



NECCT News

June 2005

Review Group reports back – and asks "What do you get for your money?"

New NECCT Moderator

NINA GWILLIAM, a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers) was welcomed as the new Moderator of NECCT at the Forum meeting held at Stockton Baptist Tabernacle on May 21st. She replaces Major Mervin Baker of the Salvation Army who retires later this summer.



Nina has served on the Forum since the inception of NECCT, and later was invited to be the Friends' representative on the Church Leaders' meeting (Friends, of course don't have "leaders").

Her background has been strongly ecumenical, from Plymouth Brethren Sunday School days through involvement in inter-church youth clubs to marrying an Anglican vicar. On moving to the North East Nina and her husband Chris got involved with religious broadcasting on Teesside, and so made contact with a variety of Church people throughout the region.

Nina still serves as an elder and as clerk of her local Friends Meeting, is a member of Stockton SACRE, and Secretary of Norton Churches Together. She says that she believes NECCT has an interesting two years ahead: we wish her every blessing through them.

There is, it seems, a gap between local Churches Together groups and NECCT, the regional body – and this is made worse when all that some CT groups ever hear from NECCT is a request for annual subscriptions. This led the review team, reporting to the NECCT Forum at Stockton in May, to make one of their more surprising recommendations – that the idea of seeking contributions from local CT groups be dropped!

As reported in the last edition of *NECCT News* (which, by the way, the review team like as a means of trying to bridge that gap), NECCT has been under review over the past six months or so – because its constitution requires it. NECCT came into being in 2001 through the amalgamation of the Durham and Newcastle Church Relations Groups, and it seeks to be the body that represents the Churches working together across the whole of the North East region.

The review team has been led by the Revd David Herbert, a United Reformed Church minister from Northumberland. Its other members are Julia Firbank, a Roman Catholic and former school head currently serving on the Diocesan

Council of Laity; Brian Hails, former rector of Sunderland; David Hasson, Methodist circuit minister from Haltwhistle; and Jenny Bond, Churches Together in England Field Officer for the North & Midlands.

Presenting their report at the Forum, the team stressed that their findings and recommendations were grounded in what they had heard people saying, from many different perspectives. "It is therefore a very wide-ranging body of reflection, and covers a full spectrum of assessments from alienation and disillusion through to satisfaction and profound appreciation."

The professional-style PowerPoint presentation also focused on the Forum, noting (what was painfully evident to those there) that many members vote with their feet, and calling for a different kind of gathering. There was a call for the Executive to act more decisively, knowing that they have support from the Churches. The team had been struck by the warmth of the Church Leaders' meeting; and there was praise too for the work of the ecumenical officers and the Theological Consultancy.

See inside for a fuller account.

NECCT – *North East Christian Churches Together* (pronounced Next) is the coordinating body that brings together the Churches of our region.

NECCT News is published twice a year, after Forum meetings, and is aimed at all Christians in the North East who are committed to the cause of Christian Unity. Copies are sent to LEPs and Churches Together Groups: please make further copies to pass on to all who are interested.

AID FOR TSUNAMI VICTIMS

Churches up and down the region were busy at the beginning of the year in raising money for victims of the Tsunami. Prominent among these were Churches Together in Cramlington who very hastily arranged for a collection to be held in Manor Walks Shopping Centre. Amazingly over £11,000 was raised in just two days. And when it was time for the usual CTiC Lent Lunches, the churches themselves were able to top-up what had already been

NECCT Review – the highlights

raised. Three members of the five-strong review team were at the Stockton Forum meeting to present their main findings. They spoke to PowerPoint slides, giving an overview of each main area of NECCT's work, and making recommendations for each of these areas. A full written report was then sent to the Executive, who were due to meet three weeks after the Forum

Churches Together Groups

This was the obvious place for the review team to begin their work – and as we noted on page 1, they quickly sensed distance and even hostility. It is clear that for many CT groups NECCT is seen to be irrelevant to their work. But the reviewers note that wherever churches are working together in the North East, that is NECCT! So there ought not to be a "them and us" attitude anywhere. Also, lest there be too much breast-beating, it is natural for local and regional



Methodist District Chair Graham Carter speaks to the Forum, watched by the new and retiring Moderators

agendas to be that much different.

They suggest that the £3 pa from each member church in CT groups reinforces a false sense of membership – of choosing to be in or out. Whereas by being part of a CT group of equivalent, every church is an active part of NECCT. Hence the suggestion that the sub be quietly dropped – though the denominations would then need to make up the £1500 shortfall....

