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Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Churches Together in Oxfordshire held via ZOOM on Monday 22nd March 2021

Those present: Revd. Jason St John Nicolle (Chair); Revd. John Anderson (Secretary); Chris Robins (Treasurer); David Hare (CEDO); Revd. David Llewellyn (Regional Minister, Southern Counties Baptist Association); Rev. Glyn Millington (URC Ecumenical Officer); Rev. Dr. Paul Goodliff (CTE); Bishop Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester; Rev. Canon Helen Cameron (Chair, Northampton Methodist District); Rev. Paul Carter (CT in Kidlington); Rev. Romily Micklem (Christchurch LEP, Thame); and seven others.

Apologies were received from: Rev. Clare Downing, (Moderator of the URC Wessex Synod); Rev. Kate Harford, (Oxford Brookes Uni. Chaplaincy); Rev. Michael Lakey, St Mary's, Chalgrove; Rev. Miriam Moul, (Oxford Brookes Uni. Chaplaincy); Rev. Pauline Main, (CT Marston & Northway); Rev. Chris Gaynor, St Francis, Banbury; Kathryn Hopkins, (CT Marston & Northway); Rev. Ian Griffiths, (Trinity, Abingdon); Liz Wood, (C.T. Didcot and District); Rev. Rebecca Peters, (Peachcroft Christian Centre, Abingdon); Venerable Jonathan Chaffey, Archdeacon of Oxford; Paul Sparrey, Oxford Schools Chaplaincy; Rev. Sheila Crowther, (C.T. in North Oxford); Elaine Bardwell, from St Michael and all Angels, New Marston; Miranda St. John Nicole, Director of Christian Concern for One World.

1. The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome to everyone and then prayers, including one from the Church of England liturgy for the 5th Sunday of Lent.
2. The Chair welcomed our guest speaker, Rev. Dr. Paul Goodliff, General Secretary of Churches Together in England.
3. The Minutes of the last AGM had been circulated and were accepted by those present.
4. **The Treasurer's report – Chris Robins**
 - 4.1. The Treasurer had circulated his report, the 2020 accounts and the budget for next year. Due to COVID restrictions there was a possible embarrassment of riches and this would be kept under review by the Enabling Group. No questions were forthcoming.
 - 4.2. The Treasurer proposed the accounts for 2020 and the budget for 2022. This was seconded by Revd. David Llewellyn, and carried unanimously.
 - 4.3. The Chair thanked Chris Robins for all his hard work.
5. **County Officer's Report – David Hare**

- 5.1. The CEDO's report had been circulated prior to the meeting.
- 5.2. The Chair asked David what had brought him joy and excitement in his Christian life at the moment. David had experienced God's grace throughout the lock-down, a situation he would have found difficult in the past. Ecumenically the churches in the small town where he lives have been working together and it has been wonderful to see how people have been providing for their locality, and also looking ahead and saying "what can we do once COVID ends". This has been exciting. David was thanked for his report and work.

6. Election of Officers

- 6.1. The following were elected:
 - Revd. Jason St John Nicolle – Chair;
 - Revd. David Llewellyn - Vice-Chair;
 - Revd. John Anderson - Secretary;
 - Chris Robins – Treasurer.

7. Key note speaker- Revd. Dr. Paul Goodliff, General Secretary of Churches Together in England

- 7.1. Paul began by outlining the current status of Churches Together in England, one of the four national ecumenical instruments created in 1990. There are currently 50 member churches with a new member church, the Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, seeking to join. These churches can be considered as a number of families of churches, which are very diverse, and CTE is the widest broadest family of churches anywhere in Europe. There are also 60 bodies in association, such as the Bible Society, the police Christian Fellowship, the friends of Walsingham. This is an extraordinary wide ranging group of bodies that are often very closely allied to local churches and parishes with the service that they bring. CTE has five full time members of staff with two part time members.
- 7.2. Paul then moved on to the ecumenical situation in his home town of Bicester which is expanding rapidly. It is one of the fastest growing towns in the south east of England, and has new estates being built to the south, the east and the north of the town. Currently, it's a town of 33,000 residents and there are planned to be an additional 13,000 houses. Paul guessed that this would mean another additional 25,000 People with 18,500 jobs by 2031. The churches in the town work closely together although there isn't a formal "churches together" group. Examples of co-operation are food banks and prayer on the streets. Bicester is typical of many towns and cities across the country – containing the traditional churches and modern Pentecostal churches including the Redeemed Christian church of God which is the largest and fastest growing African Pentecostal church in the country. There is also an independent church which will have nothing to do with the other churches. Paul suggested that this is one feature of ecumenism today, with most of the historic churches and increasingly most of the new churches involved but there are always some who find ecumenism a step too far in their fear of compromise.
- 7.3. Paul then used two examples to show how mission to new housing has changed. From his own previous ministry in Stevenage, a mission to a new housing estate was formulated as a multi-denominational church plant. Now, across the country, one denomination will take the

lead in the new housing mission, with others in a support role. This latter approach is the model that is being used in Bicester. There are no ecumenical congregations, but ecumenically the churches have agreed together that they will take a lead because that's the urgency of response. There is an urgency to get someone in on the ground early on, rather than wait for the building of a church building which often comes two or three years after people have been occupying the houses and is too late. There is a need for a Christian witness from day one.

- 7.4. Paul paused and asked for questions and there was a conversation about how these new ventures were viewed by existing church members. David Llewellyn offered a link to a video that showed the mission to new housing developments including Bicester.
- 7.5. Paul then gave examples of similar ecumenical working across the country, referencing The New Housing Hub and the work of Baptist pioneer minister, Rev. Ali Boulton.
- 7.6. Paul widened the scope of his talk to include CTE's work at national level, building bridges with other ecumenical groups such as the Evangelical Alliance and the 'black led' churches, offering the work done on vaccine information during the pandemic as an example. Theological reflection has moved away from, but not abandoned, the areas of division, towards three main topics:
 - What will mission and pastoral care and our understanding of humanity look like post COVID? What is the place of online or 'hybrid' church in the future?
 - What does nationhood and identity mean for us post BREXIT? How does our changing understanding of sexuality affect us as individuals, as churches and the relationship between churches?
 - Churches Together in Oxfordshire is an 'intermediate' body, sitting between local and national. What is the role of these bodies in the future?

Paul mentioned a new web site to be launched soon and a number of other initiatives that CTE were involved with.

- 7.7. In closing, Paul used three images to describe ecumenism at the moment:
 - Pilgrimage, walking together in all our diversity and placing unity ahead of conformity or fear of compromise.
 - A tent, with no walls so that the Spirit may blow through. In that tent we sit on different tables, separated by differences in the Eucharist, but we reach out to others, recognising that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - Developing relationships which act as fluid within the joints of the body, keeping it on the move.

Paul's sense was that we are in an ecumenical spring after a time of winter.

- 7.8. A time of questions and conversation followed. These included:
 - Who is responsible for creating a sense of community and does the Holy Spirit work through local government?

8. The Chair offered a vote of thanks to Rev. Dr. Paul Goodliff which was acknowledged by those present.
9. The Chair closed the meeting with a reading from the book of Numbers, chapter 9; this reminded us that sometimes God calls us to stay in one place, at other times we are called to move on. There was a short time of silence as we prayed for the work of CTE and we closed the meeting by sharing the Grace.