

Reflection on the *Doing Mission Together* report

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You would expect that research demonstrating how widely missional activity undertaken by Anglicans is ecumenical in its scope would be welcomed by a committed ecumenist, and this research is certainly to be hugely welcomed by those like myself who are convinced that mission is most often best explored with ecumenical partners. What might not be so widely understood is how significantly this resonates with the priorities for Churches Together in England (CTE). Since the publication of “That they all may be one: Insights into Churches Together in England and contemporary ecumenism” (Theos, 2017), a report of a major investigation into the expectations of the member churches of CTE, one of its priorities has been to strengthen the missional dimension of ecumenism in England. The pilgrimage of the churches in membership with CTE (now over 50 in number and including the Church of England, of course,) has developed to the stage where the ecumenical priority of those member churches in a post-Christendom context needs to be expressed in a policy of missional collaboration. It is our common mission — indeed it is first and foremost God’s mission, the *missio Dei* — and will be most effective when we engage with this together.

The *Doing Mission Together* report demonstrates that this policy of ecumenical collaboration in mission is not just wishful thinking, but rather a present reality. We know anecdotally that care for the communities in which local churches and parishes are located in the form of social and compassionate action is largely attempted ecumenically. It is no surprise that this research shows this to attract the largest number of those who responded positively (Introduction, p.4 and Figs. 2 and 8). Collaboration in running a food bank, a night shelter or Street Pastors does not threaten our ecclesial distinctives. It is the ‘low-hanging fruit’ of ecumenical mission. What is much more surprising is the degree to which the first mark of mission, proclaiming the good news and engaging in evangelism, is similarly approached ecumenically (Fig. 4) Here one might expect differences in theology to play much more significantly, but the encouraging thing is that those old barriers to proclamation together, largely rooted in suspicions that other Christians or churches had a faulty understanding of what salvation entailed, and that character of the gospel to be proclaimed differed so much between traditions that it was unwise to attempt it, are being systematically dismantled. The churches are discovering that despite their continuing differences in theology and missional priorities, it is possible to proclaim ‘the faith once given’ together.

Not everything in the Report is encouraging, however. It seems that when it comes to forming disciples the churches become rather more proprietorial (the second mark of mission, Fig. 6) and here there is ecumenical work still to be done. Most worrying is that the fifth mark of mission seems to be much weaker — perhaps this is seen as the task of national church leadership, and too remote for the researched population of local parishes — and the call to care for the whole of creation the weakest of all. Yet, this is the most urgent human challenge our globe faces. CTE is committed to highlighting this in 2020 and beyond, so perhaps here another ecumenical addition of value to the overall mission of the churches.

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