

GENERAL SYNOD
Council for Christian Unity
Report on the Churches Together in England 2015 Forum

1. Over two hundred and fifty people gathered at The Hayes, Swanwick for the 2015 Forum of Churches Together in England (CTE).¹ This year is the twenty fifth anniversary of Churches Together in England. In that time, the number of churches belonging to CTE has increased from just 16 to 44. The 2015 Forum was intended to enable the English churches to understand and encounter something of the diversity of English Christianity. Many of the churches that have joined in that time are either Pentecostal or Orthodox and the mix of people at the Forum reflected this expanding membership.
2. The 2015 Forum engaged particularly with these two groupings of Churches to discover some of the gifts of God within their traditions. One of the key phrases, used by the CTE General Secretary in his introductory remarks, and which became a theme as the Forum progressed, was one that Pope Francis has used on a number of occasions: we must walk together. For example at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2014, he said:

“Unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather unity comes about in journeying. If we do not walk together, if we do not pray for one another, if we do not collaborate in the many ways that we can in this world for the people of God, then unity will not come about.”

3. The session on Orthodoxy included a very accessible presentation which aimed to give a feel of what it is like to be an Orthodox Christian and to live and worship as a member of the Orthodox community. For many at the Forum, this was their first opportunity to engage with Orthodoxy. For the Orthodox members present, being asked to contribute in this way was a positive experience. One of the Orthodox delegates, commenting after the Forum said:

We have a positive attitude towards dialogue. We welcome the opportunity to meet new people who are united in Christianity. We also believe that it is important for there to be an Orthodox presence for people to learn about the Orthodox Church, which would otherwise not be heard. Our theology is in our worship and in our life, and we cannot deal with this separately or non-critically. Any discussion about unity should come from a holistic basis, because it is not in our Orthodox system to differentiate and compartmentalize theology, worship and life. Therefore, for a unity process it is essential that we discuss these as a whole.²

¹ The programme for the Forum can be downloaded at:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257379/Home/Resources/2015_Forum/The_programme/The_programme.aspx

² For other Orthodox comments go to:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/266581/Home/Resources/2015_Forum/Texts_and_videos/Texts_and_videos.aspx

[07 Orthodox evaluation coloured sheets](#)

4. The impact of the Pentecostal churches and individual delegates on the Forum was considerable. Music and worship featured very prominently and was led by Noel Robinson. Noel is a well-known worship leader, music pastor, song-writer and producer. He brought a taste of Pentecostal/charismatic worship into the heart of the Forum and this set the more formal presentations from Pentecostal speakers in an atmosphere of praise. What impressed about the Pentecostal session itself were the articulate contributions of the two young people who spoke. One in particular, a young man from the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches expressed one of the key themes of the whole Forum – using the image of Jesus knocking at the door (Revelations 3.20ff) he asked ‘Is Jesus in my/your Church?’ a theme picked up in a number of the small groups.
5. Many delegations to the Forum included young people. Half the Church of England delegation were under 35. A group of twelve young people from diverse backgrounds led one of the plenary sessions at the Forum with the help of [Chemin Neuf](#). To help them to prepare for the Forum, CTE funded them to attend the [Welcome to Paradise](#) experience in August and they drew from this shared experience in their session.³ The group of twelve was a diverse group, including Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals and a Salvationist. What came across in their session was the joy of being immersed in a large ecumenical gathering (*Welcome to Paradise* gathered over 10,000 people aged 18 to 30 from across the world). They modelled growing in discipleship through ecumenical encounter: that through meeting with young Christians from diverse traditions and cultures, they were challenged first to recognise what they had in common, and then to discover their own distinctiveness. What was really very exciting is that through this encounter, they above all learnt to value their own tradition more through the affirmation and interest they met with from others. This was a distinctive contribution, facilitated by the Revd Tim Watson of Chemin Neuf.
6. Helping young people explore their identity and vocation through ecumenical encounter is integral to the ecumenical pedagogy developed by Chemin Neuf, and one that the Church of England at large could learn greatly from. The Council for Christian Unity has as one of its key priorities the encouragement and formation of young ecumenists. This priority can naturally be linked to the Reform and Renewal objectives of growing disciples and increasing young vocations by 50%. There is a massive task to promote the model of learning and growing through ecumenical encounter throughout the Church of England at every level.
7. There were a total of 52 Anglicans present at the Forum, including the official Church of England delegation. Some represented their intermediate ecumenical body and others were associated with bodies in association. Over 40 gathered for a short meeting in the afternoon of the second day. There was a sense at this meeting that the shape of ecumenism in England has changed and that the Church of England must catch the wave

³ The video which began the Forum session led by the group of 12 young people can be watched here:
<https://vimeo.com/141340362>

of the enthusiasm and energy that there undoubtedly is in the new expressions of relationship and action at local level and with new ecumenical partners at national level.

