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April 2011

From Monsignor Sean Healy - Chair of BEC

I am pleased to have taken over the Chair of Bedfordshire Ecumenical Committee. It is a number of years since I filled a similar role for BEC and I am encouraged by so much good work going on across the County - the ecumenical appointment in Wixams is a very good example.

I have also recently had first hand experience of the vibrancy of ecumenical cooperation when I was asked to speak at the final session of the Lent course organised by Churches Together in South Bedford - 'Rich inheritance - Jesus' Legacy of Love'. Such ongoing solid work does much to cement relations between churches in a locality and encourages further commitment.

Perhaps I could encourage you to come to the Forum of Churches Together in Bedfordshire when we can share more examples of good practice.

Another good reason for attending this year, is to listen to Bishop Richard as he shares with us insights into Christian Unity gathered over his years of ministry.

I would like to take the opportunity of thanking Bishop Richard as he relinquishes his tenure of the Chair of BEC. He has contributed greatly to the ecumenical life of the County and I'm sure we can continue to draw on his wisdom and expertise.

Tony Somervell (Chaplain to Bedford Borough Council)

"What do you actually do as chaplain, Tony?" is a question people might well ask. In this brief article I hope to give an idea of the wide variety of situations I might face as part time chaplain to the Bedford Borough Council.

Approaching the Council building along Bedford's lovely Embankment at the end of my ten minute walk from home, I always pray for some significant conversation to arise during my visit. To be honest this prayer isn't always answered, (!) but it appears as the months go by, that little conversations, often very banal (about the weather, developments in the Council, something going on in Bedford, whatever) in fact add up to building bridges, breaking the ice and forming relationships. This is what chaplaincy is all about: being there, showing an interest, making friendships, adding life and well-being to the community.

Just yesterday I was on my way to visit someone but, after greeting another colleague on that floor, discovered that she was going through a real rough time with bereavement. "I wanted to talk to you" she said. "Would you like to talk now?" I asked, "I'm free if you'd like". Within five minutes we were meeting in a quieter room and she was relating her story of her large family and several bereavements already, but, "This has been the hardest, it seems," she said. Listening to her as she told of relationships in the family and different illnesses that affected them, soon we were sharing that pain of loss and shock, that death often brings.

Later in the canteen (always a good spot to engage in conversation!) I notice someone I have talked to previously is reading a book while eating their lunch. Just a quick 'banter' as I pass him: "You enjoying your book?" brings him out of himself for a minute to share, yes, how he's enjoying the Humorous Cricketing Moments. Every little conversation counts, I reckon, be it in the corridor, on the stairs (no lifts please, we're slimming, and saving the planet!)

3 faiths schools tour

Queens Park

2011

Guru Nanak

Gushan E Baghdad

All Saints

Gurdwara

Mosque

Church



starting
18:30
promptly at
Gurdwara
84 Ford End Rd
Queens Park
Bedford
MK40 4JX
Food from 18:00
Tour ends
20:00

17th May

Faith Walk

Bedford Council of Faiths
details (website): www.bcof.org.uk

Wixams Church The gospel for an un-churched generation

When I saw the advertisement for a new ecumenical minister to be appointed in Wixams, my heart leapt. First, because here is a clear example of 'the Church' working in unity, rather than 'the churches' each trying to do their own thing; in direct contravention of Jesus' own prayer, "that they may be one". Despite our sometimes uncomfortable but very necessary diversity it is crucial that we remember we are one Church serving the one Kingdom of the one Living God.

The second reason for my excitement is the potential to set up church that is not hidebound by every kind of tradition or 'baggage' – no one insisting, '*but we've always done it this way!*' - though I realise the potential for us, over the next few years, is to create our own tradition and baggage.

The immediate challenge is to draw together a group of people who want to take seriously Christ's call to God-honouring living and who want to think and speak and learn about what that means for us in the 21st century; where Christianity no longer dominates our culture; and where we can no longer rely on people's acceptance or support.

So where do we begin? Well, I've quickly learned that I know much more about ecumenical matters than I do about church planting; so there's been lots to read ... and the clear message coming through from much wiser people than me is that it's not a quick process. We're talking years rather than months to establish a viable congregation; and so it's probably no bad thing that the construction of a church building for Wixams is still some years away.

In the meantime, ministry here is about meeting people and making friends; it's about taking opportunities that present themselves, to make our presence felt in the village; working with the community group; through taking school assemblies; through organising social events such as our Easter barbecue. It's the dawning realisation that it's about **being** in the village first; and only later do we begin **doing** what comes naturally; and only then in a way that engages our village and its people in ways they can relate to. It is a daunting, but truly exciting challenge!

