



CT-eNews

September 2019

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Reflection of the Month: Let's not keep our prophetic voice silent

Anton Muller and Ian Marshall write:

It seems today that we live in a minefield of political correctness, in which people are more likely to believe what they choose to hear or interpret rather than what you actually said or meant. In such a



sensitive environment, does it make it harder to speak up about issues? Is there now a fear of being labelled as Anti, Phobic or -ist, or simply being rubbished and told "It's none of your business"? Does this keep the prophetic voice silent?

Amidst the swirling turmoil of public opinion which is often hostile to the Church, what do Christians do in the face of unprincipled opposition? How is it possible for Christians to fulfil the Fourth Mark of Mission 'To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation', without being accused of intolerance or being abused in the media?

This is a not a new problem. Jesus was labelled a drunkard and glutton; he was accused of consorting with prostitutes. By openly criticising and opposing the law and the traditions, Jesus was seen as traitor to Judaism.

There is no place in our Christian faith for hatred towards anybody, and certainly no place for hatred because of a person's faith, nationality, political views, philosophy of life or sexuality. There is a reason why Jesus chose his principal character to be "The Good Samaritan". It is a story which provides us with a model for the Third Mark of Mission, 'To respond to human need by loving service'.

There are Christians who struggle deeply with the ordination of women as Priests and Bishops. This does not make them misogynists, although some will be. There are Christians who take a particular view of homosexuality. This does not make them Homophobic, although some will be. There are Christians who campaign against the activities of the Israeli Government in Palestine. This does not make them Anti-Semitic, although some will be. There are Christians who are deeply concerned about the globalisation of Islam. This does not make them Islamophobic, although some will be.

Jesus was not afraid to engage with those of different viewpoints. At times the language he uses against those in positions of power and authority is astonishing in its directness and bluntness. But to those who were the victims of the misuse of power and authority, Jesus only responds with love and compassion. His actions, loving or challenging, always follow periods of prayer and reflection. He tells us not everybody will like it (Luke 12). Jesus is surely the signpost to how Christians should be in the world.

In all things there needs to be prayerful discernment. The writer of 1 John 4 says that we should test all things with the Holy Spirit. The benchmarks of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5) include the energy, joy, and courage we need, which help us to love more, and which strengthen us in the unity of our faith.

Rev Anton Muller is County Ecumenical Officer for Lancashire, and Prof Ian Marshall is Quaker Denominational Ecumenical Officer for Lancashire.

Education Sunday 2019



Education Sunday 2019 takes place this week, on **Sunday 8th September**.

In his introduction to Education Sunday, The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury and one of CTE's Presidents, says: "Education Sunday offers us an opportunity to celebrate all that is good in education, to give thanks for teachers and learners, educational leaders and support staff; to rejoice with those who succeed and provide reassurance for those who struggle.

"This Education Sunday we pray that, through God's power, all those who study or work in schools, colleges or universities, may flourish and be open to knowing God's love as they are formed and re-formed."

Resources are freely available for use by churches, schools, colleges, groups and individuals, and can be found at www.cte.org.uk/educationsunday2019

Each is a downloadable document or graphic:

[Theme Introduction](#)
[All Age Worship outline](#)
[Sermon Notes](#)
[Hymn: Jesus is healing care](#)
[Commissioning Prayer](#)
[Prayer for Education Sunday](#)

[Traditional worship for all ages](#)
[Primary Collective Worship](#)
[Publicity Style Guide](#)
[Logo small for web pages 300px](#)
[Logo medium for brochure 700px](#)
[Logo larger for display 1000px](#)

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2020: booklet now available!

The 2020 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a unique opportunity for mission and evangelisation, with plenty of opportunity to involve children and schools. Do be encouraged to start planning now!



Produced by Maltese Christians with the theme of 'Unusual Kindness', the service invites us to include a boat in the place of worship – not something easy to organise at the last minute!

[This year's booklet is now available to download](#), and in mid-September more resources will be available at www.ctbi.org.uk/weekofprayer

Let's make the 2020 Week of Prayer, 18th-25th January, a moment of outreach and evangelism!

Churches unite to feed families in Plymouth

All across Plymouth this summer, churches are coming together to offer free meals to children and families in their community.