8. In that meeting I posed three questions for reflection on the Forum. Members of the delegation have since reflected further on these questions and some of their reflections are given in the boxes below.

What our delegates have said (1)

What have you learnt – and what is this telling you about 1) the experience of ‘walking together’ 2) the Christian landscape in England and the relations between the churches?

- Learning a little more about Pentecostalism and Orthodoxy was extremely beneficial. This deeper learning about each other will further help to break down barriers in order to build trust. Ecumenism helps to create a church that is wealthy and healthy. So, Forum 2015 was by no means a fait accompli but good work in progress.
- Walking together - very important that we continue our learning and sharing with each other. Being open to step into each other's shoes and listen to our brothers and sisters from other denominations and work together.
- A good deal more about Pentecostal self-understanding and that there is a good deal of potential for both practical and theological engagement here.
- Reflecting in the questions, there are more of us walking together than previously, I think, a more diverse mix. But also more determined. I think the Christian landscape in England has become more interconnected and more energised in recent years as churches that hadn't previously connected with others now are doing so more and more, and are bringing their vitality and charisms to the corporate Church.
- The experience of walking together – means not just listening to each other but taking on board the needs/views expressed, assisting each other with the difficult steps we need to take to achieve a structure of grace, where we respect each other's diverse views to reach a point of trust as we travel together.
- The Christian Landscape in England is healthy when viewed through the lens of our ecumenical partnerships. As individual denominations some of us are struggling to grow our congregations at parish level. We have failed to embrace the peoples of this land in all their diversity. Relations between churches are not generally working well. Churches of the same denomination do not come together to worship together, even when there are special festivals e.g. Easter, Advent, even more lacking when it comes to different denominations.
- The ecumenical landscape has shifted dramatically. There are now many more smaller and newer churches engaging ecumenically. This appears to have shifted the focus (especially locally) to partnering in mission (usually very locally) and away from theological debate and consensus.
- In our ‘walking together’ there is much we can learn from one another which enriches us as individuals, there is a challenge in transferring this enrichment from the individual to the wider tradition as people often only understand its benefit when they experience it themselves. Listening is vital but there is a need to consider who wasn’t present to either listen or to be listened to.
- There are many positive grassroots ecumenical initiatives and a willingness for senior church leaders to engage ecumenically but in between there is little discussion of ecumenism (for example at a diocesan synod level) in the majority of places. Although there is much to celebrate there are many frustration over every-day experiences such as committed Christians being refused admission in a church school of a different tradition.

What our delegates have said (2)

What would you like to say to the Archbishops' Council and the General Synod about the Church of England's ecumenical priorities, at parish, diocesan and national levels?

