

Ecumenical development officers report 2019-2020.

This has, for all of us, been a very different year! After the last AGM things went normally for a while, but with Lockdown the ecumenical pattern seemed to have slowed as people tried to keep their own churches engaged and church leaders were busy. I will give a brief overview of the 18 months, if I have left your CT out please let me know what you are doing so that I can support and encourage you if I don't already.

It was good to have some time this year with Banbury CT, a group I had not had much interaction with before. I was looking forward to getting to know this active group better and discuss how they saw themselves going forward when the lockdown came.

Didcot CT seemed to have come out of a sticky patch when I started this work with renewed vigour and vision, ministers praying together being an important basic criterion to them working effectively together. The value of prayer together, across theological traditions and denominations, must be a basic to working together and Christian unity. The old saying those who pray together stay together is true for ecumenical work; as we pray together we realise again our basic agreement in Jesus, though we use different models and ways of expression we are one in our Lord.

Henley CT has been welcoming and steadfast in their work and witness, I still remember clearly joining in open worship in the town square 18 months ago! They have regular meetings for all but also times when ministers get together to swap ideas, vision and to pray, something again that is important. This builds up, encourages and enables ministers, helps prevent too much duplication of services and the prayer binds the leaders together. It is great how lay people are also involved in the regular meetings and it will be interesting how things re-emerge after COVID.

Central Oxford CT has seen the moving on of the great stalwart of COCT and Oxfordshire CT, Martin Wellings, who is now in North London. It has not been easy for COCT to see such an important member move on, but it will be good to have some new initiatives as people find their position. I think it is exciting that COCT has a socially distanced face to face meeting at the end of the month, it will be refreshing getting back to seeing people in the flesh!

As an aside some lead members of CT Oxfordshire had a socially distanced cream tea to say goodbye to Martin Wellings. This was a very worthwhile and positive end to an enormous ministry both in Oxford and in the County.

Although I haven't had much input recently, I hear Bicester CT continue with their positive ecumenical initiatives, working together, praying together and encouraging each other. Bicester CT had a very positive plan for their newbuild developments, with a main denomination taking an estate with help and support from other denominations. I personally find this a very sound model as Christians have less affinity to denominations and more to the local church or the church that suits their style. Although Ali Boulton has moved to be a National Leader in reaching into newbuild developments I feel, with all the proposed building in Oxfordshire, it is vital that local CT groups work to ensure every new estate has a Christian presence in it. It is said that moving is one of the big life changes that opens people to the gospel, as Christians we need to be ready to minister into that need.

It was great to attend Church in Abingdon AGM and see the numbers gathered there. It was a rewarding time to value people meeting together. Again, the lockdown has delayed my further

involvement with CiA but I have attended occasions when church leaders prayed together and I have witnessed a strong ecumenical witness in the town at major Christian festivals.

Being involved with the Love Marston Love Life initiative, which was to occur in the summer, was both thrilling and adventurous. Marston has a dedicated CT group and this event, to advertise all the Christian churches in Marston in an outdoor event, was developing well when it had to be shelved due to Lockdown. I pray that, at the right time, this event will be able to flourish, it seems a great idea to be quiet witness and a fun encounter. Marston CT continues to embrace the community and has had quite a positive outreach in this lockdown and as we emerge to an unknown normal.

After several years wait Oxford Brookes University Chaplaincy was reviewed by Oxfordshire CT. I would like to thank Colin Thompson, who, in a difficult year for him, chaired the review with understanding, initiative and incisiveness. He was very ably assisted by Nick. St John, Anna Thomas-Betts and Elaine Eulett. The final document took time to produce but we pray it will be a valuable tool for the Chaplaincy moving forward. It was reviewed briefly at a Chaplaincy meeting in the summer but will be reviewed and put in the public domain at the start of October.

Since lockdown I have tried to keep involved with CT groups and LEP Churches as they had need. Sometimes that has been a thin line between giving people yet another email/text and showing that, as an ecumenical body, the church cares for each other at this difficult time. I am always excited when churches, LEP's or CT groups contact me, I am interested in what you're doing and will try to help as you ask me to. I also just enjoy being with your group, praying with you and looking to help you work with other Christians in the extension of God's kingdom.

I would like to thank John Anderson, a retired Methodist minister who has revived the CT Oxfordshire website, something that has been especially important at this time when our PC's/laptops/iPad have been invaluable. I would also like to thank the Chair of Oxfordshire CT who, despite his personal workload, has always inspired me and encouraged me to move forward in my work situation. Without being too imposing he has allowed me to be myself while sometimes challenging me and making me think where I am heading!

Working with some of the LEP Churches to encourage enable and envision them has been exciting, as have been the initiatives and work of the CT groups. Working with other organisations has also been very valuable, linking what we do as churches to other events, strategies and encounters. As Churches in the coming months the issue of Mental Health will loom large, it is our duty to do what we can to support and enable others, while also knowing our own limitations in this field of work. I would like to thank the churches who continue to support me in my work, at times there is too much to do, occasionally it goes quiet, but I want to be someone who unites and enables all churches to proclaim Jesus to the watching world.

David Hare 1.9.2020