Sixteen churches have united to host the Feast of Fun, sharing their resources, volunteers and buildings to offer food and fun activities to families. Almost every day throughout the summer holidays an event is being held in a church across the city, including Church of England, Baptist, Methodist, URC and Salvation Army churches.

Children going hungry over the school holidays has [recently hit the headlines](#), with 4.6m children and 8.3m working-age adults in the UK living in poverty [according to the Social Metrics Commission](#).

[Transforming Plymouth Together](#) was established three years ago as a direct church response to the 2014 Plymouth Fairness Commission Report. [This report](#) spelt out the stark inequalities between various parts of the city – with those living in one of Plymouth’s most deprived areas expected to live 12.8 years less than someone from one of the least deprived wards.

Working together with churches, other faith groups, the voluntary sector, statutory bodies and businesses, Transforming Plymouth Together addresses issues related to poverty and inequality in Plymouth through informal community work such as the Feast of Fun, as well as more formal community development initiatives. Like 21 similar initiatives across the country, they are a joint venture between Church Urban Fund and the local Church of England diocese.

The [Feast of Fun](#) initiative started in Plymouth in 2017 as ‘Hope 4 Summer’, with churches in St Budeaux ward offering games, craft activities and free meals for families. They also gave the opportunity for families to learn about health eating, making smoothies, pizzas and salads together.

Some 550 children and families took part 2017, and in 2018 more churches got involved, providing over 2,000 meals to the community alongside fun activities. This year almost 40 events are taking place, from breakfasts to lunches to bus outreaches, with the aim of providing 3,000 meals over the summer.



Churches Together in Devonport are hosting all their events this year in the Salvation Army building, with volunteers from other local churches leading the activities and catering. St Pancras church is offering a free hearty breakfast every Thursday morning in August, alongside a bouncy castle, crafts, board games, table football and air hockey. And the churches in St Budeaux provide volunteers to run each of their lunches, pooling their resources to buy craft materials for all their events.

“Feast of Fun is all about allowing the church to reach people and really connect. It’s had a great impact on morale and a sense of community, and also gives an opportunity

for churches to let local families know about other activities on offer” shares Hannah Fleming-Hill, Project Support Development Worker at Transforming Plymouth Together.

“Just last week a boy came up to one of our church leaders, saying ‘You’re a legend!’ When he was asked what made him say this, he replied: ‘because of the food and the biscuits and the breakfast, and then we can play.’ It’s amazing to see the impact when the church simply shows that we care.



“It’s wonderful to see churches sharing their resources and each offering what they can to bless their local communities. It’s not about telling local churches what they should do, but allowing the communities to take ownership, and encouraging churches to work together to meet the needs of those around them.

“No church can do everything, so we need to work together to actually make a difference. We are the body of Christ – and just as the arm and the leg do different things, so various churches in a town or city will each have a different strength. It’s about each doing what we can do, working together, and growing from there.”

We spoke to Chris Clewer, chair of [Churches Together in Plymouth](#), about unity in the city. “Like Street Pastors and Food Banks, the Feast of Fun is a great initiative which shows that churches really do care for their communities. Our unity makes us more visible and more connected with the community.”

“In Plymouth we have 40 different churches represented in our Street Pastors, making us one of the biggest in the country. The police and council have recognised the church as actively loving the whole person, building bridges into the community.

“Churches Together in Plymouth has been working over many years to bring Plymouth churches together in a strategic way that best meets the needs of the city. We network all 120 churches across the city and produce a booklet called [Caring Plymouth](#), a directory of 75 local Christian ministries. We also bring churches and ministries together for monthly prayer gatherings, quarterly leaders’ lunches, and an annual day conference called City Transformation, where national speakers come to envision us.



“The only way churches can meet the needs of the city is by working together” adds Chris. “After all, God never entrusts a revival or move of the Spirit to just one particular church or denomination. Unity is God’s design and what He blesses, and it also allows us to speak as one when we engage with the infrastructure of our city, from the council to the police, to health and education. It’s the only way to serve the city effectively.”

[View this story on our website...](#)

Photo credit: Hannah Fleming-Hill

“The more united we are, the stronger we become” – Bishop Esme reflects on 50 years of ministry

Bishop Esme Beswick, one of CTE’s Presidents from 2002-2006, has recently celebrated her 50th anniversary of Christian ministry.