Tim Jackson

FRIENDS FOR LIFE

This ecumenical project has been developed by the Anglican and Methodist Churches in Bedford with the aim of co-ordinating and developing the churches' ministry to care homes and their carers. It also includes members of the other mainstream Christian churches and there is enthusiastic support from the care homes already involved in the scheme.

Our initial research highlighted that many residents in the 80 or so homes across Bedford were spending the last years of their lives with few and in some cases, no visitors at all. Also, whilst many churches were providing worship opportunities such as communion and hymn singing, this tended to be random and uncoordinated.

The group has now been active for 3 years and currently has about 40 Personal Befrienders visiting residents in 12 homes. For various reasons not all Befrienders can be active at any one time and we urgently need to recruit more volunteers to provide temporary cover for them as well as to increase the number of homes and residents visited. We provide appropriate training and carry out CRB checks on their behalf, issuing ID badges on completion of the training. We believe this enables us to offer a quality service to homes who recommend the residents who they feel would most benefit from our work.

Although all our volunteers are from a Christian background the purpose of the visit is that of friendship, not to preach. Once linked to a particular resident, volunteers are free to visit whenever and however frequently they are able to. Many volunteers speak of the uplift they have received from visiting other people in this way.

Another aim of the scheme is to encourage all churches of all denominations providing ministry, to come under the Friends for Life umbrella for support and direction to allow co-ordination, so that residents in all homes can be able to access spiritual support and feel part of the Church Community. We encourage visits by worship groups and singing groups and can give advice on the best approach, gained from our experiences over the years. It may be that an individual church may wish to appoint a co-ordinator for its work in this area and again we can give guidance and support.

Our new web-site www.friendsforlifebedford.org.uk is now fully operational and gives more details of our activities. We also have leaflets available for distribution in churches and elsewhere, while members of our panel of speakers are able to visit individual care homes and churches to give further information about our work.

"We befriend and visit Care Home residents of any faith or none – offering them the gift of friendship".

If you feel this ministry is one you would like to support, either as a volunteer or financially or you would like more information, please contact: admin@friendsforlifebedford.org.uk or

Telephone: John Bassill 01234 325227 Joanne Barrow 01234 213088

The late Ian Pearce of Three Counties Radio

Many of us were saddened and shocked to learn of the sudden death of Ian Pearce who hosted the Melting Pot programme on Sunday mornings. He always took a lively interest in events held locally and was a great help with those in which he was involved. He was particularly interested in the development at Wixams and joined us for the Barbecue last autumn and the Service of Welcome for the Revd Tim and Bev Jackson, in February. We understand there will be a Memorial Service for Ian and will let you know when we have details.

Hitchin

New Testament Greek & Biblical Hebrew Courses

Starting:

Mon 26 Sept	7.30pm - 9.30pm	Beginners Greek
Thurs ² Sept	11.00am - 1.00pm	Beginners Greek
Thurs 29 Sept	7.30pm - 9.30pm	Advanced Greek
Tues 27 Sept	7.30pm - 9.30pm	Beginners Hebrew

For further details contact Dr Brendan Devitt 01462 621776

Email: bwdevitt@readntgreek.com



c/o St Andrew's Church Centre
Kimbolton Road, Bedford MK40 2PF
Tel 01234 216881 email: standrew.bedford@btconnect.com

Being a Christian in . . . ?

Being a Christian in the Police

Steve Lloyd, Chair of the Bedfordshire Branch of the Christian Police Association

Wednesday, 1 June 2011

Being a Christian in Midwifery and Nursing

Sue Armstrong, Registered Nurse and Midwife

Wednesday, 8 June 2011

Being a Christian in the Theatre

Janet Smith, Creative Director of the Trade Secrets Theatre Company, Derby

Wednesday, 15 June 2011

Being a Christian in the Media

Major Cathy Le Feuvre, Head of Media for the Salvation Army

Wednesday, 22 June 2011

Being a Christian in Politics

Alistair Burt, MP for North-East Bedfordshire

Wednesday, 21 September 2011

Venue: The Holt Room, St Andrews Church, Kimbolton Road, Bedford, MK40 2PF, beginning at 7.45 pm and ending at 9.30 pm.

Cost: This course will be free of charge.

Donations welcome towards the costs and refreshments

Yes, please, I would like to come on the following evenings (please circle dates):

1 June 2011

8 June 2011

15 June 2011

22 June 2011

21 September
2011

Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone:

Please return this slip to BELIEF, c/o St Andrews Church Centre Kimbolton Road Bedford MK40 2PF

Rejoice in Success

Philippians 1:15-18. It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this, I rejoice.

This is my third article dealing with attitudes to ecumenicalism; in the first we looked at Difference and Diversity, last time it was Kingdom or Empire and this time I want to look at our attitude when a neighbouring ministry has all the outward signs of success while we seem to be struggling.

