

SOCIETY FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES

NEWSLETTER

November 1994

Secretary's Notes

The Society is now up and running! The Committee were pleased with the response to the Inaugural Meeting, and hope that those present felt it was a useful exercise. Since the meeting, just over 40 people have formally joined us. I hope that by the time this letter is sent out the number will have risen.

The Committee has already met and has begun to plan activities, of which more below. Inevitably, we are still feeling our way and are anxious to respond to perceived needs. A few of you have already sent in suggestions with your membership forms. These have all been noted, and those that were to hand by the date of our Committee on November 9th were tabled by me so that the Committee as a whole could be aware of your ideas. Please do not hesitate to send suggestions to me at any time. We particularly want to facilitate the links that you want made. We will be looking at the membership list as time goes on to see if we can encourage local or interest groupings. Let us know of any wishes you have in this matter.

I hope to prepare a membership list for circulation, which will help to make us all aware of who has joined, and so help informal links. Please encourage others to take an interest and join. I will always be happy to help members or enquirers with requests for ecumenical links or information, even if it is simply a matter of putting them into contact with those who are far better equipped to give them the full information they need.

Activities

The following meetings are planned:

On February 7th 1995_ we hope to have a short AGM. The reason for this is to formally adopt the Constitution and allow us to get charitable status, so that those of you who are prepared to do so may covenant your subscriptions and enable us to gain extra income at no extra expense to you. Naturally, we hope that all members who pay tax will do so. The Treasurer will tell you what to do in due course.

The AGM will be followed by a meeting at which Martin Reardon, our Chairman, will give us an update on the progress of the 'Called To Be One' process of Churches Together in England. He will be assisted by other members of the Working Party, which is involved in this important exercise in ecclesiology. The meeting will take place at Church House, which is in Great Smith Street, London SW1

from 5 to 8 pm. It is within easy reach of Victoria Railway Station.

On Saturday 29 April, we hope to hold a day meeting in Birmingham, a venue chosen in the hope that it will be easier for many of our members than London. The theme will be 'Church Conversations in a European Context'. We hope to discuss, amongst other things, the Leuenberg Agreement (between Lutherans and Reformed), the Porvoo Agreement between British and Irish Anglicans and Nordic and Baltic Lutherans, the Anglican Conversations with the French Reformed and Lutheran Churches, and an update on the Welsh and Scottish situations. The meeting will last from about 10.15 to 4pm. We will use Carrs Lane Church, which is very central, only about 5 minutes walk from New Street Station. Members are asked to bring a packed lunch with them. We hope to be able to offer you a cup of tea or coffee on arrival and at lunchtime, for which a small amount may be payable.

For the autumn, we hope to have a meeting devoted to issues in Local Ecumenism, at an Oxford venue. We would be very pleased to hear from those of you who are closely involved in this as to the issues you would like to see discussed. Please contact me as soon as reasonably possible.

Recent ecumenical news and publications.

We hope to give you brief notices of important ecumenical news and publications. The Committee will always be grateful for anything that you bring to our attention and will try to mention it subject to the exigencies of space and cost. For this first newsletter, I will mention an important article and a new initiative.

The article is *Faith, the Believer and the Church*, by the Dominican, Fr J-M.R. Tillard, published in 'One in Christ', 1994, No 3. In this, Fr Tillard looks at the issue of how the Word of God is addressed and received. Is it, as he puts it, "to human beings considered individually, 'alone with their own conscience'? Or is it addressed to the persons called to be members of the Body of Christ in the *koinonia* of the disciples of Christ?" Fr. Tillard puts his finger on a key difference of emphasis as between the Catholic and Orthodox traditions on the one hand, and the main Protestant ones on the other. Is there a way of reconciling the 'Catholic' emphasis on the Church and the Reformed one on the immediate access of the believer to Christ? This is an important question for all of us interested in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Reformation churches to ponder. Fr Tillard has put the Roman Catholic point of view with great cogency in this lucid and penetrating article.

In August, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches held a preliminary meeting in Norfolk to give fresh consideration to the place of worship in ecumenical dialogue. It brought together 32 liturgists and ecumenists from all the major traditions. It calls for a deeper integration of 'worship studies' into existing ecumenical dialogues. This seems appropriate, since our style of worship bears an intimate relationship to our understanding of the total nature of the Christian life, and to our ecclesiology. I have always felt, as a Methodist, that Methodists have seldom given a really thorough account to the rest of Christendom of what it is that they treasure in the hymnody of the Wesleys and can contribute to the rest of the Church. One looks forward to some interesting work on the interface of liturgy and ecumenism from all our traditions.