relation to our cultural context. Protestantism came into existence in response to new social realities of the time. But it has now been consumed by ‘markets’, ‘management’ and ‘novelty’ in the ceaseless quest for ‘relevance’. Catholicism and Orthodoxy, meanwhile, quietly smile at what has happened: we have constructed our own demise. A new orientation is needed involving the humility which recognises that as ‘traditional’ churches we should not fear the growth of new churches, and that the churches anyway do not control Christianity. ‘How can they join in the party which is creation-centred and has a social justice agenda?’ Our challenge is to carry the kingdom of God values into the secular area.

10. Relations between Roman Catholics and others

A particular Roman Catholic emphasis at the moment is on ‘spiritual ecumenism’, and this dimension of prayer and spirituality is being appreciated by others too. A special debt is owed to the late Cardinal Basil Hume who had a catalytic role in the ‘Not Strangers but Pilgrims’ process, the Swanwick Declaration of 1989 which led to and the establishment of the ‘new instruments’ in 1990. The small group which discussed relations between Roman Catholics and others dealt with, among other issues, the relative importance of the local and hierarchical levels. There may be many situations where ‘as a pastoral measure’ it is considered appropriate to do things not normally in accordance with Roman Catholic practice, but the Roman Catholic position is that only agreement at the highest levels can change official ecumenical relations. To an extent of course this is the case with all denominations, but it is a real question as to whether the needs of the local level should be much more determinative of the ‘official’ positions than vice versa, and this is likely to become more and more of an ecumenical issue.

11. Secularisation or re-sacralisation?

There is much debate and disagreement – including among ourselves at this meeting – on the present status of ‘religion’ on the world in general. Some see the secularisation process as inexorable, and in the end apt to affect even those faith communities apparently most resistant to it at present, such as Catholics, Pentecostals and Black-led churches. Others point to the experience of contexts such as India where the whole of life and human activity remains deeply imbued with religious awareness and practice. In the non-European world the churches, moreover, are not declining, as is clear from experiences shared in the Global Christian Forum, and Europe is ‘the exceptional case’ (cf Grace Davie, Europe: The Exceptional Case (2002)).

For some, the crucial point is not whether we are trying to ‘re-sacralise’ the world but whether we are ‘joining the party’ in creation where the real issues are already being engaged with (by church-related groups and others) in e.g. peace-making and climate change issues.

12. The role of the ecumenical instruments

Much of the current concern about the ecumenical movement in the British Isles centres around the role of the ‘new’ instruments set up in 1990. Some feel that they have ‘run into the sand’. In Wales for
example the Church in Wales had been critically important in helping the other churches to do business ecumenically but has recently rather withdrawn from that role. There seemed now to be renewed interest in continuing to pursue the 1975 Welsh Covenant (between the Anglican and some Free Churches). CTBI had been highly important for the Welsh churches but the capacity of CTBI was now greatly reduced and by 2006 appeared to have become little more than an agency of the four national instruments.

It was pointed out however that CTBI’s position is now very different. The Joint Public Issues Team (Baptist, Methodist, URC) for example works closely with CTBI when cooperation with others was needed (though it also has to be asked why the Anglicans and Roman Catholics are no longer, as formerly in CTBI, working on an ecumenical platform in this area). The Advent course on the economy *The World in Waiting*, and work being done on asylum, were also to be noted. There would also be work on Faith and Order issues. In CTE also there would also be substantial work on ecumenical theology in the coming months.

The crucial questions however concern the respective roles of the churches and the instruments in generating ecumenical activity, and whether the instruments are fulfilling (or being allowed to fulfil) the expectations set out in the ‘Marigold Book’ which accompanied their formation in 1990. One view being powerfully expressed is that the instruments have been largely reduced in their capacity to act effectively even as ‘heralds’, let alone as promoters, of ecumenism, due to an over-reaction by those in the churches who were determined to have no return to ‘the old BCC ways’ of ecumenical bodies acting ‘on behalf of’ the churches. The end result, on this view, is that there is now no effective promoter of ecumenism outside the churches themselves, many of whom are happy to acquiesce in this position.