I sometimes listen to American Christian talk radio on the internet; I have noticed that the station I listen to is very critical of other ministries especially when the other ministry is having a measure of success. I have found the same attitudes in some places in Bedfordshire, when there is a successful church, winning people to Christ, attracting young people and families, a few are critical. The methods, the motivations, the manners and even the manpower of the successful ministry are all criticised or complained about.

In one place where I was pastor there was a very large church, since I moved on they have opened a new and expensive building, while my church was very small, about two dozen people at our largest service. Others in the town were very critical of the large church, they had all the young people, they drew people from far away and one of the criticisms was that never joined with Churches Together activity. As a new minister in the area I went to meet their pastor, I found him to be a humble man. As I spoke to him he said that when they tried to join in activities they were never asked to take any active part, their ideas and resources were spurned and he said that he was aware of

the criticisms that people had of him. In view of this, he felt that it was a more effective use of his time to do that which the Lord had called him to do and leave other churches to do what they thought was right. We can debate the rights or wrongs of his attitude but the loser was the Kingdom, the events that took place without his church were less than they could have been.

It was clear that this church was reaching and keeping a lot of people, some travelled great distances to be with them, I realised that my church couldn't compete so we didn't try to; we simply did what God had called us to do. I never complained about my neighbour and I would not listen to complaints about them, we reached out to those the Lord had given us. It would be a great end to this story if I could say that my church grew to be just as large, but it didn't; the average number when I left was about the same as when I arrived but the average age fell, as those who were called to glory or could no longer attend were replaced by a few young families. Around 17 years later the church is still going well, little bigger in numbers, but it is still providing an active witness in the area.

These are my suggestions to those in a similar position:

1. Never criticise, who are you to judge another man's servant?
2. If you think that they are preaching some error, preach the truth to those the Lord has given you.
3. Look at what they are doing, are there any ideas that you can use too? Should you be following their example in prayer or hard work?
4. Rejoice that the Kingdom is growing.
5. Be content to do what the Lord has called you to do, you will reach some the big church can't reach.
6. Encourage the successful church to participate in shared activities, if necessary allow them to be the senior partner.

If you are the large successful church:

- Don't boast *For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*
You may have sown and watered but God gave the increase.
- Are there methods which can be transferred to other churches?
- Don't look down on those with smaller ministries, they are reaching some you can't.
- Share what the Lord has given you, to reach out in cooperation with your neighbours. Just because you can go alone doesn't mean that you should.

As Kingdom people we rejoice when the Kingdom is successful, it won't matter in eternity who had the church of thousands and who rescued the one or two lost lambs who couldn't settle in with the large flock. We are not interested in being seen as successful in human eyes, we are only interested in seeing the Kingdom grow and expand, so we rejoice when people come to Christ whether as part of our church or our neighbour's church, as long as they are in God's Church.

Some of you will recognise this prayer, (emphasis mine):

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.


Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.

So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen

Sponsored Bike 'n Hike  20th Year

Saturday 10 September 2011 10.00 am to 6.00 pm

Raise money for the repair of your local church or chapel by getting sponsorship for cycling or walking between churches in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Or, if your church or chapel is not open on the day, could you become Church Organiser and add to the list of 600 places of Christian worship available for riders and walkers to visit? Last year the *Bike 'n Hike* raised £99,032 (including Gift Aid), for the churches and chapels of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire and your church can benefit from this fundraising event.

Of every £1 raised in sponsorship by riders, walkers or church sitters, 50p goes to the participant's church. The other half of the sponsorship money goes to the Beds & Herts Historic Churches Trust and is distributed, in the form of grants for vital repairs to churches and chapels. By using Gift Aid you can further increase the funds available to the Trust.

This year the *Bike 'n Hike* celebrates its 20th anniversary and the organisers would like to make it a record breaking year. So what are you waiting for?

For more information please contact: Madeline Russell Counties' Organiser

BHHCT Bike 'n Hike 01767 312966 wychbrook@yahoo.co.uk

Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Historic Churches Trust

Saving the Past for the Future

www.BedsHertsHCT.org.uk BHHCT Registered Charity No. 1005697

Bike 'n Hike in association with the national **Ride & Stride**

Annual Forum

Wednesday 25 May 2011

at

The Sacred Heart Catholic Church
Pope Close Flitwick MK45 1JP

Speaker: The Rt Revd Richard Inwood
Bishop of Bedford

*Working Ecumenically
Looking Back on 35 Years of Ministry*

Buffet Meal from 6.30pm
Meeting at 7.30pm

You will have the opportunity to view and discuss a range of displays and information of interest

From the Secretary ...



Thank you to those of you who sent in material for this newsletter.

I am looking forward to seeing you again at this year's Forum.

This copy of "Together" will be on the Churches Together website: www.churchestogetherconnect.org