

Meeting of Catholic Bishops Conference Committee for Christian Unity with Diocesan Ecumenical Representatives

June 12th-13th 2009,

Focolare Centre for Christian Unity, Welwyn Garden City

The first part of the meeting was devoted to reports on events and developments since the last CCU/DER's meeting in January 2009.

Bishop Declan Lang would be relinquishing all his ecumenical positions now that he had taken over from Bishop Crispian Hollis as head of the Bishop's Conference Department for International Affairs.

An update on various bilateral dialogues was then given:

English ARC

A paper on joint Anglican/Catholic schools had been presented. This had become a sensitive area since the recent experience in Oxford tended to colour perceptions because of the lack of significant numbers of such schools in the country to draw on positive models to counter the negative example. It had been stressed that ecumenical commitment should over-ride financial considerations as the basis for such schools.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor's address to the General Synod had been discussed. A report on the Receptive Ecumenism Conference at Ushaw in January 2009 had been given. It was noted that Pope Benedict's response to the 'Ravenna statement' of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue had been very positive. The Women in the Episcopate Measure before the General Synod will be addressed.

British Methodist-Catholic Dialogue

A meeting had been held in May 2009 at Douai Abbey. The dialogue had continued on the understanding of baptism focussing on examining the concepts of regeneration and original sin. The group also looked at baptism in a parish setting and sought to derive a description orientated to those seeking baptism and parents of children to be baptised. The bible and morality were discussed based on the recent publication by the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *The Bible and Morality – Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct*. Methodist participants requested and received an explanation regarding the events surrounding the lifting of the excommunication of the four SSPX bishops.

Methodist Roman Catholic International Commission (MeRCIC)

There was nothing to report as the next meeting is in October 2009.

URC-Catholic Dialogue

The latest meeting had examined the subject of conscience around a URC paper examining the historical perspective from the time of Calvin to the URC Covenant which contained a conscience clause.

The whole course of this dialogue had been reviewed as the agenda of the dialogue had been disjointed and lacked coherence partly because it was young and no history of engagement between the two traditions. The next meeting at Ushaw would look at receptive ecumenism.

Other news given was that an informal dialogue with the Baptists had been proposed. The Society for Ecumenical Studies was offering grants for dialogues with Baptists and Lutherans.

The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity (MAPUM) was a new body which had been created to encourage the take up of the proposed covenant between the two churches under the title 'Embracing the Covenant'.

Ecumenical Instruments

The CTBI would be undergoing a refocusing of its role and be reshaped to be relevant to that focus. The downsized staff of 6 to 8 personnel will be relocating to accommodation within the premises of the CBCEW at Eccleston Square. Its function would be dependent on the Churches providing a focus. It was likely that the body would be involved in inter-faith work.

At the CTE Forum in September 2009 it is anticipated that Archbishop Nichols will be present to formally sign up as one of the CTE Presidents. Finance was also an issue for continuing operation of CTE. It appeared that funding would cease at the end of 2009 for the CTE Group for Evangelisation.

CTE offered training courses for denominational county ecumenical officers and members of ecumenical commissions. It was stressed that it was important that there was a Catholic presence on these courses to demonstrate Catholic commitment to ecumenism. The next course will be run on 2nd – 4th March 2010 at Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire.

The death of Bishop Ian Cundy, Anglican Bishop of Peterborough and leading ecumenist in the Church of England, had recently occurred.

Church leaders in various regions of the country had collaborated in issuing joint statements warning of the danger of the BNP in the elections to the European Parliament. In the light of the outcome of the elections this warning had not been fully embraced.

SSPX

Attention of participants was drawn to the Notes of the Vatican Secretary of State published on 4th February 2009 which states that rapprochement requires acceptance by the SSPX of the teaching of Vatican II and of all the popes since Pius XII. It was clarified that there are doctrinal as well as disciplinary differences existing between the Society and the Catholic Church.

New Housing Developments

Fr James Cassidy, Northampton Diocese, gave a report on a meeting of the CTE Churches Co-ordinating Group for New Housing Areas which he recently joined. Whilst there are no identifiable big projects there are many small and medium-sized new housing developments which need pastoral provision. Such provision should be provided on an ecumenical basis since there is no established presence of existing parochial church traditions.

Parish Resource for Local Ecumenism

The second and third sessions of the meeting was to review the draft text of proposed leaflets for local ecumenism aimed at those in parishes engaged in local ecumenical activities and members of the parish pastoral council. The format will be seven A5-sized folded sheets with limited graphics and colour due to cost constraints. Each sheet will be dedicated to a given topic: Introduction to ecumenism, audit of ecumenical activities and opportunities, prayer and worship together, practical ecumenism, mission & evangelisation, working together for the common good, contact details for more resources.

Work in small groups generated many amendments which would be addressed in the final revision of this resource to be published and made available at the end of 2009/early 2010. It would be a CCU document having been approved by the Department of Dialogue and Unity. It is intended to be circulated in hard copy form to all bishops of England and Wales and be made available in electronic form from the CBCEW website.

Understanding of Communion

The final session of the meeting was a presentation by Bishop Michael Evans on Communion. This was the first of a series of presentations to be made at CCU/DER's meetings in order to provide a greater depth of understanding to attendees on theological aspects of ecumenism.

The Church as Body of Christ, a prominent ecclesial model of the Pope Pius XII era, does not allow for degrees of communion and therefore could not fully accommodate the validity of non-Catholic baptism. The presentation drew on the Vatican II documents *On the Church* (paras. 8, 14, 15) and Decree on Ecumenism (para. 3), *One Bread One Body* (paras. 11,12,13,20,21,22), the CCC (para. 948), the ARCIC II agreed statement *Church*

as Communion and Cardinal Cormac's address to the Church of England's General Synod on 9th February 2009.

In deriving any understanding from formal church teaching Bishop Michael stressed that as a principle the highest authoritative source was the teaching of Vatican II which ranked above the Catechism of the Catholic Church, papal encyclicals or dicasteral statements.