

The Society for Ecumenical Studies
REPORT 1994 - 1998

The Committee has decided to issue a report detailing the first four years progress of the Society for distribution to our members and to other interested parties such as theological colleges and national and county ecumenical officers.

ORIGINS AND PURPOSE

The Society was set up in October 1994 on the initiative of a small group who were elected as its provisional committee at an inaugural meeting in October 1994. It was felt that such a forum would be useful in helping to relate the diverse worlds of local ecumenism, academic ecumenical research and church leader ecumenism. Too often insights obtained within one of these fields do not get received in the others.

Local ecumenism has greatly increased in importance over the last twenty years, greatly aided by the setting up of the 'new ecumenical instruments', under the umbrella of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, and other bodies. Renewed national conversations involve the four churches previously involved in the 'covenanting' negotiations of the 70s, viz the Church of England, Moravians, Methodists and the URC. Other important initiatives, such as the papal letter *Ut Unum Sint* and the Porvoo Agreement mean that the international context is changing. Finally, there is increasing attention to ecumenical topics with the academic theological community.

The Society aims to bring together people from all three spheres of ecumenical work. It does not aim to be a purely academic body such as the specialist societies for Old and New Testament studies, but to encourage ecumenical reflection and ideas both at the scholarly and more 'practical' levels. We stress that it is open to anyone who is interested.

ORGANISATION

The Society holds an AGM, usually in February or March, at which all members are entitled to be present, to speak and to vote. The AGM elects the Committee and officers, viz. the Convenor, Treasurer, Secretary and Publications Secretary, It receives the financial statement and a short report of activities. Any member may make recommendations for the Committee to consider.

The Committee organises activities, usually three or four main day meetings a year, held in a variety of venues. It encourages local groups to organise seminars of their own and is able to give these some financial support. Currently, there are two seminar groups, one in London and one in West Midlands, the latter based at and in cooperation with Queen's College. We hope to encourage members in Cambridge to liaise with the proposed ecumenical centre at Westcott House and to find a similar centre for cooperation in Oxford. We would welcome any initiatives in other major centres by members.

The Committee

This currently consists of Rev. Dr Paul McPartlan (Convenor), Sister Fidelis Daly, CP (Treasurer), David Carter, (secretary), Revs Maximos Lavriotes, Rodney Matthews, and Gareth Powell, Drs Gillian Evans and Martin Conway.

Subscriptions

These are currently £12 per annum, payable in April, for individual members and £14 for married couples. For students and those retired the sub is £6 (£8 for a married couple).

Newsletter

The Secretary circulates a newsletter to members, usually about three or four times a year. This contains notice of future meetings and seminars, reports of previous ones including the minutes of the AGM. Usually one or more papers from previous meetings or seminars are circulated in addition. There are usually one or two book reviews. Members are welcome to draw the Secretary's attention to any ecumenically relevant items eg. concerning conferences or writing that they think

may be of interest to our membership. In this way, we hope the newsletter can contribute towards our general aims.

MEMBERSHIP

The current membership of the Society is round about eighty, all the mainstream British denominations being represented and also some of the smaller churches. Membership is largest in the London area and the South Midlands. We have several members in both Scotland and Wales. We hope to attract more members, particularly from students and in the North and West Country.

ACTIVITIES

The two fold structure of these has already been indicated. Here we aim to give a fuller account with examples.

Our national meetings usually take the form of day conferences, usually held on Saturdays. Normally, we meet from about 10.30 am to about 3.30 to 4pm with a break for lunch and informal socialising. Usually, one or two invited speakers open up a theme for us, leading into more general discussion. At the AGM, there is usually one main speaker, as, with a late afternoon meeting including a business session, time is necessarily more limited.

Our national meetings have covered a very wide range of topics. They have been led by members of the Society and outside speakers. Amongst those particularly noteworthy were a meeting at Birmingham in 1995 looking at the development of the relationships involved in the 'Leuenberg' and 'Porvoo' agreements. This was led by Donald Norwood and John Halliburton with a shorter contribution from Fleur Houston on the talks between the Church of England and the French Reformed Church. Later in the same year, we held a consultation on local ecumenism at Milton Keynes. Here the main speakers were Emmanuel Sullivan, Hugh Cross and Elizabeth Welch, with a shorter contribution from Ruth Reardon on the Association of Interchurch Families. Our most recent meeting, in Oxford, was led by Paul McPartlan and Colin Davey. It looked at *Ut unum sint* and the responses to it, particularly from the British churches.

In October this year, we broke new ground with a highly successful study day, at Mount St, W1, devoted to the role of women in ecumenism, led by our Treasurer, Sister Fidelis and several other women.

The London Seminar

The London seminar was established a couple of years ago when two of our most active younger members, Paul McPartlan and David Chapman emigrated from Cambridge to London and cooperated with the Secretary in setting it up. It meets twice a term, on Wednesdays at 5 pm, at Heythrop College, literally round the corner from High St, Kensington Tube Station. About a dozen, very varied papers have been given. Particularly noteworthy were those given by David Chapman on authority in the thought of Jean Tillard and by Barney Milligan on the Ecumenical Movement as a means of healing memories with particular reference to the European scene. During the Autumn Term of 1998, we have papers from Sister Cecily Boulding and Alan Rainer. We are always on the look-out for members in the Home Counties who can give us papers and so keep this excellent seminar going. We stress that the seminar is open to all who wish to attend including those who are not members of the Society.

West Midlands

Information about activities in the West Midlands is obtainable from Rev. Gareth Powell. Midlands members, including those in the Oxford area, are asked to contact Gareth and let him know their interests to help him in planning potential activities

David Carter

Secretary

September 1998