



Churches Together in Oxfordshire Enabling Group
Minutes of the Meeting held via ZOOM
on Tuesday, 25th January, 2022

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)

Apologies: Glyn Millington (URC)

1. The Chair opened the meeting in prayer.
2. The meeting was reminded that we were gathered to discuss the future of Churches Together in Oxfordshire, prompted by the paper John had circulated previously. The Chair suggested that we consider three questions:
 - (a) Where are we now regarding ecumenism in the county?
 - (b) What might God be saying to us?
 - (c) What is the next step for us as a county body?
3. A number of personal reflections were offered to the first question:
 - (a) We live in rapidly changing times, where church attendance and memberships are often falling, therefore fewer volunteers.
 - (b) Senior church leaders (e.g. bishops, moderators, district chairs) have more on their plates than in the past, with fewer leaders available. They often don't place ecumenism as a priority, despite the advantages of being able to share resources across denominations (e.g. in Cumbria). How can this be changed?
 - (c) We need to review and update the Churches Together in Oxfordshire constitution which is dated 2006.
 - (d) Independent churches and others without the structures that follow the traditional churches pattern are generally not represented within CTiO. It was noted that the new CTE General Secretary is a bishop from within the Apostolic Pastoral Congress and that Vineyard Churches (UK & Ireland) are CTE's newest member.
 - (e) Ecumenism is about local engagement, though often through major events at significant festivals. There is a need to capture, encourage and stimulate the momentum within shared activities.
 - (f) Local ecumenism can often be a source of support for local church ministers. This works well in Bicester.
 - (g) Individuals are crossing denominations boundaries e.g. a Baptist pioneer working with Anglicans in Witney.
 - (h) Ecumenism can be scary! It may mean risking what we have and therefore we become defensive.
4. The following points were made in response to the second question:
 - (a) Encourage a spirit of generosity to counter the spirit of fear i.e. protect what is left. One aspect of this would be to give smaller churches or denominations a platform.

- (b) If denominations have adopted a business management approach with quantifiable measures of success then we should create measures which include ecumenical working
 - (c) Find ways of relieving stress and pressures from church leadership
 - (d) Find models of church and models of church relationships which are incarnational, based on generous relationships and unconditionality, and are “light of touch”.
5. It was agreed that the next steps would be to give further thought and prayer to:
- (a) how to reach out to the independent and “non-traditional” churches and denominations;
 - (b) how can we be even better at supporting local ecumenism on the ground;
 - (c) how can we engender generosity in our relationships in a world where it is often hard to be generous within a relationship.
6. Dates of next meetings:
- (a) Meeting with full agenda – Tuesday 15th February 2022
 - (b) Single item agenda as follow on to this one – Tuesday 5th April at 11.30am.
7. The meeting was closed by the Sharing of the Grace.