The Forum

The small group of people rattling round the wonderful new Tabernacle building in Stockton hardly needed telling that the Forum isn't working. The original vision for a significant decision-making body

for the Churches in the North East simply hasn't worked. The reviewers felt that opportunities were being missed: for instance, there had been no large across the Churches event in the region for **MakePovertyHistory**.

There have been large gatherings in the past that have worked better – and usually these have been organised round a particular interest. The review recommends that rather than continuing with a Forum made up of representatives from the Churches and from CT groups, a gathering with perhaps a different name should take its place which would appeal to all sorts of people from the churches because its subject matter appears exciting and relevant.

Forum members seemed to have a lot of sympathy for this suggestion, though one put the question: "if the Forum is not to be the place where Churches in the region come to make significant decisions together, where is that place?" It wasn't a question that found any easy answer.

The Executive

Following on from their recommendation about the Forum, the review team turned to the Executive. A Forum that everyone may come to suggests that proper representation has then to take place at the

Executive level. Members of the Team had attended meetings of the Executive over the review period, and they sensed that it was a body that worked well and made good decisions together. "It understands NECCT, does theology well and keeps its eye on mission." However, they picked up a concern from some of the Executive members that decisions were being made here that should really be made by the Forum.

A different kind of Forum would require the Executive to make decisions. Clearly it would then need to become a more representative body itself. The reviewers were concerned that already it seemed to have few women members: now it would be important for all streams of our Church life to be represented. And yet, they urged, do be careful not to

make the Executive too big. And of course, they didn't tell us how to do the one without the other!

The Church Leaders

Some of the team had attended the most recent Church Leaders' meeting, and had been impressed by the obvious warmth of relationships and the overall commitment to NECCT. They heard that the Church Leaders would like to meet more frequently than they do, and that they find particular value in the visits they make together to local areas and CT groups.

However, they picked up some concerns about leadership, and the danger that some felt of their group acting as though it were an executive arm of NECCT; and they also noted that there seemed sometimes to be a distance



Retiring Churches Regional Commission Officer Ian Zass Ogilvie chats with his successor (who is the current NECCT Secretary) Paul Southgate.

between Church Leaders and Ecumenical Officers which needs addressing. Maybe there should be some shared reflection together.

The Ecumenical Officers

Jenny Bond had just spent three days at a consultation working with some of the members of this group (*see report p 4*). She spoke appreciatively of the quality of their work, and described them as an excellent team, working well together. However, the reviewers had all noted that they struggle to keep up with the sheer volume of work and to keep in touch adequately with LEPs and CT groups throughout the region.

Their recommendation was simply that the EOs be supported and affirmed – and that the Churches at least maintain the present level

of funding, and ensure that any future appointments to denominational EO posts are of enthusiastic team players!

The Theological Consultancy

Again, members of the review team had met with Colin Carr, as they had met with all the groups mentioned in their report. They had already discovered that the Consultancy, which is a unique resource, is well used and appreciated in the region; and they encouraged Colin's present intention to develop work with sector ministries.

Churches Regional Commission

The review team were active while moves were being made (see last NECCT News) to fully integrate this piece of work as an agency of NECCT. Stressing the importance of the CRC, the team simply encouraged what was already happening.

Other Bodies and Networks

All over the region there are groups of people busily engaged together in Christian work. Do they see themselves as part of NECCT? asked the reviewers, noting that none had been asked to report to a NECCT Forum since 2002. They suggested looking back at recommendations made then, and thinking about bringing such people together again.

Communication

It's the heart of effective working together: but how well does NECCT communicate? The reviewers had noted a number of instances of "distance" – of people and individuals not communicating well. They commended *NECCT News* as being well produced and widely available: but does it reach to the local? And the joint website with the Regional Commission has great potential – but the way we use it needs to be developed.

And now?

The Forum divided into small groups to talk about what they had heard, after which a few comments were shared with the reviewers. They were then thanked for their sterling work, as the Forum came to an end. But everyone was aware that it will be for the Executive to study the full text, and then suggest the next steps for NECCT.

NEW COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTH EAST

Recent government legislation will give both regional and local ecumenical groups of churches the opportunity to have their say about the kinds of communities they want in the 21st century.

A very extensive house building programme is being planned for both brown field and green field sites and while much of the new housing will be built in southeast England, there will be some new developments here in the North East. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 gives churches opportunities to influence future planning decisions.

