

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2010-2011

This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the modern ecumenical movement. We are all aware of the challenges, the blessings, the disappointments and the signs of hope which mark our ecumenical journey. Many Gospel passages remind us that what we share, in Christ, is greater than what divides us. Tonight we entrust all of these thoughts to the Lord, confident in his providence and the power of his grace. From the earliest days of the Church, Christ has continued to send his disciples into the world in order to proclaim the coming of his Kingdom and to bring his peace to the world, beginning house by house, family by family, town by town. As members of the Ryedale Christian Council we seek through our activities throughout the year to be a Christian presence in homes, families and towns across Northern Ryedale as well as reaching out to others from further a field, many of whom this year, were able to join us and take part in our conference on "The Sanctity of Life". But I shall say more about the conference later.

Over the past extremely busy and fulfilling year, we have continued with all the many activities that make up the regular work of the Council and there have also been one or two additions. In Matthew 18, Christ says "where two or three are gathered in my name I shall be there with them". And in recognition of our need to underpin all that we do with prayer, not just as individuals, but together, we now meet for 25 minutes prior to our business meetings for prayer and reflection.

I remember this time last year encouraging as many as possible to come and join us in our preparations for the Ryedale Show and to be with us on the day as we witness through our hospitality tent to our Christian work in the area. The large Cross erected outside the tent is a wonderful and powerful indication of who we are and what we stand for and it proves year after year to be a draw to those seeking rest, recuperation, spiritual conversation and, let's face it, the best cup of tea on the showground! So our thanks go to all our extra volunteers without whom the day would not be the success it is as well as to the organising team. May I encourage you further by inviting you all to be part of this year's show, taking place on 28th July.

Our annual planning day now regularly takes place at the home of members of the Council and I would like to offer our thanks to them for their wonderful hospitality that they continue to extend to us. In October a representative of Besom in Ryedale -an organisation that describes itself as "A Bridge between those who want to give and those in need" came to speak at our meeting.

Returning to the theme of reflection, we had a lovely day at Holyrood House in October, entitled "Quite a Quiet Day", beautifully led by two members and another day is in the planning stage for this autumn. The Journey To Bethlehem which many of us attended at Christmas unfortunately had to be severely curtailed due to appalling weather and the donkey quite wisely deciding to retreat into its box as fast as possible! The weather had improved by the Songs of Praise held on 23rd January during the week for Christian Unity, which this year was celebrated at All Saints Church in Kirkbymoorside. The theme was based on the Acts of the Apostles "One in the apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer." It was a very spiritual occasion and our thanks go particularly to the parishioners of All Saints for their participation and hospitality. The collection which amounted to £227 was divided between Besom in Ryedale and the Amos Fund, working to improve the lives of women with breast cancer.

Another major function of the Council is to organise the Lent Courses throughout the area and these take place in many parishes as well as members participating in events organised in addition by the

churches during this season. This year we returned to the York Course, entitled "Rich inheritance, Jesus' legacy of love". These groups were well attended and the material provided opportunities for questions and discussion. Thanks go to all who led groups either in their parishes or their own homes. Two of the extra ecumenical activities were a series of films and discussions in the Methodist Church in Kirkbymoorside and a sung service of Compline, at St Mary's in Helmsley.

The major event of this past year took place at Ampleforth on Saturday 30th April. As many of you will know, the Council holds a Conference every two years and the themes can vary widely. This year we tackled a huge topic "The Sanctity of Life" and I would like to spend the next few minutes reporting on that Conference. We were very blessed with our organising team and with the quality of our two speakers, Lord Habgood and Pauline Dodsworth. There follows a report on the conference:

REPORT ON THE RYEDALE CHRISTIAN COUNCIL CONFERENCE ON "THE SANCTITY OF LIFE"

After a warm welcome from the Sub-Prior of Ampleforth and the opening introduction to the day, Lord Habgood, former Archbishop of York and member of the General Synod Ethics Committee, gave an excellent talk. He spoke to start with, of the development of, and significance of, both soul and body, our unique importance to God, bringing in Platonic and Aristotelian thinking on body/soul relationship, before the pendulum swung in the 17thc. with Descartes, bringing in rigid distinctions between the two elements. He was really illustrating fairly forcibly that we cannot describe human life merely in terms of bodies. He then talked about self awareness and language and evolutionary history. Having set the scene very carefully, he then moved on to human development, embryonic research, the law, IVF, cloning etc. This was followed by reflecting on medical ethics and practice and ended accepting the conundrum of what persons are, our relationship with one another and with God and the complexities that create more questions than answers. So he was far reaching, quite academic in much of what he said, but he related it beautifully to the areas within the main topic. As just over 40 people attended the conference, there were 5 lively discussion groups, taking place after each talk, tackling several questions as well as commenting on the contents of each presentation. Representatives reported to the conference in general and there was a fantastic response from each group.

Pauline Dodsworth gave a power point presentation in the afternoon. She is a nurse with 40 years experience, 28 of those in palliative care, as well as an academic and part of a team working in Russia in the 1990s setting up two hospices in and around Moscow. She referred to the fields in which she worked, stressing palliative care; care in general; the ethical and medical rules on "best practice"; euthanasia, the concept of a "good" death; the prolonging of life through advanced medical techniques; the doctrine of "double effect" (which apparently originates in Thomas Aquinas!) as well as the issue of suffering, both medically and from a spiritual standpoint. So, again, very interesting - a departure in some ways from the previous presentation, but they complemented each other extremely well. After the final summing-up, everyone moved into the Chapel for an ecumenical service, followed by tea and cakes. All the evaluation sheets were extremely positive about the whole day which was satisfying. Both speakers kindly made their presentations available to us and I would like to take this opportunity to thank our webmaster for putting them on to the Ryedale Christian Council website, which he regularly updates on our behalf. As both speakers graciously declined a personal fee, donations were made on their behalf to Marie Curie and the Alzheimer's Association.

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Each year we visit one of the smaller churches throughout Northern Ryedale to join with them in prayer and worship and this year we were delighted to be invited in May to St Aidan's in Gillamoor, where we joined them for their Sunday evening service. Our thanks go to them, especially as we have been invited back! Our summer outing stayed fairly close to home this year, as we were able to visit the new Benedictine Abbey of Stanbrook at Wass, where 22 nuns now live the contemplative life in a very modern 21st century building. They have come from the old Stanbrook Abbey in Worcestershire and a member of the community gave us a most inspiring talk about their history from the days in France during the French Revolution to the present day and she also spoke of their life and prayer under the Rule of St Benedict. (Her presentation is now also available on this website). Those who were able to be there then enjoyed lunch together in Gilling. As for other regular activities, the power point presentations in many churches of our work have been ongoing and thanks to techno wizards and presenters who have already given 6 presentations during the past year. Three more are in the offing, including All Saints in Helmsley. Our books for primary school pupils moving on to secondary education continue to be distributed and our grateful thanks go to a member of the Council for the overseeing of this project also for her indefatigable sale of The Christian Heritage of Ryedale booklets. Information leaflets for visitors in the area are being updated.

Finally, my extremely grateful thanks go to each and every member of the Council. Every single member gives his/her time, energy, gifts and prayers towards the success of our work. It is a privilege to serve them as Chairman and I know that without their continuing support it would not be an easy task.

Anji Dowson

6th July 2011