

Leyland Celebration and Praise – St Mary's, 22.v.10 1910 – 2010

A Century of Christian Unity - the Last Ten Years:

Ten years ago on Pentecost Sunday 2000, 14,000 of us were *all together in one place* in the football stadium at Deepdale, Preston. We had gathered to mark the third millennium of Christianity and to celebrate the Church Leaders' 1987 Covenant of unity with one another under God. *That's the Spirit* was a memorable event in the life of Churches Together in Lancashire and a tremendous testimony to the work of my predecessor, Donald Parsons.

So our ***Covenant Relationship*** is my first heading for these few reflections. Between 1984 and the year 2000, fifteen local churches' partnerships came into being in the county. Eleven of them were Congregations in Covenanted Partnership, two of them were Single Congregation Partnerships, one was a Chaplaincy Partnership and one a Shared Building Partnership. By 2008 a further eleven partnerships were formed, three more shared building arrangements, three more partnerships of covenanted congregations and five more single congregation partnerships. When I retired in 2008, there were in addition to all of these partnerships about fifty local groups of Churches Together or local Christian Councils of Churches.

In 2002-3 the Church Leaders updated and renewed their Covenant to reflect the progress made by Churches Together and changes which meant that many of them were new signatories. They asked all Christians in Lancashire to support and encourage them in the keeping of this Covenant. In Lent 2004 they led a series of studies on *Five Characteristics of a Missionary Church* as featured in their Covenant.

My second heading focuses on Lancashire's commitment to ***Inter Faith Relations***. In 2001, the world had changed with the events of 9/11. In 1999 Churches Together in Lancashire had already appointed an Inter Faith officer. This proved to be both prophetic and providential. Between 1998 and 2007 Inter Faith partnerships or projects rose from two to eleven or more. In addition to all of the foundational work that my colleague, Dale Barton, did, we also ran a series of biennial Churches Together in Lancashire Saturday Forums to develop a readiness for Christian participation on the Inter Faith scene.

In 2002 the focus was on *Understanding Islam* with Abdul Hamid Qureshi as keynote speaker at Jan's Conference Centre in Blackburn. It was a memorable occasion putting into practice the principle that inter faith is best done ecumenically and over food.

In 2004 it was *Faith in the Region* with keynote speaker Rachel Lampard, then Parliamentary and Political Affairs Secretary of the Methodist Church and held in Westbury Gardens United Reformed Church, Blackburn. Mgr John Devine, Churches' Officer for the North West introduced the regional report *Faith in England's Northwest*. I shall return at the end to the kind of evidence in the report for the sake of those who believe that if it cannot be measured, it does not exist.

In 2006 the theme was *Where Faith Leads ...* with the Revd Dr John Campbell Principal of Luther King House as our keynote speaker at the Salvation Army Centre in Preston. That was when I learned from Major Mary Bullock that the colours on the Salvation Army flag share an unexpected symbolism with some of those on Rublev's icon of the Trinity in the Orthodox tradition.

In 2008 we changed the format of the Forum to an open evening meeting after a short AGM meeting in Ingol in a similar style to that held last week in Fulwood on the theme *Better Together*.

Because the unity and diversity of God, so profoundly expressed in the undivided Trinity, is the basis of our common faith, and since mission and unity belong together, my third and last heading is ***Mission in Community***.

The Christian Unity movement has never been about introspection or cosy fellowship for the like-minded. We seek unity in order to engage in God's mission for the world. And the world has been ever-present on this journey of faith over the past decade on which I have been asked to reflect today.

Whether it was the fall out from 9/11 or 7/7, whether it was political elections – local, general and European, whether it was the rural scene in the county or the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, whether it was national dialogues or various anniversaries, chaplaincy or educational matters, Churches Together in Lancashire have been active in context.

In 2001 the Churches Together Tent at the Royal Lancashire Show had a particular focus on the effects of the Foot & Mouth tragedy and until 2005 we were present at the Show with high quality exhibits, miniature gardens and dedicated teams of volunteers serving Show visitors, organisers and other exhibitors; in 2002 and 2005 joint meetings of the Diocesan and District Synods were held in relation to the national Anglican/Methodist Covenant; in 2004 a unique purpose-built Methodist-Roman Catholic Church in Nelson was opened and in 2006 the national Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue Committee met there; in 2005 Christian Aid's 60 years were celebrated; in 2006 Polly Mason was commissioned as the Further Education Co-ordinating Chaplain; in 2007 we engaged in the *Set All Free* agenda to mark the bi-centenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act; at the Forum in 2008 we marked a century of prayer for Christian unity; and in 2009 we celebrated the commissioning of Debbie Peatman and Steve Hughes.

Add to this the plethora of good things that are done by Churches Together locally in joint choirs, furniture stores, drop-in centres, youth clubs, projects for the homeless, meals for the lonely, those who speak for the churches on strategic partnerships and many other services offered as needed in the community - and really only these words of St Paul can speak for any of this. In his letter to the Romans 12:4-5:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Terry D.Garley
20.v.10