She spoke with CTE’s Lucy Olofinjana about her passion for church unity, her Pentecostal ministry and her decades of ecumenical engagement...

The overwhelming sense you get from speaking with Bishop Esme is that she is a disciple of Christ, full of confidence in who God has made her and what He has called her to do.

Growing up as the only sister of seven brothers, Bishop Esme says she models her life and faith on her father who had great devotion to Christ. He was an Anglican lay preacher, and later Pentecostal minister, in Jamaica. The family gathered each Sunday morning at 6am for family prayers, and her father influenced their whole village as well as instilling great love and confidence in his children.

Confident and full of faith

When Bishop Esme arrived in England in 1961 – for what she thought would be a period of just five years – she brought this confidence and strong faith with her, determined to be a devoted person for the kingdom of God.

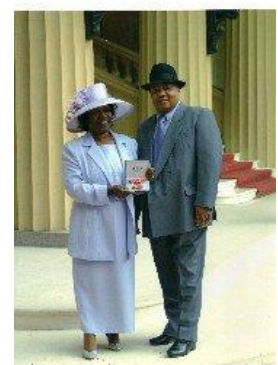
“When I came to Kent to train as a nurse, I became very serious about my salvation and Christianity. I knew it was important to believe in Jesus Christ, to search the Scripture myself, so eventually I went to bible school and studied liberation theology. I wanted to understand what it means to be a Christian, not only in words, but in actions.

“I try to exemplify the Christ-like image in this world – to really set my life agenda and become a disciple – I just want to exemplify Christ.”

A Pentecostal minister

Bishop Esme explains how she didn’t set out to become a Pentecostal minister, “I just wanted to help people, to bring some wholeness to people’s lives, and to do that needed to know about the Scripture. The call of God became evident in my life, and I had to stand up and declare who I am in Christ.”

Bishop Esme has been a leading figure in the New Testament Assembly church, alongside her work in the Joint Council of Churches for All Nations which she founded. And for the last four



Bishop Esme receiving her MBE, with her husband Herbert

years she has been Bishop of Nebaioth Prophetic Church in London.

Speaking of the challenges of ministering at a time when many opposed women in leadership, as well as the blatant racism in British society during the 1960s and 70s, she repeatedly says "I wasn't fazed. There were challenges, but it didn't faze me."

Ecumenical engagement

It was the Brixton riots in the early 1980s which first led to Bishop Esme's involvement in national ecumenical work. As the vice-chair and later the chair of the Brixton Council of Churches at this time, she explains: "When there was a standoff in the Brixton riots between black and white, God used me then, in the privileged position as chair of the Brixton Council of Churches, to bring about understanding and cohesion between various cultures."

"Following the riots in 1985, the British Council of Churches joined us at a meeting in Brixton with the churches, community police and politicians as we sought to bring the community together. I was then invited to be involved with the British Council of Churches".

As well as being a Borough Dean in Lambeth in the 1990s, Bishop Esme's ecumenical involvement has included meeting the late Pope John II at Canterbury Cathedral and joining a delegation sent to Russia. She was also a member of the British Council of Churches committee in 1990, when Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and the four national ecumenical instruments were created, and was part of the new Churches Together in England (CTE) committee when it was first founded. Speaking of this transition which took place in the 1990s, Bishop Esme says: "Catholics were now enabled to become full members of CTE, rather than just having observer status as they did with BCC – it was wonderful."

Sharing about her time as a CTE president from 2002-2006, Bishop Esme says "It was really challenging, but also very rewarding. I was able to speak at many different churches, including the Anglican Communion in Nottingham, and take part in national events such as the Queen's Golden Jubilee at Windsor Castle."



Bishop Esme & her fellow CTE Presidents

"I was also signatory to the first CTE Presidents covenant, signifying our work together as the churches in England – this was a historical occasion, and an important part of my ecumenical work."

A pioneer

While Bishop Esme challenges the label 'first black female president of CTE', she acknowledges the pioneering role she had as both a female and a person of Jamaican descent.

"Working with the catholic cardinals and four Archbishop of Canterbury, they accepted me for who I am, not because of my pigmentation or my gender, but because of what I have to offer."

With the confidence instilled in her from childhood shining through, she adds: "I don't go into a room or church and think that anybody there is better than I am – I walk in wherever I might be with the mindset that I am well able to do all things through Christ who strengthens me."



