

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

MINUTES

**of the Annual General Meeting, Monday 26th September 2011 at the Chapel, Methodist
Central Hall, Westminster, LONDON SW1**

Members Present: The Revd Elizabeth Welch (presiding), The Revd Mark Woodruff (Secretary), the Revd Dr Paul Avis, Dr Rosalind Bearcroft, The Revd Dr James Blackstone, The Revd John Bradley, Sister Teresa Burke, the Revd James Cassidy, Professor Pauline Croft, Lady Kate Davson, Father Maximus Lavriotes, Deolinda Eltringham, the Revd Graham Kent, Sister Margaret McMullan, David Murphy, the Revd Dr Donald Norwood, the Revd Dr Alwyn Pettersen, Andrew Pettman, Alan Rainer, Dr Chris Sissons, Julie Skrine, Dame Mary Tanner, Janet Ward, Eileen Walkin

Apologies: Hubert Allen, John Anderson, the Revd Dr Keith Clements, Martin Conway, the Revd Dr David Cornick, the Revd Nicholas Latham, Hilary Martin, the Revd Dr Murdoch Mackenzie, Stephen Penna, the Revd Gareth Powell, Ruth Reardon, the Revd Dr Nicholas Sagovsky, the Revd David Tatem

Guests present: Michael Redwood, Elizabeth Danes

1. The Presiding Officer opened with a prayer.
2. Apologies were noted.
3. The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 21 September 2010 were approved and signed.
4. The draft Annual Report for 2010 was approved and adopted.
5. In the absence of a Treasurer, the Secretary reported expenditure in 2010 amounting to £847-26 against income of £590, an excess of expenditure over income of £257-26. All these were lower than in 2009. The closing balance at 31st December 2010 stood at £391-54, but following the new president's consultation of members and supporters, together with the event at Westminster Abbey, new subscriptions and payments of arrears had raised funds in the Society's account to £1200, compared with £450 at the same point in 2010, even with some outstanding bills to be settled. The Secretary asked members to note that the Westminster College conference had been held in 2009 although the invoice were received in 2010 and some of the income from participants had been received in 2009 and some in 2010. Even so, income had fallen well short of costs and thus budgeting for such events was important to watch in future. Secondly, the charge for printing was a cumulative charge for printing at cost and posting Newsletters, thanks to the generosity of another charity. As it was now possible to send most newsletters by email, this level of expenditure was unlikely to recur. The Financial Statement and Accounts for 2009 were received and approved.

6. The level of membership subscriptions as in the last year was noted. No increase was approved.
7. The president, the Revd Elizabeth Welch, reviewed the year, noting a successful exercise in consulting members on the future of the Society and the purpose and shape of such ecumenical studies as it could conduct and stimulate. An unexpectedly high proportion had responded and now nearly all known members had confirmed their subscriptions or other involvement. Ideas and expectations that had emerged included collaborations enabling a profile for the Society's aims around the country regionally (such as the Cambridge Theological Federation or the Durham Centre for Catholic Studies, and greater networking through the national and intermediate instruments linked with Churches Together), possible sub-groups on particular issues (such as arts, the various national and global dialogues, ecclesiology etc.) and practical theological approaches that could undergird or be undergirded by our ecumenism. The work ahead would mean a greater use of the Society's website as an interactive social network to encourage ecumenical study and discussion online and further afield than the immediate meetings and their papers. Another fruit had been a reinvigorated committee, attracting the engagement of several new key figures. Despite losing the Treasurer, Hilary Martin, because of an exciting new commitment to another society focussing on the study of science and religion, Elizabeth and Mark (secretary) had been joined by Chris Sissons as a third trustee, and enjoyed the continued support of Paul Avis, John Bradley, Maximus Lavriotes and Donald Norwood as well as Keith Clements and David Tatem as new active members to the team. This had enabled two successful events for 2011 to be planned – first a focus on the Ecumenical Theology of Rowan Williams by Dame Mary Tanner and Dr Oliver Rafferty at Westminster Abbey, by kindness of the Dean, and secondly the evidently well attended event coinciding with the AGM, on the Ecumenical Significance of the King James Bible. There was thus clearly a momentum behind the society worthy of its past achievements and ready to serve new challenges, lest the ecumenical imperative for the Church and the Churches be forgotten. Elizabeth thanked Mark for his work as secretary, Newsletter editor and ambassador for the Society over his eight years in office as secretary.

