

A Promising start to a new year for Churches Together in Formby

August 2015

How nice to start a new year of shared faith and community witness for the local Churches Together Association (CT) with a well-attended annual General Meeting.

We met on Wednesday 15th July in the St Jerome's Church Hall, Greenlooms Drive, Formby – by tradition we hold our meetings in the Church which provides our Chair-Person in and for his year of office, and this year just completed has been chaired by Michael Evans-Freke representing St Jerome's Catholic Church, Formby.

Michael has been an outstanding Chair-person maintaining the tradition of high quality leadership which our local Churches Together have always had. Thank you. Michael and your church for the support it has given you.

We are a Christian Churches Association and our full title is Churches Together in Formby, Altcar and Hightown, and we cover and include Anglican, Catholic and the Free Churches. We have 12 member churches – From Formby: Formby Christian Fellowship, Formby Methodist, Formby United Reformed Church, Holy Trinity, St Luke's, St Peter's, and St Anne's Our Lady of Compassion: from Altcar St Michael's and All Angels; and, from Hightown, St Stephen's and Our Lady of Victories; AND Every member Church was represented at our AGM by clergy leaders and/or members.

Chair-Person's Annual Report

Michael reported on his year of office as Chair-Person. He began by saying he had set himself the modest objective of building on the existing friendship and cooperation between CT's 12 members.

During his year he said he had been much moved by the warmth and evident goodwill of everyone involved in and with our Churches Together Association. Also, when he needed it, the Holy Spirit was with him to provide him with support and inspiration.

He ended his year even more convinced that God wills us to work, pray and witness together to show a united Christian face to the secular world which surrounds us – especially in our own local community.

He reviewed the key events during his year – the input to Formby's Flu Jab Sessions, the Nativity Play, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Lent Study Series, the Good Friday Walk of Witness and Passion Play, the Pentecostal Party and the Midsummer Evensong at t Michael's and All Angels Church, Altcar. He thanked everyone who had helped to make them very successful events.

He ended by reminding us that in the Gospel accounts in the Bible it seemed that women were mere bystanders at the Passion and the Crucifixion. In reality he said he was sure they were very busy behind the scenes, and after the crucifixion he was sure they helped to calm fears and maintain morale. Indeed, he said, he suspected they understood what was happening rather better than the Apostles all of whom panicked.

He paid special tribute to the heroic efforts of our women helpers, especially Bruni Jones (St Jerome's), June McGibbon (St Luke's) and Dympna Edwards (Our Lady's) who are the glue that keeps our Churches Together running and providing year after year the major events he had mentioned earlier.

My installation as the new Chair-Person

During this AGM I was installed as the new Chair-Person for this coming year. I introduced myself as an active member of St Luke's Anglican Parish Church in Formby. I also re-assured everyone that I was a committed ecumenist whilst retaining my prime loyalty to my own Church. I gave two examples of how I had acted ecumenically.

First, I was invited to act as advisor and consultant to the working party set up to produce the predecessor to Churches Together. This was the Mersey and District Christian Ecumenical Assembly (MARCEA).

This working party comprised local Christian church leaders. They were all agreed on the need for such a body. However, they judged there was no need to discuss its leadership, presuming that the current church leaders – Derek Warlock, the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Liverpool, and David Sheppard, the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Liverpool would take over as its leaders. I challenged this presumption.

I had done my research and discovered that the number of Merseyside church-goers fell into three roughly equal categories: Catholic, Anglican and the Free Churches. I therefore suggested that we needed a third leader to represent the free churches to form a trinity with Derek Warlock and David Sheppard.

My challenge and proposal created uproar. Two reasons against my proposal were tabled. One, that the Free Churches would never agree on one Free Church Leader to represent all the Free Churches, and second, that there was no Free Church Leader of the same calibre as Derek and David.

Eventually, my proposal was conceded as the right way forward. Believe it or not, all the Free Church Leaders on the working party easily chose one of their number to represent them, and their nominee, whilst lacking the standing of Derek and David, was an excellent church leader, and with Derek and David's support and help, would do them proud and grow in office as they say.

My second example was when I was invited by David Sheppard to review the Anglican Deanery of Ditton, near Widnes. David told me that the Anglican churches clergy were by-passing their own Fraternals – official regular meetings – in favour of meeting clergy from the other denominational churches! I was asked to sort this out!

I went and met with the churches clergy and secured an agreement that whilst promoting ecumenical relationships was welcome and to be encouraged, it had to be compatible with a primary loyalty to one's own church!

I am looking forward to my year of office as the Chair-Person for our Churches Together Association and will do my utmost to maintain the high standard of leadership which has been exercised by my predecessors. I did propose that we should establish a 3-man leadership team – my predecessor, myself and my successor - to ensure this required high standard.

John Nelson