- That in some urban areas at least, Pentecostal relations is where it's at rather than with the older denominations.
- At parish level we need to encourage clergy and lay people to continue befriending Christians from our ecumenical partner churches. Obviously from parish to parish this will vary greatly, but a movement of the Holy Spirit is stirring churches as liturgically diverse as Orthodox and Pentecostal to seek our friendship, and we should be intentional and persistent in seeking theirs. This is a task for everyone, in clerical collars or in the pews!
- On a diocesan level I would think we need to continue to be more intentional about our networking with other church leaderships in our areas. Ecumenists need to persuade others to move ecumenism from an item on the agenda to a component part of every item on the agenda (i.e. every agenda item we should consider, is there an ecumenical component to this?)
- In my opinion, the Church (of England) is open in various places to reform and input from either Pentecostal or Orthodox churches; I think if we can be consistently open to both (and more) across the country, we'll be listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches!
- It is very important that we continue to talk and listen to each other's narratives. I think that General Synod could be encouraging more ecumenical engagement, particularly at parish level where resources could be shared. Good LEP experiences could be used to promote further ecumenical engagement. I am going to propose to our Deanery Synod that we invite speakers from other Christian denominations to talk to us about their traditions and encourage parish reps to do the same in their parishes.
- The Church of England's ecumenical priorities can sometimes appear to be non-existent, perhaps low down on the list of priorities or simply no interest at all (as demonstrated at General Synod when ecumenical issues are discussed). There is some movement among our national church leaders where they acknowledge a need to grow more closely but this is generally with the established denominations (URC, Methodist, Anglicans, Catholics), very little appears to be going on when it comes to other churches (Pentecostal, Black Led, Baptists). At parish level there are some well-established ecumenical partnerships, others are simply satisfied to rent out church buildings and little more.
- In a changing landscape we need to discern the right priorities for ecumenical engagement. Clarity on priorities will aid positive relationships with other churches (because everyone will be clear as to why they are around the table) and will progress our walk together. Although I believe there is some truth in the importance of walking together even if the destination is unknown, it is difficult to get others to walk alongside you unless there is a clear motive for walking (I think that this is particularly true for young adults what ecumenism is and why they should get involved).
- Once there is clarity on priorities these priorities need to be approached at the right level by the right groups. For example it is often difficult to encourage local missional ecumenical relationships from a national body like General Synod and it is equally difficult to locally state that the Church of England agrees doctrinally with another denomination on a particular issue.
- CTE, CTBI and other ecumenical bodies are a great resource but can only be so if they are connected at the right levels to the right groups. If the purpose of CTE is to encourage its members

with positive testimonies that's great and they can do this independently. However, if it is about 'deepening communion' there needs to be a purposeful, regular dialogue between church leaders.

What our delegates have said (3)

Many people remarked on the diversity and multiplicity of voices at the Forum – what pictures/images/ideas of Christian unity emerge for you out of this experience?

- I think one of the most important voices at Forum was expressed by several of the young people: that young people have ministries of their own (eg. to other young people) and we need to help equip and empower them to *be* the Church amongst their peers, pastoring, evangelising, discipling, etc. I would say this is one of the most urgent needs for us to respond to. The Archbishop of Canterbury of course is already doing some very good stuff in this direction.
- I am not sure I'd want us all to be the same and I did get a sense that we were all trying to be polite, so I think for me a unity as a smooth pond image emerged and wasn't very encouraging; unity as a flood of mighty waters crashing and roaring is a lot more exciting.
- We are clearly living in a time when other church leaders will be receptive to our friendship, and happy to co-work with us in our dioceses. Such good news; operationally necessary in some places where we cannot continue alone, and theologically imperative everywhere in light of some of the Scripture shared this week such as Ephesians 4:3, 13, John 17, and Revelation 2.
- The Archbishop of Canterbury described himself as a "magpie", treasuring what he sees shining in other fellowships and 'lining' his 'nest' with the things he finds of value elsewhere. I find this concept of "magpie ecumenism" very good, one which goes further than "receptive ecumenism", as we are not merely 'listening', but affably absorbing and cherishing what we may.
- The Forum was an example of God's world in action, recognising our different languages, our varied methods of worshipping, the diverse methods of engaging with the Word of God. It was an image that we are truly one people in Christ. The Team of Twelve who experienced the Chemin-Neuf community added to this image – a beautiful example of how young people – of all cultures/complexions - can work harmoniously together. They shared their experiences - living together, praying/meditating together and having fun together but they also challenged us concerning our failure to recognise the needs/distress/pains of young people within the Church.
- The picture of 'unity' that emerges out of the Forum - the ecumenical family is understanding better that we seek 'unity' and not necessarily 'uniformity'. And, that part of the common vision is to acknowledge our common ground – we all believe in the mysterious relationship we have with God in the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit); we all share in the enduring love of Christ – this love is evenly distributed; we continue to walk together despite our different views regarding the Eucharist and other ethical issues of our present day; we recognise our duty of care for each of God's children and as good stewards of God's creation.
- I thought that this was a really good thing about Forum and I pray for the day when it's not novel but is the norm and when we don't need a separate session for young adults because they are in our midst anyway.
- I like the umbrella image with Christ at the centre and every part of the umbrella necessary to ensure it fulfils the purpose for which it was created. This image is limited by the fact that it's difficult to add things to an umbrella, an organic growing image would therefore be better.

