

NECCT News

January 2006



NECCT Forum gets moving - and discovers the Churches have a lot to learn about Regeneration.

From the Churches' Regional Commission

Chief Officer Paul Southgate writes...

2005 has been a fascinating - and somewhat breathless - year of two halves for me. I started out as Community Development Officer with Durham County Council, and as your Honorary NECCT Secretary. It changed course in June when I joined the CRC. In September I handed over the Secretaryship to Susan Atkinson. So much was going on, thanks to the energy, flair and vision of my predecessor, Ian Zass-Ogilvie, that my feet have hardly touched the ground during these six months - and 2006 promises to be even busier.

Tees Valley Ministry (TVM) is an important part of the CRC and is thriving in its ministry to commerce, industry and business in the south of our region. We most heartily welcomed Revd Dr David Whiting to TVM in December. David is funded by the URC and based in Stockton. He joins a team in good ecumenical shape.

In partnership with the University of Durham, we are running a research project to investigate the role and potential of faith communities in promoting the social inclusion of young people through social action. Our two enthusiastic researchers, Susannah Moon and Catherine Duce, are presently engaged in a pilot study of Middlesbrough.

contd overleaf...

Regeneration needs to be people orientated. Shouted out in upper case, this was one of the points on the feedback sheet that gathered up the insights and impressions of the participants in a new style Forum meeting held last November.

It was a people orientated day, as Forum members saw for themselves some of the issues through morning visits to three different locations: Stockton's Hardwick estate, Backworth in North Tyneside, and Whinney Banks at Middlesbrough. A different group of people spent a couple of hours in each area, drawing on the expertise of those who had been asked to lead the sessions, and in some cases sharing the insights of local church people who had taken the opportunity of the general invitation to come and see and talk for themselves.

Participants then travelled to the Glebe Centre in Murton, first to share their impressions with one another over lunch, and then to engage with two speakers with wide experience in the area of community housing - Tony Stephenson, North East Housing Board Officer, and Colin Garbutt, Regeneration Director of Hall & Partners.

Running through both the feedback comments and the questioning and discussion that followed the two speakers was a clear sense that we in the Churches need to be involved. Each of the three visits showed how churches could be involved

in regeneration in their own area, and engaged in a whole range of social issues, not just housing. Yet while some Forum members called for more reflection and discussion on what the churches' role should be in this context, others insisted that we take on the challenge posed by extensive housing development just as we are.

Our speakers gave encouragement with the observation that the Church is not perceived as a "one issue" pressure group, but is known to have a concern about the wellbeing of the whole community, and to have a particular interest in the needs of the most marginalised and dispossessed. And a frequently repeated theme of the day was the readiness of Local Authorities to hear from the Churches and to affirm the value of Christian voices.

At the close of the afternoon session it was agreed that the NECCT Executive in consultation with the Church Leaders should convene a group with expertise from within the Churches. They would be asked in particular to draw up a strategy to help churches in each locality work with Local Strategic Partnerships and offer leadership to often voiceless communities looking for ways of communicating with developers. A lot of good work is already being done; and the challenge for us all is to ensure that Churches are all working Together where it matters throughout the region.

CRC News contd.....

In the CRC we have several groups which are made up of people who generously volunteer their time, experience and expertise in the service of the churches and people of the North East. I am more grateful to them than I can say. For example, we have the Community Development Group, the Common Good II Group, the Consultancy Group, the Tees Valley Faith Communities Regeneration Group, and HANEP (Housing Action North East Partnership). HANEP, for example, has become a focus group on housing and homelessness issues, ensuring that they remain high on the regional agenda. It organised a conference in October attended by a hundred people. The conference began with a video in which four homeless people shared their stories – you could have heard a pin drop! Paul Marriott, the Chief Exec of the Depaul Trust, chaired the event with charm and humour. John Bird, founder of The Big Issue, was the keynote speaker who demonstrated the power of a person's story to inform, inspire and educate.

The Faiths Survey published by CRC a year ago showed that our churches would appreciate help in certain areas. There were issues that kept surfacing and it is probably true that most of our church communities are asking similar questions. Unsurprisingly, funding was a big one. How can churches get information about funding? Where can churches get funding to improve their premises for wider community use, for example, or to provide better facilities for people with disabilities?

Churches also told us they would appreciate some assistance in developing their projects: how do we do the right thing, and do it right? For example, how can we best find

out what the needs are in our community, raise funds to respond to them, be good partners with other agencies and faith groups, put our message across, and get the whole process right?

In response, we are organising three events that we hope will go some way to answering these questions. The first one, on February 14th, will address issues around funding; the second (March 8th) will be on disability awareness; the third (March 30th) will be about the steps to take when developing a project. We'll be ringing round respondents to the Faiths Survey who expressed a need for this kind of help to give them first refusal, but if you wish to take part in one of these workshops, and if there are still places available, just phone CRC (0191 373 5453) to express your interest.

NEWS SNIPPETS

NEW NECCT SECRETARY

As Paul has indicated above, his move to the CRC meant that last summer NECCT needed to seek a new secretary. Everyone was delighted when Mrs Susan Atkinson agreed to take on the job. Until recently Susan was known to many as the Librarian in Hartlepool, and an active Catholic member of her local Churches Together group. This autumn, as well as taking on the secretaryship, she began a new student career at Ushaw.

CATHOLIC ECUMENICAL OFFICER APPOINTED

Following the retirement last summer of Bernadette Askins, the Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle has appointed a new Ecumenical Officer in the person of Mrs Andrea Murray. She comes with a good deal of experience of work in a number of Catholic agencies, and with a wide range of ecumenical experience.

ECUMENICAL DAY ON MARY

The most recent ARCIC statement, *Mary—Grace and Hope in Christ*, will be the subject of the next day conference to be organised by the Theological Consultancy. It will take place at St Ninian's, Gateshead on March 21st: look out for the posters, or contact Fr Colin Carr, Theological Consultant, on 0191 2221960.

IN THE WAKE OF ST PAUL

Former West Yorkshire County Ecumenical Officer Stephanie Rybak has branched out into organising and leading retreat holidays. Bernadette Askins is trying to get a group together to sail along the Turkish coast, 25 September—2 October, with flights from Newcastle. The brochure looks wonderful! - contact Bernadette for details on 0191 5367627.

COMMUNICATION IN NECCT

Apologies that this edition of the newsletter is only half the size it usually is. The NECCT Review last year asked us to do some thinking about communications, and a small group is shortly going to meet and look at some of the issues. So it's anybody's guess what you might be offered next time!

This Newsletter is published by North East Christian Churches Together (NECCT) as a means of communication with the Churches and Churches Together Groups in the Region.

It may be freely copied and distributed to all who have an interest in the Pilgrimage on which God is leading his people.

Moderator of the Forum:

Nina Gwilliam

Secretary:

Mrs Susan Atkinson -
susan.atkinson20@ntlworld.com

Churches' Regional Commission -
0191 3735453
crcnortheast@btconnect.com

WEBSITE -

www.northeastchurches.org.uk