



Churches Together in Oxfordshire Enabling Group
Minutes of the Meeting held via ZOOM
on Thursday, 21st October 2021

Those present: Jason St. John Nicolle (Chair, Church of England), David Hare (County Ecumenical Officer), Chris Robins (Treasurer), John Anderson (Secretary, Methodist), Steve Barber (Baptist), Glyn Millington (URC)

Apologies: Joth Hunt (Baptist), Nick St John (Roman Catholic)

1. The Chair welcomed everyone, especially Steve Barber. Steve has replaced Dave Llewellyn as a regional minister for the Southern Counties Baptist Association; this is a part-time appointment for 12 months. The Chair then offered a time of guided reflection.
2. *Minutes of the last meeting.* Thanks offered to John for the Minutes which were received without amendment.
3. *Financial matters.* The Treasurer was thanked for the document circulated before the meeting. He drew attention to the surplus projected for 2022, and proposed that the contributions from the supporting denominations be reduced by 40%. This was agreed.

The contributions from local groups would remain at current levels but the financial situation would be reviewed as required. Chris was thanked for his work.

4. *Review of recent Churches Together in England Ecumenical Officers Conference.* The CEDO and he Secretary had attended the Conference, held at the Hayes Conference Center, Swanwick, 28th-30th September. 105 people had attended with significant presence from the Salvation Army.
 - (a) CEDO – generally helpful conference, good to meet and converse with people, perhaps lots of information to be processed without really being able to see how it was useful in a practical way.
 - (b) Secretary – the new Roman Catholic national ecumenical officer was impressive. He talked about Pope Francis’ book about ‘synodality’ which was interesting. It would be helpful to know if this theme is reaching and affecting the laity in the local church. There was a useful session on the ‘flexible framework’. The Anglican and Methodist ecumenical officers met together and it was refreshing to discover that both groups were equally depressed about the lack of progress. If there was a criticism then the theme was ‘nurturing the roots’ then there was little manure to be found at the Conference.

At the closing act of worship it was announced that the national ecumenical officers for the Salvation Army and the Church of England were retiring, as was Rev. Dr. Paul Goodliff, General Secretary of C.T.E..

The Secretary had met the new National Ecumenical Officer for the Quakers who is Judith Baker. Judith is part-time in her post and lives in Abingdon!

5. *Local Ecumenical Partnerships*

- (a) *Christchurch, Thame* - The Secretary had sent a copy of the new constitution with the requisite fields completed. This had been acknowledged by Bridget Micklem with the additional news that the ‘supplementary document’ was being constructed.

The Secretary had written to the Assistant National Ecumenical Officer asking for clarification regarding the status of a Methodist Church Council within the new constitution.

A meeting between the Vale of Aylesbury Superintendent, supported by the District Chair, and the Moderator of the Wessex URC Synod was planned to attempt to resolve the remaining staffing issues.

- (b) *Church of the Holy Family, Blackbird Leys LEP/LECOS* – The Chair confirmed that planning permission to demolish the existing buildings had been granted. Archdeacon Jonathan had confirmed that the Diocese were looking at structures and fundraising. Denominational leaders would be asked to review the validity of the 1978 Sharing Agreement. The Diocese were also looking at a ‘lighter touch’ Partnership Agreement.

In response to the latter point the Secretary referred to a training session at the recent CTE Conference and whilst the “Flexible Framework” did give some examples of differing sorts of agreements, in the case of Blackbird Leys in his opinion a LEP was the only option.

It was noted that the URC had agreed to supply a community worker for five years.

- (c) *Oxford Brookes Chaplaincy* – The recent review had concluded that the LEP, which was part of a multi-faith chaplaincy, was no longer fit for purpose. The Chair reported that Rev. Kate Harford, University and Pastoral Care Lead chaplain, is looking at some options in consultation with the university and other relevant bodies. **(See my note below.)**

It was noted that the half-time Anglican post was being renewed following the departure to a new appointment of the previous chaplain.

- (d) *Reviews of LEPs and gathering of constitutions or ecumenical welcome* – The Secretary announced that the Northampton Methodist District was conducting a district-wide survey of LEPs and other institution based ecumenical work. He would work with the CEDO to ensure that the survey was extended to include those LEPs that did not include Methodists.

ACTION: SEC

6. *Updated contact lists and GDPR*. No further progress but it is hoped that the survey mentioned above and the Treasurer's contact list for ‘churches together’ groups would allow the creation of an up to date list.

ACTION: SEC

7. *Future direction for Churches Together in Oxfordshire* – the Secretary was thanked for the paper he had produced on this topic. It was agreed that we should hold a single agenda item meeting to discuss the paper. The Secretary was asked to send out a ‘doodle poll’ to find a suitable date in either December or January.

ACTION: SEC

8. *Arrangements for Annual General Meeting*

(a) There had been no feedback from the last AGM.

(b) The next AGM to be held on 23rd March. The suggested venue was Bicester, and the keynote speaker was Rev. Canon Helen Cameron, chair of the Northampton Methodist District and moderator-elect of the Free Churches Group within CTE. Nick St John was to be asked if the Roman Catholic church would be able to host, and it was suggested we might also invite other church leaders from Bicester to talk about their experiences in reaching out to new housing communities.

ACTION: N St J/SEC

9. *Sharing of news:*

- (a) Glyn Millington – the URC were discussing the implications of how presbyteral ministry was unequally distributed across the various Synods. Summertown URC was mentioned as an example where a retiring minister may not be replaced.
- (b) Steve Barber – Baptist Associations had gathered to discuss their welcome to refugees from Hong Kong. (**See my note below**).
- (c) Chris Robins – Churches Together in Kidlington had held nine days of prayer in the run up to COP26. This had been open to the public and was deemed to be a success. This was a very active group.
- (d) John Anderson – the Methodist Church was also concerned about the shortage of presbyteral and diaconal ministry. Some reorganisation of Districts and Circuits was being considered but nothing that would affect Oxfordshire directly as far as he knew.
- (e) Jason St. John Nicolle – Oxford Diocese was being challenged by the reduction in numbers and therefore income which was significant for small communities. The Diocese was saved from structural changes such as those proposed within Leicester Diocese. There were ongoing debates about old versus new ways of being structured fro mission.

10. *Any other business* – none.

11. *Date of next meeting: The Secretary to poll for dates for a full meeting in February, main item of business being the AGM.*

ACTION: SEC

12. David Hare closed the meeting by leading us in the sharing of the Grace.

Secretary's Note:

- 5(c) – Rev. Miriam Moul, part-time Methodist chaplain at Oxford Brookes University, has told me that Rev. Kate Harford has been working with representatives from the University and Oxford Methodist Circuit to create a “ministry agreement between the University and the Circuit and Chaplain”. Once completed and approved this will be applied in a bespoke manner for the other chaplains and their parent bodies.

If, as I think everyone is assuming, the LEP should be disbanded, then I suggest that the CEDO asks the relevant church leaders to approve this so that it can be reported to the enabling group and to relevant synods or equivalent bodies.

I also suggest that the church leaders and the chaplains be asked if a different type of agreement, coming out of the ‘flexible framework’, would be helpful.

- 9(a) See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hong-kong-uk-welcome-programme> and <https://ukhk.org/>