9. From these reflections, a number of themes emerge.

- a. First, appreciation of encounter with Christians of different traditions, especially those, in the context of the member churches of CTE, which have an increasingly important presence in our communities locally and nationally and from which we have much to learn and receive. Such encounter can be enriching if we as individuals and corporately as a church approach it in an attitude of respect, recognition and openness. Pope Francis' picture of 'walking together' is one that catches the imagination because it suggests movement, companionship, common purpose, an outward looking focus and both a practical and spiritual emphasis.
- b. Second, that in line with the changing, and to a great extent, already transformed, ecumenical landscape in England, the Church of England's ecumenical priorities need to develop accordingly. There is a refreshing view expressed, not only by our delegation, but the Anglican delegates at large, that the core priorities of the Church of England need to have an ecumenical focus – that we cannot do all that we need to in terms of Reform and Renewal for example in isolation from our ecumenical partners, but that our engagement with them in discipleship, evangelism, mission and spiritual renewal is essential. As a Pentecostal voice at the Forum said, 'Unless we are one, renewal will not happen'. Not surprisingly, the message from the delegation is that the major change of priority in terms of ecumenical relations should be to focus more on Pentecostal and new churches on one hand, and the Orthodox on the other.
- c. Third, the 2015 Forum modelled 'unity in diversity'. There are some strong images of Christian unity in the reflections from the delegation; one that stands out is the picture of unity as a flood of mighty waters, crashing and roaring, which is in contrast with the placid pool that even the Forum projected. These images reflect the reality of ecumenism on the ground. In another context, the expression 'ecumenism is necessarily untidy' has been used. In this context there are serious issues being raised about the goals of ecumenism and the sort of vision of unity that has the power to inspire and energise. At the Forum, although there was certainly a sense of being united in fellowship and praise – a celebration of the gift of unity that we already share – there was also an awareness of profound differences in the visions of unity just beneath the surface of that placid pool.
- d. Fourth, the enthusiasm of the group of young people who led such a significant part of the forum, has created momentum to share the experience of ecumenical encounter in a wider network of young people. This aspect of the Forum is being actively followed up in a number of strands. In CTE, the Directors are being asked to support a core group of young people drawn from diverse churches and traditions to take this forward. In 2016, Chemin Neuf will be holding an ecumenical pilgrimage for the 18 to 30 age group, Paradise in the City, leading up to participation in the Wold Youth Day called by Pope Francis in Krakow in Poland at the end of July 2016. This may provide a focus for the follow up to the Forum. At the same time, CCU staff are in conversation with Tim Watson and colleagues in other departments in Church House

to explore how to promote this event within the Church of England as part of a wider programme of engaging young people in ecumenical formation. Both these strands of follow up depend on each other, and the aim in both cases is to build up a growing network of young people.

10. Gathering over 250 participants, from member churches, bodies in association and from local and regional level, the 2015 Forum modelled receptive ecumenism in action, with two full days of celebration, listening to each other and reflecting together. It was an inspirational event and gave new life to an occasion which has been flagging in recent years, particularly by forging new relationships and changing the focus of our ecumenical conversation. This year's Forum could be a defining moment for the next stage of English ecumenism.

*Revd Dr Roger Paul
Council for Christian Unity*

25th November 2015

Members of the delegation appointed by the Appointments Committee

Rt Revd Christopher Foster, Bishop of Portsmouth

The Venerable Jane Steen, Archdeacon Southwark

The Revd Marcia Wall, General Synod, Manchester Diocese

Canon Mrs Linda Ali, General Synod, York Diocese

Ashley Leighton Plom, Diocesan Ecumenical Officer, Exeter Diocese

Patrick Deeming, Chair, Church of England Youth Council

The Revd Patrick King, Incumbent, Oxford Diocese

Kat Witham, Diocesan Yoith Advisor, Blackburn Diocse

Hannah Givell, General Synod, Derby Diocese

Alexandra Podd, General Synod, Youth Council Representative – unable to attend due to sickness

Rt Revd Andrew Proud, Bishop of Reading – unable to attend due to last minute commitments