Another view, however, is that it is indeed the case that it is the churches themselves who now carry the responsibility for the ecumenical enterprise as set out in the Marigold Book, and this must be accepted. This is the quite clear condition on which the new instruments were set up, to be as inclusive as possible and to enable the churches to act together if having work done for them. It is simply not the responsibility of CTE, CTBI, CYTŪN, ACTS and ICC to undertake any initiative which is not asked for by the member churches themselves – and certainly not to act to satisfy certain ‘sectional’ interests in the social arena which do not reflect the range of concerns and viewpoints in the churches at large, and do not take account of the ‘alternative narratives’ that need to be heard.

13. Ecumenical initiative: whose responsibility?

The positions outlined in the two preceding paragraphs in turn, pose a real dilemma for many observers. Are we simply caught between instruments forbidden to act except at the behest of the churches, and churches which may at best be only half-hearted in their ecumenical commitment, as reflected in earlier discussions at this meeting? Put crudely, who does the ecumenical ‘prodding’ of the churches if this is not the role of the instruments? If people feel passionately about certain issues that require ecumenical action, their churches should indeed address them. But such individuals might not have a voice within their synods/assemblies. In the past certain ecumenical networks (often quite informal) have been catalytic in challenging the churches and ecumenical bodies alike. We want to affirm the ecumenical instruments – they are suffering from a lack of affirmation at the moment. But how do we ensure that the ecumenical vision is kept alive? Europe, for example, is an issue tending to be neglected by our British churches yet many global issues are those on which Britain takes decisions within the EU framework. There are individuals within the churches who are interested in Europe but no real engagement from the churches themselves. Most churches however have some link to the British Study Group – could it help?

A review of CTBI (CCBI as it then was) was already carried out in the mid-1990s. This however focused on the instrument itself, not on whether and how the churches themselves had grown in their fulfilment of the commitments made in 1990 to make ecumenism a dimension of all they do and to move from ‘co-operation to commitment’ and more crucially to communion. This is the crucial question which still needs to be put to the churches: do the undertakings made in 1990 still count? A new review is necessary in which it needs to be asked what was set up in 1990, and why? What was the commitment of the churches then, and what is it now? The year 2010 will be appropriate as it will be the 20th anniversary of the new instruments as well as the 100th anniversary of the 1910 Edinburgh World
Missionary Conference, generally regarded as the birthing event of the modern ecumenical movement. There are real problems of relationships and honesty to be faced – unfortunately it is often more politic to deal in generalities and not address the specifics. What does it mean to say ‘Called to be one, yet asked to be different’? How are we different? There is anger and at times vituperation over specific issues – can we offer a ‘counter witness’ in how to handle difference?

14. More than institutions – providing space

Again and again the need has been stated in this meeting to ‘provide space’ for the ecumenical conversation to be carried on, deepened and extended. We must not become obsessed with the institutions, which are useful but are not themselves the kingdom. We should focus on what they should be about. Survival is not important to God! The institutions can provide an opportunity to ‘create space’ by: being an honest broker; providing worship and prayer opportunities; facilitating accountability; providing access where learning can happen, people can be enriched and behaviour changed.

In Conclusion

This meeting has proved a worthwhile experience, and the main lines of discussion are summarised in this report which the participants are free to use as they wish.

One possibility that has been aired several times is a Letter to the Churches which would seek to recall them to the ecumenical vision and invite them to address the issues we have discussed.

Above all, it is felt that the kind of encounter and discussion we have experienced could and should be replicated in a variety of other contexts and at different levels – national, regional, local etc – so as to renew and promote the ecumenical conversation in ways not confined to the normal institutional channels.
Publications mentioned in the Report


*Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment* (CTE)


*Swanwick Declaration*: see the Marigold Book


*The World in Waiting* (Advent course, CTBI 2009)

Davie, Grace Europe: *The Exceptional Case* (Darton, Longman and Todd 2002).

Kasper, Cardinal Walter *Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (New City Press 2006)


Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Action of Churches Together in Scotland</td>
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<td>BCC</td>
<td>British Council of Churches (1942–1990)</td>
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<td>CEC</td>
<td>Conference of European Churches</td>
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