The North East Assembly is developing its Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which will guide planning decisions relating to housing, health care, education, crime, investment, transport, the economy and the environment. Through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) every Local Authority, in consultation with the local community, must produce its own Local Development Framework.

In September 2004, when our national churches began to realise the implications of the new legislation, Churches Together in England arranged a national consultation. John Durell (URC Ecumenical Officer) attended on behalf of NECCT. John said, "It was recognised early on that ways had to be found to share the learning experience of churches as they got involved with the development of new communities. CTE has set up a national co-ordinating group so that this can happen. It is essential that the spiritual aspirations of new communities are addressed, so we want to influence government policy to ensure that a holistic approach is adopted."

In the big conurbations it will be important to protect green areas. A number of fairly small housing developments can add up to a big development. Brown field sites will be regenerated and there will be opportunities to redevelop church buildings. Thought will be needed about the kind of buildings suited to modern liturgy and local community needs.

The NECCT Forum on November 5th will include visits to new developments, where new building and

regeneration are already underway, to meet local people and learn about their experience. This will be followed by a time to reflect together, with the assistance of some 'experts', about what we have seen and heard.

Bernadette Askins, who has been appointed to the new CTE Working Group, writes, "Churches Together groups should approach their own Local Authority and find out what's happening because very often the churches are overlooked when it comes to community consultation. Try to find out if there are any church (or faith) representatives – or individual Christian people – on the Local Strategic Partnership. These are key people and will be able to assist.

"Churches Together in South Tyneside have worked hard to raise the profile of the churches and recently were asked if they want to be included in the Local Development Framework consultation. Local M.P., David Miliband, has recently been appointed to the Cabinet as Minister for Local Authorities and Communities. He has asked for a meeting with the Churches Together in South Tyneside in order to discuss how government can assist churches to develop their role with the local community."

NEXT NECCT FORUM

Plans are in hand for the November Forum meeting to focus on this topic, and for this meeting to be open to all who have an interest in housing and regeneration issues in the Region.

Meeting on November 19th, the morning will be spent at a choice of either a new housing area in Tyne & Wear, or a regeneration area on Teesside. There will be opportunity to hear from local authority officers, planners and developers, and to examine the potential role of churches and faith communities.

The Forum will then reconvene all together for a sandwich lunch at the Glebe Centre at Murton, after which there will be opportunity for sharing experiences and insights from the different morning visits. Other experts will be invited in to form a panel for a question and answer session.

Details of the day are yet to be finalised – look out for these from your Churches Together group, or check up on the NECCT/CRC website www.northeastchurches.org.uk.

Under the Rainbow CEOs' Conference in Leeds

We don't have CEOs in the North East – County Ecumenical Officers that is. Most places in England have an ecumenically appointed and funded person to work with CT groups and LEPs, but we rely on our denominational officers to work together as a team and do what everywhere else is done by CEOs.

Being different doesn't mean that we're excluded, however. Every year a couple of our ecumenical officers attend the CTE consultation held for CEOs (and national EOs too) and participate fully in the event. Jenny Bond and John Bradley, the two CTE Field Officers, play a large part in putting the programme together, but they also rely on a planning group chosen each year from one of the regions.

And this year it was us! Bernadette Askins, Colin Carr, John Durell and Clive Price met with Jenny Bond several times over the previous months to plan a challenging two days looking at the concept of Covenant in local ecumenism. Entitled "Under the Rainbow", one of the highlight sessions was "Noah speaks!" – an opportunity for Colin Carr to share his insights with the group, and for the North East to demonstrate the value of having a theological consultant.

In the final evening's worship, after acting out together the story of the Great Flood, participants were invited to hang their covenant fruits on a previously bare tree. *An extra website – Fidelity to God and the kingdom – the hope of that yet to be revealed* – were a few. People had been challenged – and touched.



Under the Rainbow – the signs of the Covenant were all around throughout the Consultation

Working Together on Holy Island

Pentecost Sunday saw a special occasion on Holy Island, when members of all the resident Churches and Christian communities came together in St Mary's Parish Church to share their various mission statements. After each was read out, clergy and leaders together affirmed "We offer and accept these Mission Statements as a sign that we honour our various traditions and recognise God's call of service to each of them on Holy Island. We intend, by the grace of God, to work together for increasing cooperation which reflects our common faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Statements were offered on behalf of St Mary's, St Aidan's Roman Catholic Church, St Cuthbert's Centre (URC), Marygate House, and the Community of Aidan and Hilda.