The following comments were made in the ensuing discussion:

- i) Fr James Cassidy asked for a document on the Society to be available for download from the website. The Membership Form containing such information is already available, but it will now be revised and made more prominent
- ii) Dr Rosalind Bearcroft recognised that activity by members of the Society in other centres around the country should be encouraged but believed that London remained a useful focus for members and other networks alike. Alan Rainer echoed this, given the importance of engagement with young people and the range of their theological, religious and philosophical interests.
- iii) Fr Maximus doubted there exists the consensus we hope even in listing the agenda for unity and ecumenical engagement – we do not mean the same things when using the same words and terms. So a task for the Society is to explore the meaning of our several senses of our purpose, see if we genuinely do have a common focus and only then list the priorities which

emerge – both for the Society’s tasks and as agenda for the Church and the Churches.

- iv) The Revd Graham Kent noted the thorough and impressive review of the work and purpose of the Intermediate Bodies in ecumenism recently completed by a group led by the Revd Bill Snelson for Churches Together in England and commended by its Enabling Group to the local, regional and national instruments, bodies and member Churches. He drew attention to the proposal that CTE’s Theology and Unity Group and the (voluntary) Bodies in Association, of which the Society is one, should be able to work in greater closeness for the purpose of extending the ecumenical instruments’ effectiveness and working in national, local and intermediate formats and levels, and disseminating the theological reflection that surrounds them. Fr Mark Woodruff responded that the proposal had arisen out of several years of constructive engagement between the Bodies in Association and CTE, the meeting for which he chairs, and specifically this had led to the Society’s recognised engagement on several recent occasions with the TUG.
 - v) Dr Chris Sissons stressed the importance of not leaving ecumenical studies, discussions and papers as static achievements but of getting ideas, addresses and discussions out more widely in our church and ecumenical networks to inform local conversations with much greater energy. Formal and academic conversations – even the great interdenominational dialogues nationally and globally - are valuable but they risk being very detached and separate from practical realities and the necessary conversations that arise within local experience. He will be leading on reinvigorating the Society’s presence on the web, including using social networking approaches, to extend the reach of our conversation and the impact of what we are studying and discussing. This urgent task and farsighted initiative was warmly welcomed by members.
 - vi) The president concluded by remarking that in the comments alone we could set ourselves agenda for the next ten years and that it was very encouraging thus to see the Society regather itself and imagine future efforts so imaginatively. She announced a plan in development for some joint efforts with Queen’s College, Birmingham, and hoped this might provide a pattern for other collaborations, locally and regionally, around the country.
8. a) The Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch was elected to the Chair of the Society for 2011-12
- b) The Revd Dr James Blackstone was elected Secretary for 2011-12
 - c) The Meeting committed the election of a Treasurer to the Committee.
 - d) The following nine persons were elected as trustee-members of the Executive Committee: the Revd Dr Paul Avis, the Revd John Bradley, the Revd Keith Clements, Fr Maximus Lavriotes, the Revd Dr Donald Norwood, the Revd Dr Alvyn Pettersen, Dr Chris Sissons, the Revd David Tatem, the Revd Mark Woodruff. The following two persons were elected as additional members of the Committee: the Revd Graham Kent, the Revd Gareth Powell. The next meeting of the Committee will take place on October 18, 4-30 pm at the offices of the Council for Christian Unity, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1.

- e) Professor Paul Murray was confirmed as an honorary member of the committee in view of his work through the University of Durham on receptive ecumenism, for which resources on local and regional ecumenical engagement for mission and service were at an advanced stage of preparation in collaboration with Churches Together in England.
9. The president warmly welcomed Professor Pauline Croft, Professor of Early Modern History at Royal Holloway, University of London, to address the Society on the Ecumenical Significance of the King James Bible. A copy of the address will be circulated to members subsequently.