

## Diocesan Christian Unity Committee Forum

### The Search for Christian Unity An Audit For Today



On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2009 30 people from around the diocese gathered at St. Bede's Church, Basingstoke for a forum to assess the current state of Christian unity led by Monsignor Andrew Faley, Assistant General Secretary of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England & Wales. He opened the event by stressing that it is worth celebrating what has been achieved since the Second Vatican Council.

Monsignor Faley introduced the first session which consisted of an audit to affirm what has been achieved as well as to challenge the current situation to provide a renewed sense of hope. Those attending then formed small groups to undertake an audit of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats relating to the contemporary Christian unity situation. It was suggested that this exercise could also be conducted in a parish context. In the feedback the following were reported:

#### Strengths

- We share a common faith recognising it is Christ's Church
- Sense of oneness – a belief in Christ as Lord which is important for evangelisation of a secular society
- The dialogue which currently exists and takes place including the actions of working together which cement us together
- Recognition of the progress that has been made
- Ecumenical activity has helped to draw Catholics closer to Scripture

#### Weaknesses

- Arrogance and ignorance as aspects of narrow mindedness as a consequence of lack of understanding or knowledge both of one's own tradition as well as other Christian traditions
- Intercommunion barrier that currently exists
- Lack of commitment resulting from insularity (in the pews) and the pre-eminence of keeping one's own show on the road
- No consensus on what unity looks like and no goal – where does the road go?
- Inconsistent support from the clergy along with inconsistent ability to move things forward

## Opportunities

- Witnessing jointly by working together
- Praying together
- Understanding of others and ourselves
- Friendship and trust that has been built up break down barriers that have or continue to exist
- Sharing resources both material and people, especially their gifts

## Threats

- Internal disunity within churches and traditions
- Gap between preaching and practice
- Lack of leadership
- Alternative priorities, e.g. other immediate challenges such as climate change pushes ecumenism down to less prominence in the consciousness of the faithful

After analysis of the feedback from the groups a second plenary session was an open discussion of some of the major challenges and opportunities for advancing unity. The question of the discipline relating to shared eucharist broadened into an explanation of the degrees of communion or what we share in common with other Christian traditions. This, in turn, led to an examination of the underlying ecumenical challenge of reconciling the understanding and exercise of authority.

The event concluded with Monsignor Faley stressing that prayer should be at the heart of all ecumenical activity. He also encouraged Catholics to participate, whenever possible, in the non-eucharistic liturgies of other Christian traditions, in particular the liturgy of the hours, common to both Catholic and Anglican traditions.

The reading and study of the scriptures together was also commended. There was reference to the 2008 Synod in Rome on the *Word of God in the life and mission of the Church* in which the Anglican Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright, participated and contributed (usually, only bishops and, occasionally, theologians of the Catholic Church participate in Rome synods). People were advised to look out for the post-synodal letter from the pope in 2010 which could contain useful material as the basis for ecumenical scripture study and reflection. Monsignor Faley mentioned a proposed ecumenical celebration in 2011 of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary marking the publication of the King James Bible. This would be another instance of a public event demonstrating the depth of ecumenical relationships that now exist between the Christian traditions.

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