Single Congregation LEPs

Ecumenical Officers organised an evening for people in leadership roles in "joint churches" at the beginning of June, and were gratified when more than 20 people from eight of our LEPs attended. The evening was hosted by Oxclose Church, one of the older LEPs in our region, who this summer are celebrating the 30th anniversary of their building.

Other single congregation LEPs are more recent. Some have come into being as different churches have merged locally, while others on the Oxclose pattern reflect joint working from the beginning.

Newcastle Diocesan Ecumenical Officer Clive Price told the representatives to challenge the wider Church with the good things they'd discovered through working so closely together. He and other ecumenical officers then shared in a question and answer session in which it was clear that these local congregations still have enthusiasm for their ecumenical witness, but often feel frustration with church structures that have difficulty admitting their existence.

And we know that single congregations are not the only kind of LEP. Look out for an evening on Covenant LEPs – coming your way soon!

The Theological Consultancy presents

Bread and Wine for a Hungry World

A Day Consultation to mark the
Year of the Eucharist with

The Revd John Farrell OP

Rt Revd Tom Wright

Revd Dr Laurence Whitley

at Ushaw College

22nd September, 10.00-3.00

Cost incl lunch £15, £10 concs.

Details from Colin Carr

colin_carr@lineone.net

Thanks to Malcolm

Back in the dark snowy evenings of January a group of Church Leaders and Ecumenical Officers found their way to the White Swan at Dinnington to say *Thank you* to Malcolm Porter and his wife Ruth for his three and a half years of sterling service for NECCT. Malcolm, who is a member of St John's, Kingston Park, one of our region's flourishing LEPs, had been secretary of NECCT from its beginnings in 2001.



After the meal Moderator-elect Nina Gwilliam expressed the thanks of all our churches for Malcolm's keen and careful guidance through this significant period. News from th

This Newsletter is published by North East Christian Churches Together 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.

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News from 'The Agency' –

by Ian Zass Ogilvie

News from the Agency means news from the CRC (The Churches' Regional Commission in the North East), rejoicing in its new-found role as an Agency of NECCT. Its strap line is **Promoting social action by faith communities.**

NECCT and CRC have worked increasingly closely together over the last few years and as from 1st April (and don't look for any significance in the date) the partnership was cemented by CRC formally becoming an agency of NECCT, in much the same way as the Theological Consultancy has been from the outset. Why NECCT and CRC were not together in the beginning is in the realm of what Bishop David Jenkins would characteristically have called *a mystery and a muddle*.

One of the many tangible signs of the partnership has been the appointment of Paul Southgate, who succeeded Malcolm Porter as Hon Secretary of NECCT, as the new Chief Officer of CRC. After my five years at CRC, Paul takes over the reins from me on 1st July and does so at a particularly significant time.

With the completion of the region-wide survey of faith communities and the publication of *Faith in the North East* at the end of last year, we are moving into the challenging task of exploring ways of supporting and resourcing churches and other faith communities in their engagement in social action. By coincidence this happens to be a matter now high on the government's own agenda and, through the Home Office Active Communities Unit, limited resources have been made available to help develop the infrastructure of the voluntary and community sector, of which faith communities constitute a significant part.

Your agency the CRC, working closely with VONNE (Voluntary Organisations Network North East,) BECON (Black & Ethnic Minorities Network), Regeneration Exchange and others is engaged in building partnerships that we hope will help churches and faith communities to continue and extend their contribution to regeneration in our region. So seriously has Bishop Kevin Dunn of the Catholic Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle taken this task that he has appointed Jim O'Keefe, parish priest at St Bede's Newcastle, specifically to take this agenda forward within his own diocese and no doubt he will do so on an ecumenical basis.

The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle continues with its own significant pioneering work in urban mission. Indeed there is far more going on in the region in this respect than most people realise – some of it ecumenical, some of it purely denominational. We'd like to see it all as ecumenical – 'You know it makes sense' (as Dell Boy would have said).

Currently CRC is positioning itself as broker for additional resources and capacity building for faith communities in the region. Paul Southgate's experience of working as a community development officer, with special responsibility for faith communities, within Durham County Council will prove to be invaluable, as will his former role as a Catholic priest working both in this region and in East Africa.