Bishop Esme and leaders at a CTE retreat, 2003

Unity is key

"We all have something to offer, and as Christian denominations we are all in this together. We need to work together for the good of humanity – that's our mission."

"Christ is all and in all – God's Spirit dwells in His people, there is no bond nor free. While some in the past thought that the Spirit was only for the Pentecostals, I understood that the body of Christ is so diverse – we cannot limit the presence of God, He moves in true believers."

"God doesn't need labels. He deals with our heart and how much we are devoted to his precepts."

Celebrating how Pentecostals have become increasingly involved with CTE, Bishop Esme particularly commends the work of Bishop Joe Aldred, CTE's Principal Officer for Pentecostal & Charismatic Relations.

"I thank God he has allowed me to be an example to fellow Pentecostals, to say we're not supposed to stay outside and not participate. My stance has helped to influence the change of hearts – that we are not strangers but working for the same God."

We need to show grace

While Bishop Esme herself has always had good relationships with the Anglican churches which her church has met in, she's aware that this is not always the case.

Some Pentecostal colleagues, even today, are saddened that the relationship with the church they rent from is one of "tenant and landlord", rather than brothers and sisters in Christ. "For many there is no grace in the relationship, and that is something that needs to change."

A passion for church unity

So, after decades of involvement in ecumenism in England, why is Bishop Esme still so passionate about church unity?

“We need to hold on to that unity as the body of Christ, because without unity we cannot change our society. And Christ loves our communities.

“We are often taught that we send missionaries abroad, but in our neighbourhoods we need some missionaries around to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

“The more united we are, the stronger we become.

“But when we are divided, Satan can deceive and distract us, calling us to play games and blame each other. But we are one in Christ – if you belong to Christ as I do, then we are one in Christ.

Leaving a legacy

“Paul wrote about the body of Christ with its head and arms – every member has its function, according to what it was created to do. We need to go back to basics, being clear of our mission and purpose here on earth and knowing what legacy we are able to leave for the next generation.

“In years to come, when we’re off the scene, our legacy for other generations will be for them to emulate the things that we have done in Christ.”

Bishop Esme ends our time together as she began, focusing on the centrality of being a disciple of Christ: “We need to stand faithful to the calling of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am proud to be a Christian, and I am proud to be like Christ.”

[View this story on our website...](#)

Gavin Calver shares his heart for unity following EA appointment

Gavin Calver has recently been announced as the incoming Chief Executive of the Evangelical Alliance, following Steve Clifford’s decision to step down as General Director at the end of 2019.

We recently caught up with Gavin to hear more about his heart for unity.



[You can read the full piece on our website](#), and an extract is included here...

When asked what excites him about taking on this new role, Gavin says “It is an honour to be able to work alongside so many others for the sake of the gospel.

“As evangelicals we also recognise that we’re part of a wider church and we want to celebrate that. [The Gather network](#) is one example of this wider church unity, connecting local unity groups across the country, including many Churches Together groups.”

"We are seeing a new level of unity, with friendships formed across previous divides. We're also seeing a pragmatism in local churches that hasn't always been there, as we realise that we need each other. I'm really excited about unity for a purpose – seeing new things emerge as we work together to reach people with the good news."

Gavin is passionate about unity and the importance of building relationships. An evangelist ordained by the Baptist Union, he trained at the interdenominational Bible college London School of Theology. Gavin has been director of mission at the Evangelical Alliance since 2015 and also chairs the Spring Harvest Planning Group. He was previously national director of Youth for Christ for six years, and has two children with his wife Anne, a Baptist minister.

Speaking about the importance of building unity across the ethnic diversity of the church, Gavin says "from my local church gatherings in a curry house (where the restaurant owner knew we must be Christians because of the sheer range of ages and ethnicities we represented), to the work of the One People Commission, it really is so exciting to see us working together in unity – all equally loved by God and made in his image.

"It comes down to relationships and understanding that we really do need one another."

When asked his advice to others seeking to build Christian unity at the local level, Gavin simply says "make friends. If you drink coffee and pray with people, it soon breaks down barriers.

"We can't force unity – it is a gift from God, and something Jesus himself prayed for.