Faith in Young People in the North East – a new project

This is a two-year action research project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund Research Grants Unit in London. It opened on 16th May and is run by CRC in partnership with the University of Durham. Working directly with young people in the North East region, it has the following aims:

- Initially, to assess the contribution made specifically by churches and faith communities in the region through their work with young people aged 11-18
- To ascertain the extent to which churches and faith groups may assist young people in their becoming responsible, self-assured adults within their communities and wider society.
- In the second year, to facilitate and support the work of churches and faith communities, through organising multi-faith events and the production of a Good Practice Guides
- To engage young people from a variety of faith backgrounds throughout the research project in all aspects of its delivery.

How we plan to go about this:

1. The two University researchers, Susannah Moon and Dr Anselma Gallinat, supervised by Dr Sarah Banks and based at Ushaw College, are gleaning information from a variety of books, journals, pamphlets, surveys and reports and will be looking to see just what kind of work with young people is going on in the region. They will also make contact with various faith and ethnic minority networks in order to gain as much detail as they can.

2. A multi-faith event will be held for young people and from those attending a reference group will be recruited to help advise and focus the research work, as well as to provide feedback.
3. Four areas in the region will be chosen for in-depth studies, each reflecting different characteristics.
4. Wherever possible, further young people will be recruited from these areas to do some of the research themselves, for which training, supervision and travel costs will be provided.

The project has a multi-faith Advisory Group of community and youth work professionals, several being from ethnic minority communities.

During June and July the researchers would be really grateful for your help:

They are currently contacting as many organisations and communities as they can, just to hear how they are engaging with young people – be it a youth work project, outreach work, care, education etc. They are also interested to find out how different communities see young people. They would be delighted if you could get in touch with them and let them know about any work that you do. They also would be glad to meet some of your young people, if that is possible and very much look forward to hearing from you.

Please contact: Susannah Moon or Anselma Gallinat either by phone – 0191 373 5453 or by e-mail: susannah.moon@durham.ac.uk or anselma.gallinat@dur.ac.uk

Arts & Regeneration

Not enough people perhaps realise that we have had an Arts & Recreation Chaplaincy based in the region for many long years, which became a company limited by guarantee in 1998. Visit their website on www.artschaplaincy.org.uk to get a resume' of the company, its history, the chaplains, ministries and aims etc. See also its current and planned events.

Most people, especially those in Newcastle, will remember losing the Culture 2008 bid to Liverpool – a sad day for the North East. However, behind that bid was a lot of work put in by Peter Robinson of the Urban Ministry & Theology project in Walker - and if you've not heard of that, just have a look at their website on www.umtp.org.uk .

Peter had been adding strength to the original culture bid by sensibly proposing some joint working by faith communities on arts & culture on both sides of the Tyne. Despite the eventual failure of the bid, or maybe because of it, Peter suggested that NECCT should establish an ecumenical strategy group for the promotion of Arts, Culture and Regeneration (and yes they do all belong very much together, when you come to think of it!) initially for Newcastle-Gateshead.

A group was convened on 24th May in Mervin Baker's office at the Salvation Army Divisional HQ and it was decided that the NECCT/CRC website – you have seen it haven't you at www.northeastchurches.org.uk - should give links to both the Arts and Recreation Chaplaincy, as well as to UMTP and give some details of coming events, to the Tall Ships etc on the Tyne in July. In addition to this, the Arts & Recreation Chaplaincy will arrange a Colloquium and the UMTP will arrange for a Theological Seminar, both addressing and exploring the interface between Arts & Regeneration. Look out for details of this on the websites.

The HANE Partnership

Most people will remember the brilliant HANE project (Housing Action North East) funded by the Big Lottery Fund and managed by CRC for three years, with John Rogers as its enterprising project leader. In an increasingly difficult funding climate it proved impossible to get it re-financed, but by dint of some support from Lloyds TSB and much practical support and advice from Julian Simpson of VONNE, we have managed to re-invent ourselves into a new and more comprehensive partnership, running a 'Question Time', chaired by Bp Kevin Dunn, just before the Election and currently engaged on producing a video (with homeless people and students from St John's College Durham) on homelessness – as a launch to our Annual Forum on 12th October, with its accustomed panel of high-profile speakers. The Starter Packs initiative continues, for which Sue Blackbird at CRC would always be glad to hear from you. Tel: 0191 373 5453.

That's me signing off now – in more senses than one. It has been great working with you all and thank you for your fellowship in the gospel. Shalom!

Ian Zass-Ogilvie