"Once you know and love people, it is much easier to work in unity, and not end up competing for the same people in the same town."

"It's relationships that really matter – a unity rooted in relationship and prayer."

BBC Songs of Praise shows CTE Presidents in prayer

BBC's Songs of Praise has shown CTE's Presidents kneeling together in unity to pray for our nation.

The programme, broadcast on Sunday 4th August 2019, features highlights from the Thy Kingdom Come prayer gathering in Trafalgar Square, where CTE's Presidents joined 8,000 Christians from many denominations to pray and worship together in the heart of our capital.



Celebrating the sight of so many Christians from different denominations praying and worshipping together, CTE President Archbishop Justin Welby said: "This is the real deal isn't it. I mean we've got I don't know how many denominations here this afternoon, and who cares where they come from? What matters is that they know and serve and follow Jesus Christ."

Archbishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church, CTE's Orthodox President, also took part in the event and shared his joy to be part of such a gathering: "To have this kind of presence in the middle of London with all of the diversity of churches here is just breath-taking, it's wonderful."

[Read the full story on our website...](#)

Photo credit: Rodycloud Photography

Homeless Sunday 13th Oct 2019: Resources available

Housing Justice, the national Christian homelessness charity, is urging churches to take part in this year's Homeless Sunday on 13th October.



Homeless Sunday has been part of the Christian calendar for more than a quarter of a century. It is an opportunity for churches of all denominations and people of all faiths to unite and show solidarity with those experiencing homelessness and to reflect and plan practical action on homelessness.

The focus this year is 'The impact of volunteering on the volunteer', apt as Christians and church communities are at the forefront of the response to the rise in homelessness including the most visible aspect, rough sleeping. There were just 65 night shelters operating across the Housing Justice network in 2013, and today there are 125 across England and Wales.

Around 500 or more churches across the country usually take part in Homeless Sunday, and it is hoped that the number will grow this year.

[Find free Homeless Sunday resources on the Housing Justice website...](#)

And finally...

Season of Creation

From 1st September to 4th October, Christians around the world celebrate the Season of Creation.



Some pray, some take part in hands-on projects, some advocate. Find out more about this global movement at **www.seasonofcreation.org**

Harvest resources from CPO

Harvest is a great time to reach out to your community and invite them to experience church and ultimately develop their own relationship with God. CPO has a huge range of resources, from posters, banners and invites to colouring postcards, bookmarks and more, to help you invite and welcome people during this time. Take a look at some of the latest resources at cpo.org.uk/harvest



Pilgrim's Progress on the big screen

This Autumn, John Bunyan's epic masterpiece *The Pilgrim's Progress* is hitting the Big Screen! Journey with Christian as he travels from the city of destruction to the celestial city. Experience the friends and foes he meets along the way and the ultimate choice he must make to reach the King. Find more information, including how you can request for your local cinema to show the film, at pilgrimsprogressmovie.co.uk



Join the conversation on the challenges facing Christian youth work

Those involved in Christian youth ministry and training are invited to join a strategic conversation on 15th November 2019, exploring how we can face the challenges of this important ministry. This event in Birmingham will be hosted by the UK Christian Youth Work Consortium and the Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work.

[Find out more...](#)



Conference: what is a 'church of sanctuary'?

This conference, supported by the Churches' Refugee Network of CTBI, will explore the theology of sanctuary by looking at the biblical, historical, and ecclesiastical foundations of the practice of hospitality and provision of refuge. It will be of interest to church leaders, community groups, activists, and anyone else interested in exploring the theory and practice of sanctuary in the UK and Ireland in a Church context. The conference takes place from 18th-19th September in Salisbury.

[Find out more...](#)



The Asylum System: Churches' Refugee Network Meeting

This Churches' Refugee Network Meeting will explore the current asylum system, with the help of Home Office civil servants and those who have first-hand experience of the way it works. It takes place on Mon 30th September from 11am-3pm in London SE1. ***[Find out more...](#)***



Prisons Week: 13th-19th October

For forty years, Prisons Week has prepared prayer literature to enable the Christian community to pray for the needs of all those affected by prisons: prisoners and their families, victims of crime and their communities, those working in the criminal justice system and the many people who are involved in caring for those affected by crime on the inside and outside of our prisons. Find more information and prayer resources at ***prisonsweek.org***



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